

# How to educate about abortion

## *The essentials*

Abortion is an issue which people can have strong feelings about. Some consider it too 'controversial' to include in education programmes. However, unplanned pregnancy and abortion are common occurrences around the world and IPPF believes that we all need accurate information to form our own values and make informed choices.

'*How to educate about abortion: a guide for peer educators, trainers and teachers*' is a guide created by the International Planned Parenthood (IPPF) to provide support to those wishing to include discussion of abortion in educational programmes, with a focus on young people's education. This guide can be used by anyone teaching or training others about sexual and reproductive health, and includes a range of activities (*which can be seen on pages 26-78 of the guide*) to introduce and explore the issue of abortion that can be used with groups of all ages. Here, we present the essential information from the guide to get you started...

## Why should I talk to young people about abortion?

(more on pages 10-12 of *the guide*)

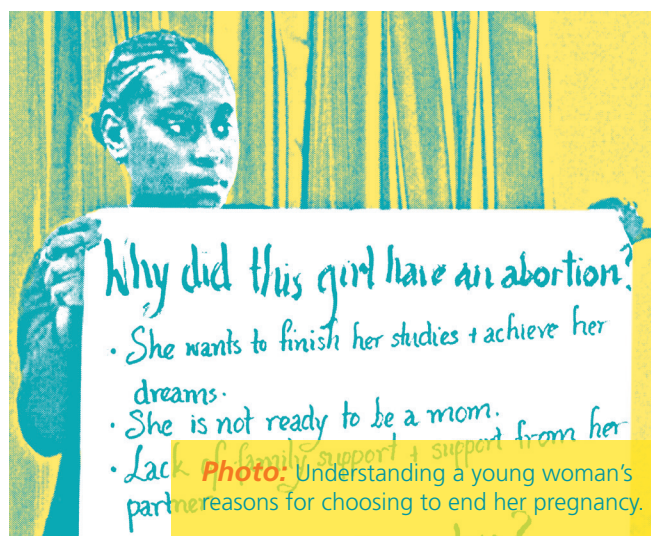
International human rights agreements like the *Convention on the Rights of the Child* support young people's right to information and education, and to good health.

Unintended pregnancy is common among young people, and *complications related to pregnancy and childbirth* are the second most common cause of death for 15 to 19 year old girls worldwide. Girls who become pregnant are less likely than adults to be able to access safe, legal abortion and have approximately three million unsafe abortions each year, which can lead to health problems, and in some cases, death.

### Did you know?

It's estimated that **one** in every **five** pregnancies around the world ends in abortion.<sup>1</sup>

We can't talk about girls' and women's health, well-being and rights without talking about their reproductive health, and that includes abortion. Abortion stigma allows myths about abortion to flourish, and can lead to people feeling ashamed or harassed for seeking or providing abortion. In order to ensure people can access safe abortion, free from discrimination, we need to provide factual information about health and the law, but also create a safe space to discuss an important issue which affects many people around the world.



<sup>1</sup> Sedgh, G et al Induced abortion: incidence and trends worldwide from 1995 to 2008. Available at: <https://www.guttmacher.org/pubs/journals/Sedgh-Lancet-2012-01.pdf>

“Today we will be discussing the decision to have an abortion. We will not be discussing abortion as right or wrong. Instead, we will consider what goes into making that decision to try to understand why some choose to have an abortion.”

*'It's All One Curriculum'<sup>2</sup>*

## How to deliver a workshop on abortion

(more on pages 15-19 of [the guide](#))

- **Create a safe space:** Many people have had, or will go on to experience unplanned pregnancy and/or abortion, or will know somebody who has. It is therefore important that your workshop does not stigmatise people who become pregnant unintentionally and/or at a young age, who are young parents, who have abortions, or who choose

### Did you know?

It is not only women who can become pregnant. People who are transgender (including those who are intersex, or 'non-binary' i.e. do not identify as male or female) can also experience pregnancy. Thus, information about contraception and pregnancy choices should not focus exclusively on female audiences.

adoption. One way to encourage a respectful atmosphere in the session is to discuss and agree upon 'group rules' at the beginning, and to provide information about services where young people can ask personal questions confidentially.

- **Know (and involve!) your audience:** The best education programmes involve the people they serve in planning, evaluation and often delivery, to make sure that they are relevant and engaging. Talk to the groups you are working with (informally, or using focus groups and surveys) to find out about gaps in their knowledge and what they would like to learn about pregnancy and abortion. Remember that students may be apprehensive about discussing sexuality-related issues in the presence of others, so provide a box where they can ask questions and make comments anonymously.
- **Be inclusive:** Education about pregnancy and abortion should be accessible for diverse groups of young people. Try to make sure that the activities and materials you use are inclusive and do not assume an audience that is, for example, heterosexual, female, cis-gender and sexually active. Think also about the abilities of your group: do not rely on written information that some people might not be able to read, or exercises that will exclude people with physical disabilities.
- **Use accurate information:** Review all the external resources you plan to use to ensure they are from reputable organizations, which provide evidence-based, non-judgemental information. You can check the facts provided in the materials you have against the factsheet on page 4, or with local medical professionals. You can also use IPPF's '[How to talk about abortion: A guide to rights-based messaging](#)' to review the language and images in any handouts, films or leaflets you plan to use.
- **Make it relevant:** It is important that the workshops you deliver are appropriate for the cultural context, for the age group that you are working with, and the time that you have ([suggested workshop structure is given on pages 84-85 of the guide](#)). Think about adapting exercises for your community. For example, if you live in a religious community, ensure that the activities address how local religious beliefs and norms interact with or affect knowledge, behaviour, stigma and services related to abortion and pregnancy choices.

<sup>2</sup> International Sexuality and HIV Curriculum Working Group (2011) *It's All One Curriculum: Guidelines and Activities for a Unified Approach to Sexuality, Gender, HIV, and Human Rights Education*. Available at: <http://www.popcouncil.org/research/its-all-one-curriculum-guidelines-and-activities-for-a-unified-approach-to->

- **Link to services:** You can only cover so much in an education session or training workshop, so it is important that young people know where to go for more information, or to access sexual and reproductive health services, including counselling. Remember some of the young people you speak to may go on to have experience of an unplanned pregnancy and may have difficulty talking to their family/friends/ teachers, so it is important to link students to services by sharing leaflets that contain clinic details or a hotline number.
- **Try not to debate the issues:** Although it is important to discuss different views on abortion, setting up a debate can be stigmatising for those who have experienced abortion, and is usually not an effective channel for clearly distinguishing between facts and values. It is better to facilitate balanced discussions, and equally important that educators/trainers recognize the importance of not sharing their own personal views or opinions on abortion, but of presenting the facts clearly and facilitating a respectful discussion.

## “Have you had an abortion?”

Sometimes talking about sensitive issues related to sexuality can lead to curiosity, and people asking personal questions. When a facilitator tells a group that abortion is common, it might lead the group to wonder if someone in the room, perhaps the facilitator, has experienced abortion. In most workshops, it is almost guaranteed that some participants (and/or their partners, friends and family) have experienced abortion, or will go on to. However, nobody is obliged to share that information. As an educator or trainer, you do not need to share any personal details and your ability to educate others on a topic does not depend on whether or not you have personal experience of it, but on whether you have the knowledge and skills required to facilitate discussion on the issue.

An educational workshop could easily be diverted by a discussion of personal experiences, so in order to avoid this, it is best to outline ground rules at the beginning and remind participants not to ask personal questions (and to be reassured that none will be asked of them). Using resources such as IPPF's series of '*Women's Voices*' films allows participants to discuss abortion within real people's lives – further examples of case studies are given in the main guide.

**(More 'Talking Points' can be found on pages 19-25 of *the guide*)**

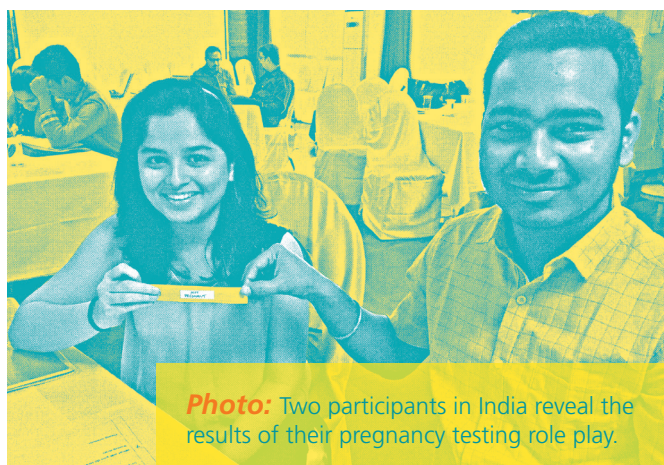
## Knowing the facts about abortion

**(More in *the guide*: Key terms on page 6-7, Talking Points on page 19-25, Links to resources/ medical information on page 81)**

Many people (even teachers and educators!) haven't received evidence-based education on abortion issues so it's important to do some research to get the facts straight yourself before educating others. The factsheet on page 4 gives some general statistics which are taken from the *World Health Organization*.

## Activities

A number of activities which can be adapted for different groups are included on **pages 26-78 of *the guide***. One example (see photo below) asks participants to role play as a young couple awaiting the results of a pregnancy test and examines gender and cultural norms about pregnancy, parenting, adoption and abortion (**pages 61-64 of *the guide***).



**Photo:** Two participants in India reveal the results of their pregnancy testing role play.

## Download the full guide

We hope this inspires you to introduce discussion of abortion issues in your educational work – please download the complete guide (in English, French and Spanish) here: <http://www.ippf.org/resource/How-educate-about-abortion-guide-peer-educators-teachers-and-trainers> and contact [abortion-stigma@ippf.org](mailto:abortion-stigma@ippf.org) to let us know if you've found it useful!

Published January 2017

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# Abortion Factsheet

All this information comes from the World Health Organization

**Abortion** is the voluntary ending of a pregnancy. It is different to miscarriage, which is when a pregnancy ends naturally.



Worldwide, approximately **1 in 5** pregnancies end in abortion.

When performed by **skilled providers**, using correct medical techniques and drugs, and under hygienic conditions, abortion is a **very safe** medical procedure.

## 'Unsafe abortion'

is when an abortion is performed by someone who does not have the correct skills, or in an environment which does not match up to basic medical standards, or both.

**21.2 million women**

worldwide have an unsafe abortion each year.

**Almost 50%** of these are young women **aged 15-24**.



Where abortion is allowed on broad **legal grounds**, it is generally **safe**.



Where it is highly **restricted**, it is typically **unsafe**.

Whether abortion is legally restricted or not, the likelihood that a woman will have an abortion for an unintended pregnancy is about the same.

**47,000** women die each year due to complications related to unsafe abortion.

**98%** of unsafe abortions happen in **low-and middle-income countries**.

**5 million**

**Estimated number of women who** are hospitalized each year due to unsafe abortion.

Almost all **abortion-related deaths** occur in low-and middle-income countries, with the highest number occurring in **Africa**.



★ **2.5 million adolescents** have unsafe abortions every year, and adolescents are more seriously affected by complications than older women.



★ In almost all countries, the law allows abortion to save the **woman's life**, and in the majority of countries abortion is allowed to protect the physical and/or mental health of the woman.



★ Providing safe abortion (and access to contraception) is **cost saving**, as the health consequences of unsafe abortion can be very expensive.