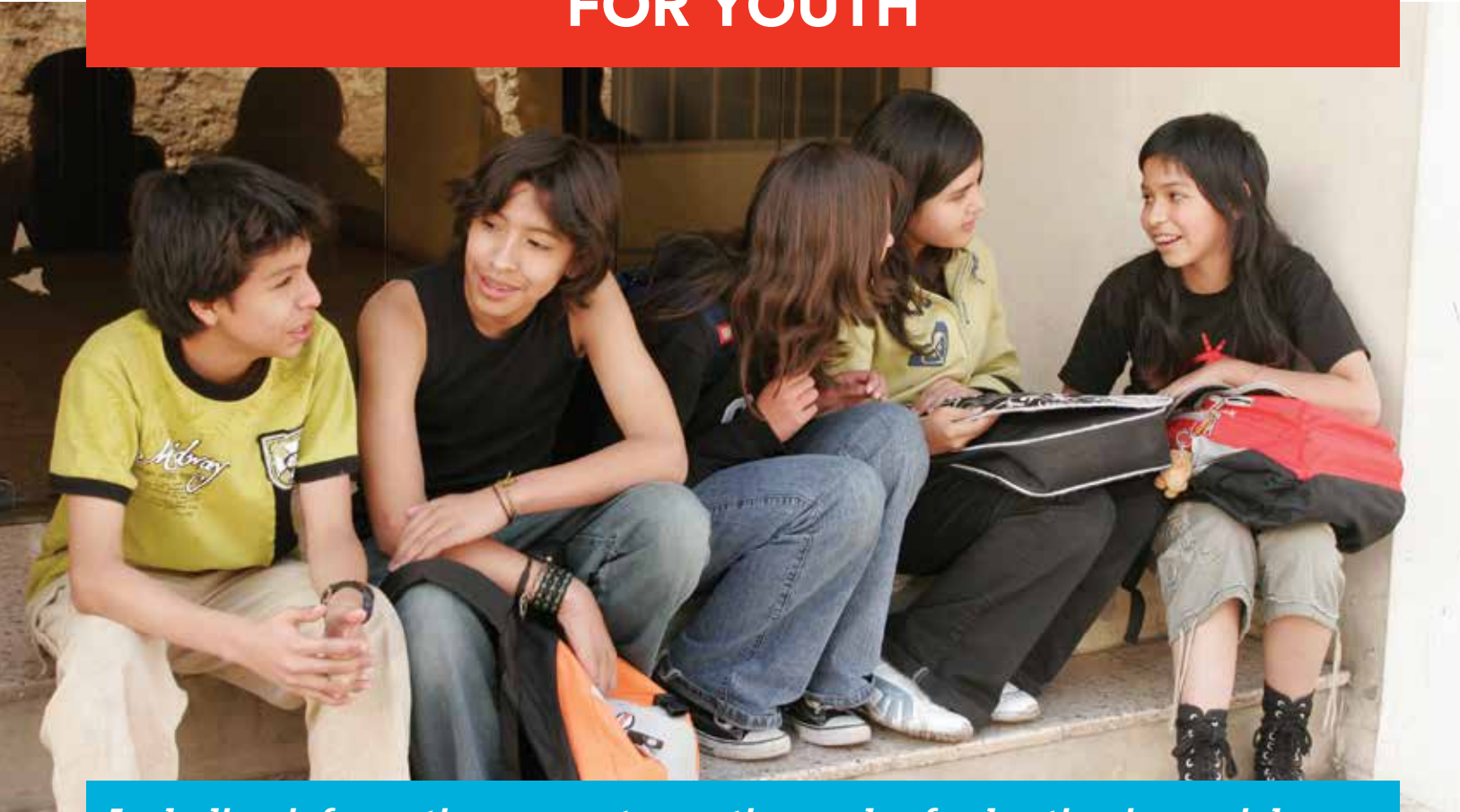


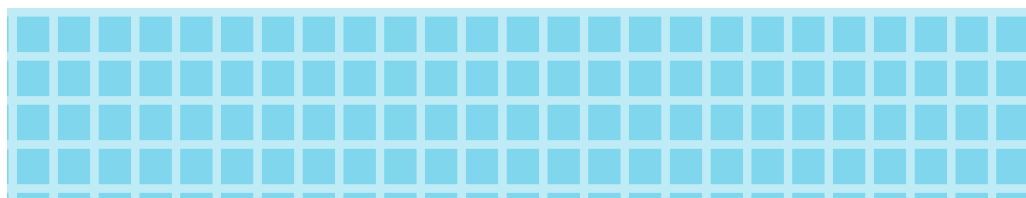
COMPREHENSIVE SEXUALITY EDUCATION FOR YOUTH



Including information on contraception and safe abortion is crucial

Comprehensive sexuality education (CSE) is a critical means of improving young people's access to sexual and reproductive health (SRH) services and their ability to make safe and informed decisions. However, the topic of abortion remains absent from most CSE programs, which diminishes young people's ability to avoid the dangers of unsafe abortion and to exercise their right to safe, legal abortion services. According to a 2013 systematic review of comprehensive adolescent health programs, "the scarcity of sexual and reproductive health and rights information and services, as well as family planning interventions, represents the biggest missed opportunity and most glaring programmatic and policy gap for adolescent girls."¹

This factsheet summarizes the global movement to improve and expand CSE and offers key standards and approaches for creating quality CSE programs that include accurate, non-biased information about contraception and safe abortion.



Definition of comprehensive sexuality education (CSE)

CSE is an age-appropriate, culturally relevant rights-based and gender-focused approach to teaching about sexuality and relationships by providing scientifically accurate, realistic, non-judgmental information to youth, whether in or out of school. CSE aims to equip children and young people with the knowledge, skills, attitudes and values that will enable them to develop a positive view of their sexuality, in the context of their emotional and social development.⁵

Global support for government-led CSE

A number of international bodies have recognized the importance of CSE as a human right for young people through global agreements, declarations and guidance. They encourage the promotion of CSE through government ownership and involvement:

- **UNFPA**, in its 2018 State of the World Population report, states: *“People need knowledge to exercise their reproductive rights, and make choices around whether, when or how often to become pregnant. This knowledge should be imparted to young people before they become sexually active. All school curricula should therefore include age-appropriate and phased comprehensive sexuality education about rights, relationships, and sexual and reproductive health as a foundation for gaining this understanding.”*
- **UN Human Rights Committee** asserts that: *“[State parties] should ensure access for women and men, and, especially, girls and boys, to quality and evidence-based information and education about sexual and reproductive health.”*²
- The 2012 **International Conference on Population and Development’s** Bali Global Youth Forum Declaration called on governments to: *“create enabling environments and policies to ensure that young people have access to comprehensive sexuality education, in formal and non-formal settings, through reducing barriers and allocating adequate budgets. [And] provide non-discriminatory, non-judgmental, rights-based, age appropriate, gender-sensitive health education including youth-friendly, evidence-based comprehensive sexuality education that is context specific.”*

These calls are supported by a 2018 joint United Nations technical guidance document: *“International technical guidance on sexuality education: An evidence-informed approach.”*

Essential components of CSE

Curriculum-based CSE programs have been proven to contribute to many positive outcomes among youth, such as delayed initiation of sexual intercourse, decreased frequency of sexual intercourse, decreased number of sexual partners, reduced sexual risk taking, and increased use of condoms and modern contraceptive methods.³ For CSE programs to be as effective as possible, they should include the following essential components:^{4,5}

- **Evidence-based, age- and developmentally appropriate content:** All content for CSE programming and curricula should be based solely on scientific facts and evidence

related to SRH. This content should be responsive to the cognitive, emotional and physical age of learners and should use the most effective learning styles in each setting.

- **Integrated gender equality focus:** Effective CSE must address the ways that gender inequality translates into unequal access to SRH information and services by examining and challenging gender roles within each program context.
- **Human rights-based grounding:** A central premise of the global CSE movement is respect and awareness for young people’s human right to non-discriminatory health information and services, particularly in the realm of SRH.
- **Culturally relevant and safe learning environment:** CSE programs should be sensitive to the cultural context in which they operate and understand the local norms and structures that may influence choices. Creating safe and healthy learning environments can help reduce barriers to improved SRH knowledge and behavior.
- **Participatory, transformative learner-centered approach:** CSE should go beyond the traditional didactic model by building on the existing knowledge base of the learners and allowing them to engage critically and constructively with the content and curriculum. By meeting learners where they are and providing dynamic education rooted in critical thinking, CSE can transform youth into empowered decisionmakers in their own lives.
- **Comprehensive scope beyond basic SRH facts:** While CSE is aimed at improving SRH knowledge and behavior, CSE program content should encompass a wide range of topics beyond the simple mechanics of reproduction. In addition to a strong SRH foundation—including reproductive physiology, puberty and menstruation, modern contraception, pregnancy and childbirth, STIs and HIV/AIDS, and abortion—CSE curricula should also include other subjects related to the health and well-being of young people, such as life skills for health, sexuality, human rights, healthy interpersonal relationships, gender equality, gender-based violence, consent and bodily integrity, and abusive practices such as forced early marriage and female genital cutting.
- **Links to outside health and advocacy resources:** CSE programs present an opportunity not only to educate youth, but to connect them with the relevant health and advocacy resources they need to act on their SRH choices. Such programs should develop links with local civil society and health-care groups that can support and empower learners beyond the CSE curriculum.

Integrating abortion into CSE

Globally, over three million adolescent girls ages 15-19 undergo unsafe abortions each year, and approximately one-third of all annual abortion-related deaths are among women younger than 25.^{5,6} Inclusion of non-biased information on abortion into CSE can be an important means of empowering young women and girls to make informed decisions about their sexual health, including how to access safe and timely abortion care.

Drawing on our extensive experience working to improve access to safe abortion for women and girls, Ipas works to partner and advocate with governments, non-profit organizations, and coalitions to include abortion content in their CSE programs. We know that successful CSE programs are more than just a curriculum. Programs must include training key stakeholders—especially teachers, parents and community members—plus a functional system for referring students to youth-friendly health services and strong partnerships with local organizations that work with youth.

Ipas is committed to the following activities to advance the inclusion of abortion information into CSE around the world:

- **Partnerships:** In partnership with other organizations, institutions and governments, we use our technical capacity to integrate abortion topics into existing CSE programs.
- **Advocacy:** Through advocacy in global policy debates and networks, Ipas works to support integration of abortion in CSE programs and guarantee that new agreements and guidance related to SRH education highlight the importance of safe abortion access for youth.
- **Research:** Ipas conducts research to build needed evidence and support to advance the integration of safe abortion in CSE programs and to learn more about the CSE needs of young people.
- **Accountability:** Ipas supports locally led movements that promote government accountability in providing information and education on SRH for youth.
- **Opposition monitoring and response:** CSE is one of the issues under ongoing attack by the organized opposition. Ipas tracks opposition work around CSE, especially at the country level, to hold governments to account and to support partners in their response to opposition work that undermines human rights.

References

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- 6 Shah, I., & Ahman, E. (2010). Unsafe abortion in 2008: Global and regional levels and trends. *Reproductive Health Matters, 18*(36), 90-101.

