BUILDING BRIDGES

CONVERSATIONS ON SEXUALITY AND RELATIONSHIPS FOR PARENTS AND CAREGIVERS OF YOUNG ADOLESCENTS

Implementation guide

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About Plan International

We strive to advance children's rights and equality for girls all over the world. We recognise the power and potential of every single child. But this is often suppressed by poverty, violence, exclusion and discrimination. And it's girls, who are most affected. As an independent development and humanitarian organisation, we work alongside children, young people, our supporters and partners to tackle the root causes of the challenges facing girls and all vulnerable children. We support children's rights from birth until they reach adulthood and enable children to prepare for and respond to crises and adversity. We drive changes in practice and policy at local, national and global levels using our reach, experience and knowledge. For over 80 years we have been building powerful partnerships for children, and we are active in over 75 countries.

Plan International believes that all children, adolescents and young people are entitled to comprehensive sexuality education (CSE) to gain knowledge, explore values and attitudes, and develop the skills they need – without fear or discrimination – to make conscious, healthy and respectful choices about relationships and sexuality. To do so, we also recognise the importance of creating safe and supportive environments by engaging parents, caregivers and families in dialogues on sexual and reproductive health and rights, sex and sexuality.

If you have any questions or comments, please contact: srhr@plan-international.org

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INTRODUCTION TO THE MATERIALS

OVERVIEW OF THE CURRICULUM

Objectives

Conversations on Sexuality and Relationships for Parents of Young Adolescents is a 10-session training curriculum addressed to parents and other caregivers of young adolescents aged 10-14.[1] The overall goal of the curriculum is to explore with parents the physical, emotional and mental journey that their children go through during adolescence, and empower them to support their children on this journey. The specific objectives are:

- To give parents tools to discuss and communicate with their young adolescent children about relationships and sexuality
- To increase parents' knowledge on sexual and reproductive health and rights, and children's sexual development

Rationale

Early adolescence and puberty are turbulent times with significant changes in young people's life. Most parents want to support their children as they go through this phase of changes in their life. They want to be the person that their children turn to for support, guidance and information. They also want to have open discussions about love, sexuality and relationships. Very often though, parents are unsure how to start conversations or how to address sensitive topics, and they'd rather avoid these discussions altogether or delegate this responsibility to others. Plan believes that working with parents of young adolescents just before or at the start of their puberty is an essential window of opportunity to improve the communication with their children about sex and sexuality. It will also help to maintain trust and open communication at a later age. This is why Plan has developed a curriculum for its staff and implementing partners to work with parents and help them provide sexuality education to their children.

Overview of the sessions

Sessions	Session objectives
1. Parenting an adolescent	- Understand the role of parents during adolescence - Understand the importance of a positive parenting style to support the development and (sexual) well-being of adolescents
2. Being an askable parent; how to communicate with your child about sexuality and relationships	- Learn how to be an askable parent - Learn how to communicate with children about sexuality and relationships
3. What to say and when? Age-responsive messages on sexuality	- Understand adolescents' sexual development - Identify age-responsive messages

[1] In some contexts, the content of this curriculum may be relevant also for parents of older adolescents

4. How to explain puberty and body changes?	• Know how to talk to your adolescent child(ren) about physical and emotional changes during puberty
	• Understand how to support your child(ren) during puberty
5. First sexual experiences; how to support your child to make safe decisions and online	• Explore own values on sexuality
	• Know how to support children to make safe decisions
6. Gender and sexuality	• Understand what gender norms are
	• Understand how to prevent harmful gender norms
7a Consent and sexual abuse	• Explore the issue of consent
	• Understanding sexual abuse/violence
	• Explore how you can react to sexual abuse and violence
7b. Staying safe online	• Explore different forms of abuse online
	• Discuss how to react when children are bullied or abused online
8. How to talk about sensitive issues	• Explore personal values on sensitive issues of sexuality
	• Be aware of how comfortable you are discussing sensitive issues
	• Explore how you can react to embarrassing situations and questions
9. Inter-generational communication	• Practice talking about sexuality and relationships together (This session brings together parents and their children)
10. How to be a role model in the community	• Identify ways of being a role model in the community
	• Identify ways of advocating for CSE in school
	• Know who to deal with challenging situations

Structure of the sessions

Each session includes:

1. Specific objectives
2. An overview of the session
3. Notes and tips for the facilitator
4. Exercises and discussion points
5. Tips for parents
6. Key messages
7. Homework

Each session also includes handouts for the participants.

EXPLANATION OF TERMINOLOGY

In this curriculum, the term "parent" refers to anyone who has the role of raising a child and helping a child grow up to be an independent, healthy, mature adult. This includes biological parents (mother and/or father), non-biological parents (same-sex parents, foster parents, adoptive parents), other family members (grandparents, siblings, aunts, uncles, older siblings), or other guardians and caregivers responsible for the child.

Parenting means the "interactions, behaviours, emotions, knowledge, beliefs, attitudes and practices associated with the provision of nurturing care. This refers to the process of promoting and supporting the development and socialisation of the child. It is the entrusted and abiding task of parents to prepare children, as they develop, for the physical, psychosocial, and economic conditions in which they live, work, play, learn and thrive. Amidst the many influences on child development, parents are critical to children's development, protection, empowerment, adjustment and lifelong success" (UNICEF 2021).

Plan International defines **adolescence** as the period from 10 to 19 years of age, in line with United Nations (UN) practice, along with the following age definitions:

- Early adolescence: 10 to 14 years
- Late adolescence: 15 to 19 years

According to UNESCO, "comprehensive sexuality education (CSE) is a curriculum-based process of teaching and learning about the cognitive, emotional, physical, and social aspects of sexuality. It aims to equip children and young people with knowledge, skills, attitudes, and values that will empower them to: realise their health, well-being, and dignity; develop respectful social and sexual relationships; consider how their choices affect their own well-being and that of others; and understand and ensure the protection of their rights throughout their lives" (UNESCO 2018).

This curriculum targets parents of very young adolescents (10-14 years old), but recognises that levels of learning and exposure to comprehensive sexuality education and dialogues on sex and sexuality vary from context to context, from family to family, and from generation to generation. Age is not the only parameter to describe the physical, emotional and mental development of children and young people. Therefore, the curriculum may be helpful for parents of both younger and older children. The 10-14 age group is the primary target because sexuality education should be provided before the onset of puberty and the first intimate relationships. All the communication tips provided in the curriculum apply to all age groups, but it is important to ensure that parents don't wait to give information to their children.

TIP! Plan International has developed a CSE Topics Table that describes our vision of sexuality, learning and the healthy development of children, adolescents and young people. It seeks to clarify the different domains or topics of comprehensive sexuality education that need to be included, and for which approximate age group (0-5, 5-8, 9-12, 12-15, 15-18, and 18+). The topics table could be helpful to better understand what topics children, adolescents and young people may need support from their parents on.

WHY INVOLVING PARENTS?

Role of parents in their children's (sexual) well-being

Evidence shows that parents are a protective factor in their children's health (WHO 2007). Specifically with regard to sexual health, families can support adolescents to have safe sexual behaviours (such as having sex with a condom). Parent-adolescent communication is also considered a significant factor in having positive relationships, delaying unintended sexual initiation, increasing the use of contraceptives and reducing inconsistent condom use (Saskatchewan Prevention Institute 2017).

Likewise, studies show that children who are afraid to approach their parents with concerns about whether they are "normal" or not may feel isolated and confused. This may lead to depression and anxiety (Newman 2008).

Research has also shown that parental bonding and a happy home, positive school environment, and positive community environment are protective factors against risk-taking behaviours by adolescents (WHO 2001).

Interestingly, parents' knowledge (or lack thereof) of specific topics is not a key factor in determining their children's health outcomes, yet it can influence the level of comfort displayed by parents when communicating with their children (Colarossi 2014). Most parents want to have a good and warm relationship with their children. They want their children to grow up healthy and happy. They want them to become well-informed adults. Being perceived as trustworthy and as giving good advice is more important than being knowledgeable, together with warmth, support, and connectedness in parent-adolescent relationships.

Role of parents in sexuality education

Even if children become closer to their peers during adolescence, parents remain an essential source of information on sexuality, relationships and sexual health. Parents often don't realise that even without having explicit discussions with their children, they still send messages about sexuality. This is called 'attitudinal sex education'. This nonverbal education includes the perceptions and reactions of others to a child's gender and bodily functions. An adult's behaviour and body language (an embarrassed look, a suddenly hushed tone, a frowning face) provide subconscious cues for the child on sexuality attitudes (Turnbull et al., 2008).

The more comfortable a parent feels in front of their children, the more comfortable children will feel in their bodies as they grow and the easier it will be for parent and child to communicate about sexuality in later life. Parents who are open to questions ("askable parents") make their children feel more comfortable discussing any topic in an informal manner. Also, the sooner and more repeatedly a parent has dialogues on sensitive topics, the easier it gets. While sexuality education at school is becoming better implemented in many countries, with extensive curricula and pre-/in-service training or professional development for teachers, parents don't have access to such support to provide sexuality education at home (Dyson & Smith 2012). It can indeed be challenging for parents to be fully prepared to answer their children's questions. Many parents realise that it is important to discuss puberty before it starts, so their child will not be surprised, confused or frightened. They want to know how to start a conversation before their child gets misinformation from somewhere else. To be an educator demands a wide range of cognitive, affective and knowledge-related skills. Parents often don't receive any specific training, and they may lack the necessary skills and knowledge to answer their children's questions (Walker 2004). Parents need and want support to face challenges such as limited sexual knowledge and embarrassment. They may feel they lack the right communication skills, cannot find the right words and may not even have the time to talk with their children about sex and sexuality. They may fear their children have other sexual values and don't know how to address this.

To overcome these challenges, parents need encouragement and inspiration to increase their confidence.

PLAN INTERNATIONAL'S VALUES AND POSITIONS ON SRHR

This curriculum is aligned with Plan International's overarching values and positions on sexual and reproductive health and rights (SRHR) for children, adolescents and young people. By supporting the development of an enabling environment, this curriculum also aims to trigger change in two interdependent and interconnected dimensions (in accordance to Plan International's Global Theory of Change): influencing social norms – particularly harmful gender norms – and related attitudes and behaviours; and strengthening people's personal, social and economic assets and safety nets.

On CSE, our position paper clearly states that:

- Plan International believes that all children, adolescents and young people – without discrimination – are entitled to comprehensive sexuality education to gain knowledge, explore values and attitudes, and develop the skills they need to make conscious, healthy and respectful choices about relationships and sexuality. Parents and educators should be supported to embrace children's learning about their bodies, relationships and sexuality from early childhood to allow children to explore, clarify and form life-long healthy attitudes and practices, free from coercion, violence and discrimination.

- Comprehensive sexuality education should be accessible for all children, adolescents and young people, in both formal and non-formal educational settings. Co-curricular activities which complement the formal curriculum are also important, as are parental and community involvement and links to gender-responsive, child-, adolescent- and youth-friendly healthcare and other services. Comprehensive sexuality education should be provided in a way that is non-judgmental, non-discriminatory, scientifically accurate, accessible, inclusive, rights-based, gender-transformative and adapted to the evolving capacity of the child, adolescent or young person.

Putting the C in CSE: Our Comprehensive Sexuality Education Standards

To support Plan International and partner staff, educators and implementers in formal and non-formal settings to deliver effective and quality CSE, we have developed a series of CSE standards. These standards are based upon international evidence and good practice. They also uphold a set of principles, including a comprehensive, human rights-based, gender transformative, inclusive and sex-positive approach towards the sexuality, sexual development and (sexual) relationships of children, adolescents, and young people. The 14 standards are comprehensive and interconnected, and aim to ensure quality across three components:

- CSE Programme content
- CSE delivery, and
- Creating an enabling environment.

Of particular relevance, this curriculum aims to support Standard 12 – CSE programmes support interventions with parents to build their confidence and skills in talking to their children about sexuality from early childhood.

Learn more in Putting the C in CSE: Standards for Content, Delivery and Environment of Comprehensive Sexuality Education.

HOW DOES THE CURRICULUM FIT INTO OUR WORK?

This curriculum is developed to be used in broader programmes that support adolescents' access to SRHR information and services, caregivers' involvement and parent-child communication, and positive, comprehensive sexuality education and dialogues.

How is this different from other parenting interventions?

Parenting interventions generally aim to support parents and caregivers in caring for their children, help strengthen their social support systems and promote positive parenting approaches and gender equality in families and communities. This often includes (but is not limited to) addressing issues like how to protect children from violence and harm in the community, child and adolescent development, health and nutrition needs, positive role models and positive coping mechanisms, self-care and parent-child communication. This curriculum focuses entirely on parents' and caregivers' ability to support their children's sexual well-being through open, accurate and early communication about sexuality. The aim is to help parents and provide them with tools for supporting and respecting their children's sexual and reproductive health and rights, including their relationships and sexuality. The aim is also to support parents to empower their children with the right information, so when the time comes, they make the right decision about love, relationships and sex.

These topics are often neglected in parenting interventions but are critical if we want to achieve lasting improvements in the lives of children, adolescents and young people.

CSE is not a one-off activity. Learning about sex and sexuality is a long process. Parents know their children well. Therefore, they can be effective educators because they are with their children during their entire childhood. They can grow with their child and help them with the right age- and developmental responsive information and support.

How is this complementary to other interventions?

This curriculum focuses on communication skills needed to discuss sexuality education. Depending on the audience, it should be combined with other interventions that offer complementary information. For example, parents may need more technical knowledge on sexual and reproductive health (e.g., prevention of HIV and STIs, contraception, safe abortion). Or they may want information that is relevant to crisis settings. Many of the sessions in this curriculum is complementary to the Adolescents in Crisis Parenting Curriculum. They may also want to learn more about positive parenting in general. This intervention should therefore be seen as one way of supporting parents, rather than a stand-alone activity.

What about sessions with very young adolescents?

The curriculum for parents aims to strengthen the supportive environment for very young adolescents to be able to learn about their sexual and reproductive health, sex and sexuality. Other interventions should be included in CSE programming that target children and young people directly. The CSE Standards, Topics Tables and other programme materials should be considered for this target group.

Plan International has also developed activity cards for 9-15 year olds that can be used with groups of children in parallel to these sessions with their parents.

Similarly, the Adolescent Life Skills Curriculum developed for humanitarian settings should be consulted and used to integrate other themes and topics relevant for the protection, health and well-being of adolescents as appropriate.

FACILITATOR GUIDE

WHO SHOULD THE FACILITATORS BE?

The curriculum is designed to be used by facilitators with a certain level of knowledge and experience. While initial onboarding/training sessions are expected to take place, the following characteristics are recommended to implement successful workshops.

Experience in sexual and reproductive health and rights

The curriculum includes facilitator notes at the beginning of each session to support any staff member or consultant who wants to facilitate a session. However, it is recommended that the facilitators have solid knowledge of sexual and reproductive health and rights. Someone who has experience with comprehensive sexuality education is more likely to feel comfortable explaining the various topics and answering challenging questions from the participants.

The facilitators should be able to differentiate evidence-based information from their own values and opinions. Before facilitating this workshop, they might want to reflect on their own upbringing and the sexuality education they received when growing up, as well as their sexual experiences during adolescence. While it can be helpful to share personal experiences to empathise with the participants, the facilitators should be as objective as possible and not let their emotions and values interfere with the teaching. **Even the most experienced facilitators need to take some time to prepare themselves.** Facilitators who are parents themselves need to reflect on how that will influence their discussions with other parents. As a first step, they can explore and discuss their personal experiences, values and norms with Plan colleagues. It is advisable that when a facilitator feels uncomfortable discussing a particular topic, e.g., abortion or sexual pleasure, another facilitator can take over (which means that facilitators should work in pairs to lead each session). Finally, facilitators need to remember that, even if they have certain religious beliefs, they still need to deliver the training in a neutral, respectful, professional and academic way.

Note: Facilitators may need continuous support throughout implementation from technical specialists and/or the programme manager.

Conversations that matter – dialogues in sexual and reproductive health and rights

To support the implementation of CSE and SRHR programming, Plan International has developed the SRHR learning package, Conversations that Matter, which aims to support all Plan staff and partners to:

- Increase knowledge and understanding of key SRHR topics

- Support alignment of staff values and attitudes with Plan International's SRHR positions

- Improve the quality and consistency of SRHR messages and approaches in Plan's global programmes

- Ensuring programme staff, facilitators and volunteers have the capacity and confidence to deliver CSE sessions to parents and caregivers should be of the highest priority, to avoid doing harm.

Contact srhr@plan-international.org for more information.

Experience in workshop facilitation

In addition to knowledge, it is recommended that the facilitators have previous experience in organising and facilitating workshops. This includes setting ground rules, making the sessions interactive, adapting the content and the activities to the participants, gauging energy levels, and build a trusting, safe (and fun) environment for participants etc. The sessions are not meant as a lecture; the facilitators should ensure that all the participants are actively involved in the workshop.

It is advisable to work in pairs during the sessions. The facilitators can support each other when participants ask difficult questions. In addition, one can observe the behaviour of the participants – are they feeling (un)comfortable, are some of them silent? Working in pairs is also helpful when the group is divided into smaller groups. The facilitators need to decide beforehand how they are going to work together and divide roles and responsibilities.

HOW TO ORGANISE A WORKSHOP?

Consider the audience

Many factors should be considered when developing the list of participants:

- **Age of parents:** parents who are close in age might feel more comfortable relating to each other. For example, parents who had children in their early twenties might have had a different experience with comprehensive sexuality education when they were young than older generations. In some cases, the participants could be grandparents who are the primary caregivers for their grandchildren.

- **Age of children:** while the content is relevant to any parent, the curriculum was specifically designed to support parents of young adolescents aged 10-14. In some settings, it may be appropriate or contextualised also for older adolescents.

- **Gender of parents**: the curriculum is designed for both fathers and mothers in all their diversity. Depending on the level of comfort of the participants, the workshop can be separated into sessions for mothers and sessions for fathers, or both at the same time.

- **Knowledge of sexual and reproductive health and rights:** every parent already has some knowledge of sexuality and relationships through their personal experiences. Since the curriculum focuses mainly on communication skills, it might be helpful for the participants to have some additional knowledge of SRHR (through reading or formal training).

- **Parents' involvement in Plan International's work:** the workshop could build on other work done by Plan International at the community level. For instance, the participants could include parents of Champions of Change participants or other parents and caregivers already trained by Plan International in other activities.

- **Children's involvement in Plan International's work:** it might be easier to reach parents whose children are already involved in some of our activities at the community level.

It is recommended to start with parents who are already involved in Plan International's work, such as Champions of Change. Parents whose children are engaged in a CSE programme are also a suitable group for initial sessions. Having participants who are already familiar with Plan International's work can make it easier to focus on communication skills, instead of having to provide technical information and go through values clarification exercises.

Consider the group size and participants

It is generally recommended to have 8-12 participants per session. This way, the group is small enough so that everyone has an opportunity to have their questions answered and get some individual

attention from the facilitators, but still large enough to generate some lively discussions. If the group is larger than 15, the voices of some people, usually those who are quieter, tend to get lost; if it is smaller than 6-8, there may not be enough opinions, questions, and ideas shared. Depending on the context, you can organise mixed father/mother groups. Mixed groups are preferable. However, sometimes parents are not able to come together to a session or do not feel comfortable sitting together in a mixed group to discuss sexuality education topics. In these cases, separate sessions for mothers and fathers can be helpful. Some fathers seem to feel freer and more comfortable discussing their specific role in sexuality education when they are among themselves. That may help to emphasise the key role of fathers and show them evidence of the positive effects of involved fatherhood.

Consider the timing

Parents often have limited time to engage in trainings; they are busy with work, household chores, family life and social life. Therefore, it is important to consult them when organising the sessions to find the most suitable time. This includes the time of the year (e.g. winter months in rural communities might be less busy), and time of the day (e.g. evenings, after religious or community events). Each session is designed to take approximately one hour and a half. Depending on parents' availability, the sessions can be divided into sub-sessions or combined to take place over a few half-days.

Consider the budget

When budgeting for the training programme, the team should ensure that all the elements are taken into account. Ahead of the meeting, some budget should be allocated to translation and adaptation of the curriculum to the local context. The facilitators may need some training, and it may be helpful to include an induction for all Plan staff. The workshop venue itself should be welcoming, and there should be sufficient stationery for all the activities. To ensure attendance at all the sessions, the participants may need to get compensated for transport fees and depending on the time of the meeting, they may need some refreshments. If they are not employed by Plan, the facilitators should be compensated for their time and skills.

Agree on how to work together

At the beginning of the sessions, the facilitators should discuss with the participants what would make them feel safe and comfortable to talk openly about sexuality education. It is important to develop these agreements together with the participants to create a conducive environment to discuss sensitive issues. The curriculum includes a section to remind facilitators to discuss ground rules at the beginning of the first session.

Before and after the sessions

Each session in the curriculum will require some preparation. This could include, for example, printing handouts or preparing a PowerPoint presentation or flip chart with key messages or illustrations.

Facilitators should be prepared to offer support to parents, should they have questions or concerns between the sessions. Depending on the context, this could be in the form of providing them with ways to contact Plan International, making sure parents are aware of available support services in their communities, and also making sure participants are aware of any feedback or complaint mechanism put in place.

Facilitators could also identify local organisations that are able to provide further information and support on sensitive topics. Contact details could be provided in a handout or to individual participants who want to know more.

HOW TO ADAPT THE CONTENT?

How to select the sessions

The curriculum can either be used for a stand-alone workshop series or as an add-on to other parenting curricula or interventions. It is recommended to go through all the sessions to give parents a comprehensive set of tools to communicate with their children. However, if there are any time constraints, the facilitators, in consultation with the dedicated SRHR technical staff in the office, can decide to choose only a few sessions. In this case, it is recommended to include at least Sessions 1, 2 and 3. These lay the foundation for communication on sexuality and relationships and provide the basis for the following sessions. Sessions 5, 6 and 7 should only be facilitated by an experienced trainer who is comfortable talking about sensitive issues with parents.

If possible, this curriculum should be used as an add-on to Plan International's Parenting curriculum for parents and caregivers of adolescents in crisis settings. It provides a strong basis to discuss positive parenting, children's development and coping skills. It might also put parents at ease before discussing more sensitive topics related to sexual and reproductive health.

How to make the content culturally relevant

Contextualisation is the responsibility of the SRHR advisor or specialist prior to implementation. This can be done in collaboration with programme staff and facilitators who will deliver the sessions to parents. It is important to base any contextualisation or adaptation of the materials on existing context analyses and previous programme experiences.

There is a fine line between making the content culturally relevant and omitting information because it is taboo or too sensitive. The facilitators should ensure that the participants receive comprehensive information, even if it means having uncomfortable discussions. It might be helpful to remember that many cultures have a long tradition of some form of sexuality education given to girls and boys (for example, when boys are about to be circumcised). While the content may not be as comprehensive as current CSE curricula, sexuality education is part of many cultures. Sexuality education doesn't deny traditional values; it helps children identify their values and empowers them to lead their lives according to these values.

Making the content culturally relevant means identifying the main sources of concern in the community, as well as some potentially harmful traditional practices, and openly discussing those. For instance, if child, early and forced marriages and unions (CEFMU) are common, it is important to address this topic and help the participants understand the impact of CEFMU on boys and especially girls. Contextualisation is about truly understanding the socio-cultural norms about sexual and reproductive health, and the behaviour of young people. Contextualisation is not the same as adapting the content to what parents want or don't want their children to know. Children's rights and Plan's values on SRHR must remain the basis for the session content. It is important to be aware of how the community thinks or acts regarding the following topics:

- When it is acceptable to have sex (before marriage, during marriage, outside of marriage), or at what age
- Acceptable number of partners
- Reasons for marriage
- Male/female roles during a sexual encounter
- Acceptable/non-acceptable sexual behaviours (especially for young people)
- Values about gender and gender equity

- Menstrual health and hygiene, and other hygiene issues
- Sexuality education programmes at school or out of school
- Sexual violence/harassment towards girls, gender-based violence
- Other social and gender norms

How to translate the curriculum

If needed, the curriculum and the handouts will have to be translated into the local language. This can be done either by a professional translator or by the facilitators. A dedicated technical staff should ensure the quality of translation is adequate and the content is the same. The person translating the materials should have some experience in SRHR to know how to translate technical terms.

How to adapt the activities

Individual preferences and cultural context can influence the type of activities that parents feel comfortable with. The facilitators should feel free to adapt some activities based on the participants. For example, group work might work better in some settings, while in other instances, plenary sessions or individual reflections might be preferred. If the participants don't feel comfortable discussing personal experiences, the facilitators and/or SRHR advisors can develop case studies that are culturally relevant.

How to find relevant information

The workshop will be more interesting if it includes information, data, statistics, and stories relevant to the country/region. For all the sessions, the facilitators should be equipped with stories from the community to share with the participants. These can be used as examples to illustrate recommendations or tips, or as case studies if the participants don't feel comfortable sharing their personal stories. The facilitators and/or Plan's technical team should also collect (sub-)national data and statistics on specific topics, including the proportion of boys/girls attending school, number of young people who have had sex before the age of 15, adolescent pregnancy, early adolescent pregnancy (under 14 years old), unsafe abortion, HIV prevalence among young people, different forms of GBV, such as CEFMU, female genital mutilation/cutting (FGM/C), sexual violence or femicides.

National and international statistics are general and may not include specific data from a community. The facilitators need to "translate" the national statistics to the relevant community, village or urban context.

In some countries, there may be data on the percentage of young people having access to the Internet, and their use of mobile phones. Often this percentage is higher for boys than for girls. This can give an indication of how many young people have access to information on sexuality outside of the formal setting and may also be accessing pornography.

All these data and statistics will help make a case for parents' involvement in sexuality education, and can support facilitators if participants argue that something (whether abortion, same-sex relationships or premarital sex) doesn't happen in their community. On these sensitive topics, it is also helpful to be familiar with the national laws and policies on:

- age of consent to have sexual intercourse (is it similar for boys and girls?)
- age of marriage
- access to contraception; parental/spousal consent
- abortion and post-abortion care; parental consent
- LGBTIQ+ rights

- sexual and gender-based violence
- access to sexual and reproductive health services for adolescents

It is essential to be equipped with facts to answer participants' questions. During the workshop, the facilitators can discuss how these policies differ from (or are the same as) the social norms in the community. Participants may think customs and norms are the same as laws. For example, they may assume that there is a law that prohibits unmarried girls from having access to SRH services, because they feel it is against the social norms. However, in reality, this may not be the fact. The laws on age of consent may create indirect barriers to young people's access to SRH services. Similarly, people often assume that if abortion is not easy to access that it is illegal; however, abortion is only completely banned in *all* circumstances in very few countries. Post-abortion care is not illegal anywhere.

> TIP! Plan International has developed a set of key messages for SRHR IEC materials and dialogues, that may be useful to consult as a complement to this curriculum. Please contact srhr@plan-international.org for more information!

TIPS FOR FACILITATING A WORKSHOP

How to make the sessions interesting and interactive

People tend to remember what they learned by doing a lot more than what they just heard. While it might sometimes be easier just to give a presentation rather than facilitate group work and discussions, it is essential to get the participants actively involved. The activities included in the curriculum are meant to engage the participants and create some discussions.

When using PowerPoint presentations, it is best to keep the slides short, only highlighting the key messages. Visual aids can be helpful to remember the messages and are particularly important if literacy levels are low among the participants. Illustrations should be selected carefully to represent a diversity of parents and children.

Ice-breakers and energisers can be included when needed during the sessions. The Laughter and Play Manual provides many suggestions for these. The facilitators can also check the energy level in the room by asking the participants to show a "thumbs up" or "thumbs down".

> ### Images and illustrations
>
> You should choose images and illustrations relevant to your setting. If so, consider the following suggestions:
>
> - Make sure that illustrations represent the context and setting where the materials will be used and the people they target.
> - Use positive images to communicate empowering messages
> - Use images and illustrations that reflect the diversity of people in the setting
> - Don't use images and illustrations that could promote stereotypes, inequality, stigma or discrimination
> - Don't use images or illustrations that could be triggering memories of traumatic experiences, for example FGM/C
> - Pre-test the images on people with limited knowledge of the topic. This will highlight potentially harmful misunderstandings
>
> If you want to access more illustrations, contact srhr@plan-international.org

How to answer difficult questions

Discussions on sexual and reproductive health and rights, as well as on raising children, can be emotional and personal. The participants may have strong opinions, or they may challenge the information provided during the workshop. The facilitators should prepare themselves ahead of time and review common myths and misconceptions. They can consult their colleagues to identify the questions that are likely to come up with regards to sexuality education. In preparing their answers, they should stick to evidence-based information and avoid any type of judgement or personal opinion.

How to deal with strong disagreements and conflicts between participants

Sexuality education can include controversial and uncomfortable topics, especially between parents from different faith groups or socio-economic backgrounds. An unwillingness and inability to discuss sex and sexuality may, for example, limit knowledge of the full range of options known to be successful in HIV prevention, including condom use.

Facilitators should hold to Plan's values, including a gender-transformative, sex-positive and rights-based approach, while at the same time realising that this may pose challenges in some cultures and for some religious groups. It is only through discussion and debates that people can begin to address these complex issues. As a facilitator, finding common ground in values of dignity, equality, respect and compassion is vital.

It may help to refer to the agreements discussed at the start of the workshop to keep discussions respectful. The facilitators need to ensure that people can express their personal opinions and react to participants who have different views. They must ensure that participants respond to each other in a calm, non-defensive and respectful way. They should never make the discussion personal. They should not accept explosive, angry, hurtful and resentful reactions.

Discussions should not end in winners or losers. Participants can agree to disagree. Facilitators can help participants forgive and forget, and move past the disagreement without holding resentment or anger.

What to do when the number of participants decreases after the first couple of sessions

First, the facilitators should try to find out what is causing participants to drop out - is it the timing of the sessions? Is there a lack of interest? To retain participants, the facilitators need to establish good relationships and be personal with all participants: know their names, remember something personal about them, etc. This requires good communication skills during the sessions, but also during the breaks. A welcoming environment and sufficient refreshments might help, too. The facilitators need to ensure that all participants know each other and talk to each other. Facilitation goes beyond the sessions; it includes creating a sense of belonging and accountability to the group.

Support for the facilitators

It is best to work with two facilitators so they can support each other before, during and after the sessions. Also, Plan's management and technical staff should be available when problems arise with participants, including heated discussions, breaking confidentiality issues, etc. Furthermore, for more technical information on some topics, technical back-up might be needed.

Annex II provides a detailed checklist for facilitators.

FOLLOW-UP AFTER THE WORKSHOP

Session 10 explains to the participants how they can be role models in their community. While not every participant will feel comfortable speaking publicly about sexuality education, some of them might feel motivated to take action or lead by example. The facilitators could set up a system to provide support and follow up with the participants over the next few months (see also M&E tools).

SAFEGUARDING ISSUES

SAFETY AND CONFIDENTIALITY IN THE ROOM

Sexual and reproductive health and rights can be a sensitive, personal topic. For the participants to feel comfortable opening up, the facilitators should support them to establish some ground rules. For instance, all the discussions should be kept confidential. What happens in the classroom stays in the classroom. No pictures should be taken, and nothing should be recorded without all of the participants' consent. It should be emphasised that learners are responsible for their own judgements about what they may contribute during the workshop. At the same time, it should be made clear that confidentiality is bounded and not absolute, e.g. if specific safeguarding or child protection issues become apparent during the sessions with parents and their children, the facilitators are obligated to address these concerns in line with Plan International's policy on Safeguarding Children and Young People.

The workshop includes a joint session (Session 9) for parents and children. Here it is important to create a safe environment for both parents and children. One suggestion would be to meet with the children separately beforehand and ask them what would make them feel safe.

The participants should also feel safe to express their opinion. To ensure this, the facilitators should remind the participants that they should carefully listen to each other before reacting to someone's opinion. They should also discuss ideas and opinions, and not the person expressing them.

IDENTIFYING AND REPORTING CONCERNS

Protection concerns

It is important to be mindful that conversations around CSE sometimes bring with them disclosures of concerns people have relating to abuse or other protection issues, or disclosures of actual abuse. If a facilitator or a participant hears or suspects that a parent or a child attending the workshop is subject to any form of harm, it is their duty to take action and report this. Consult Child Protection colleagues in your Country Office for appropriate reproting mechanisms.

Child and youth safeguarding

Safeguarding is not just what we do, it is who we are! We take very seriously our responsibility and duty to ensure that we, as an organisation, and anyone who represents us does not in any way harm, abuse or commit any other act of violence against children and young people or place them at risk of the same. All staff, consultants and volunteers involved in implementing project activities, including facilitators conducting these workshops, must know who the local Safeguarding Focal Point is and what reporting procedures are in place.

Safeguarding concerns and other allegations related to inappropriate staff behaviour, including breaches of Plan International's Safeguarding Children and Young People Policy, Prevention of Sexual Harassment, Exploitation and Abuse (PSHEA) policy or Code of Conduct must be reported immediately!

Read more about our safeguarding policies and procedures on Planet.

ADDITIONAL CONSIDERATIONS FOR SPECIFIC GROUPS

YOUNG PEOPLE LIVING WITH HIV

The curriculum is applicable to all parents, regardless of their child's HIV status. However, there are some additional topics that parents may want to discuss. These include:

- How to decide if, when and how to disclose HIV status and how to consider safety and security when disclosing
- Stigma and discrimination issues
- Addressing specific health needs
- Addressing mental/psychosocial needs
- How to have enjoyable sex
- Understanding what it means to be "undetectable"
- How to practise safer sex
- How to decide on family planning
- How to encourage children living with HIV to continually take medication (treatment adherence)
- Accessing support and services that respect everyone's health, dignity, autonomy, privacy and well-being

YOUNG PEOPLE WITH DISABILITIES

Parents of children with physical, mental or intellectual disabilities may not think that sexuality education is necessary. However, people with disabilities are sexual and express their sexuality in ways that are as diverse as everyone else. They need, like all people, affection, love and intimacy, acceptance and companionship. Therefore, children and adolescents living with disabilities have equal rights to information, knowledge and education on their sexuality as other children and adolescents. This is especially important as people with disabilities face significant physical, institutional, communicational and attitudinal barriers in accessing SRH services. Furthermore, people living with a disability are often more vulnerable to all forms of abuse and exploitation.

Some topics for conversation could include:

- Reproductive rights (the right to decide if, when and how to have children)
- Sexual needs and how to have a pleasurable sexual life
- Understanding and communicating personal boundaries
- Consent
- Accessing support and services that respect everyone's health, dignity, autonomy, privacy and well-being

YOUNG LGBTIQ+ PEOPLE

Sexual orientation and gender identity are an important but often sensitive issue to discuss with parents. Parents often avoid this topic because it makes them feel uncomfortable, they may not have sufficient information, or they may have strong negative/hostile feelings about it. When they express negative opinions or derogatory jokes about same-sex relationships, their children internalise this, and it becomes almost impossible for a child to "come out" (to reveal their sexual orientation or gender identity).

The following topics could be discussed:

- Stigma and discrimination
- LGBTIQ+ people's rights (based on the country context)
- Addressing specific health needs
- How to have enjoyable sex
- How to practice safer sex
- Accessing support and services that respect everyone's health, dignity, autonomy, privacy and well-being

Most importantly, parents should aim to show unconditional love to their children and support them in their uniqueness.

MONITORING AND EVALUATION

To thoroughly assess the quality and impact of the curriculum, monitoring and evaluation (M&E) should take place during the workshop, at the end, and after a few weeks/months. The facilitators can choose which M&E tools are most appropriate based on the settings and the need for data. All global SRHR tools and resources for monitoring and evaluation are available in the SRHR M&E Tool Box.

At the project or programme level, the curriculum is developed to support the realisation of Plan International's global SRHR results framework, and our CSE Programme Model. The curriculum is designed to strengthen the **knowledge, attitudes and skills of parents of adolescents** as it relates to the sexual and reproductive health and rights of their children, their ability to communicate effectively with them and model positive behaviours, and contribute to a supportive home environment where children, adolescents and young people feel confident and able to discuss topics concerning their bodies and relationships with their parents. In our global SRHR Results Framework (as part of the AoGD Package), several results and indicators reflect this change.

Note: The curriculum only cannot be expected to lead to these changes, but it can contribute to the achievement of some indicators if combined with other interventions over a longer period of time.

To access the full results framework, see our SRHR page on Planet.

Some key results and outcome indicators for parents, caregivers and families that this curriculum could contribute towards include:			
SRHO2.1	Parents, primary caregivers and other family members have a good understanding of CAY's sexual and reproductive health and rights	SRHO2.1.1	% of parents, caregivers and family members with basic correct knowledge of SRHR core topics
		SRHO2.1.5	% of parents, caregivers and family members who have positive attitudes toward young people's sexual and reproductive health and rights
SRHO2.3	Parents, primary caregivers and other family members support their CAY to make healthy and informed choices related to sexuality and marriage	SRHO2.3.1	% of parents and caregivers who report that they feel able to support their children on SRHR
		SRHO2.3.3	% of CAY who say they had a positive experience talking to their parents/caregivers about SRHR in the past 12 months
		SRHO2.3.6	% of adolescent girls and young women that report controlling behaviours on the part of their parents, primary caregivers and/or other family members

		SRHO2.3.8	% of adolescents aged 12-18 years who report that they feel a strong connection to their primary caregiver.
SRHO2.4	Parents, primary caregivers and families support their CAY equally to use SRHR services, including contraception	SRHO2.4.1	% of parents, caregivers and family members who would approve of their adolescent child accessing modern contraception, irrespective of sex

ANNEXES

I. ROLES AND RESPONSIBILITIES

Task	Responsible person/team
Prepare budget for the whole activity	The business development team, in collaboration with SRHR advisor
Conduct staff induction	SRHR advisor at CO (Global Hub SRHR team available for support)
Support staff and facilitators to reflect on their own values and experiences	SRHR advisor at CO (Global Hub SRHR team available for support)
Translate materials into local language	SRHR advisor at CO
Adapt curriculum to local context	SRHR advisor at CO
Look for (sub-)national data and statistics on SRHR key topics (safe and unsafe abortion, child marriage, HIV, etc.)	SRHR advisor at CO (building on existing situational analyses)
Look up laws and policies on age of consent, abortion, LGBTIQ+, etc.	SRHR advisor at CO (building on existing situational analyses)
Identify participants and invite them to the workshop	Project manager and field staff
Select sessions to include in the workshops	SRHR advisor (in collaboration with project manager)
Read the Implementation Guide and Curriculum, especially the notes for the facilitators	Project manager and field staff Facilitators
Prepare presentations (PowerPoint or flipchart) for the whole workshop	SRHR advisor and project manager
Orient staff and facilitators of Plan's Safeguarding Policy and ensure all involved are aware of reporting mechanisms	Project manager and CO Safeguarding Focal Point
Purchase stationery and refreshments	Project staff
Deliver sessions with parents	Facilitators with experience in SRHR and participatory workshop delivery

II. EXTENDED CHECKLIST FOR FACILITATORS

1. Be well organised

- Read the training materials beforehand, so you are well prepared
- Arrive early so you can set up and welcome the participants when they arrive
- Set up chairs in a semi-circle, making sure that everyone can see each other and the flipchart
- Set up the materials (flipcharts, projector, etc.), so they are ready to use
- Prepare all the markers, cards, flipchart papers, masking tape, handouts and other materials necessary before the session so that they are ready
- Make the environment comfortable

2. Get to know the participants and put them at ease

- Introduce yourself and talk to the participants in an open and friendly way before the session starts
- Find out more about them and their interests
- Assure them that the workshop is not a "formal" place and that they should feel free to contribute

3. Use warm-up games and introductory activities

- Use warm-up games to break the ice and create a relaxed learning environment
- Use name games to help the participants get to know each other
- Use games and energisers at different points throughout the day to maintain energy levels

4. Match objectives against expectations

- Ask the participants what they hope to learn
- Address as many of the participants' expectations as possible
- Talk through the workshop schedule and how it relates to the objectives

5. Follow the schedule and manage time effectively

- Go through the sessions in an orderly way
- If questions come up which are off-topic, either tell the participants that you will deal with them later (and record them on a flipchart for this purpose) or deal with them immediately if they are brief
- Include some time for questions that come up during the session

6. Explain things clearly

- Speak slowly, clearly and loud enough for everyone to hear
- Look at the participants as you speak and use your hands and body to emphasise points
- Keep messages short and straightforward. Use simple and familiar words
- Don't talk too much. Remember, your task is to get the participants to actively participate

- Make sure the main points are also written in keywords on a flipchart
- Be patient; it may take some time for participants to be able to express themselves and overcome embarrassment, especially discussing sensitive issues

7. Ask questions and lead discussions

- Use questions – to get the participants talking, to make them think, to clarify what is being said, to test for agreement
- Ask clear, simple, open questions that allow people to give their opinions
- Fish for contributions – use your hands and body to encourage the participants to open up
- Wait for responses. Give people time to think and come up with answers
- Encourage everyone to talk – small 'buzz' groups help to get everyone talking
- Keep asking – "What else? Who would like to add to that?"
- If there is no response, restate or rephrase the questions
- Show that you are listening and are interested to hear more
- Praise responses to encourage participation – "Thanks!" "Good!"
- Rephrase responses to check that you and the other participants understand
- Redirect the answers to the other participants – "she said…. What do others think?"
- Summarise and check the agreement before moving to the next question/topic

8. Organise group work

- Use groups to get everyone involved and to allow more detailed discussions
- Decide on the size of groups – pairs, 3s, 4s, 5s, 6-10
- Fewer groups save reporting time, small groups increase participation
- Divide the participants into groups using a group divider
- Give a clear explanation of the group task, time and reporting method
- Form new groups each time so that the participants get to work with different people

9. Record on the flipchart

- Write large and clear enough for people at the back of the room to see
- Write key words only and use participants' own words
- Ask a co-facilitator to record so you can concentrate on the facilitation
- Use the flipchart notes to stimulate further discussion and then summarise

10. Observe and test the climate

- Observe body language and ask people how they are feeling.
- Do they look interested or bored?
- Are they doing most of the talking, or are they just listening to you?
- Do they need a break or an energiser?

11. Select appropriate activities and use a variety of methodologies

- Adapt the suggested activities to the group

- Don't use the same methods all the time

- Use different sizes and types of groups, change the meeting space (why not go outside?), and take turns as trainers – so people don't get bored

- Use activities that participants could use with other groups as well and discuss with them how activities could be adapted to other groups and contexts, in a way that is culturally sensitive, age- and developmentally appropriate.

12. Timing and pacing

- Don't underestimate the time needed for participatory learning activities

- Give groups enough time to do their work. Don't rush them.

- Go at a pace that is appropriate to the group

- Don't forget to take breaks to relax, get refreshments and talk informally

13. Start and end of each session

- Start each new session with a reflection on the previous one; what was important; are there still questions?

- End each session with a summary and a brief evaluation; like a barometer; what did the participants like about the atmosphere in the group, the content of the training, the delivery of the training; any other comments?

14. Things to avoid in a facilitation/training process

- Too much talking

- Too much theory and becoming too academic

- Using the same methods all the time

- Use of complicated language or jargon

- Speaking too fast for participants to follow

- Overloading participants with too much information

- Poor time management

- Seeing yourself as the expert

- Solving problems and making decisions for the participants

- Imposing your ideas and solutions to the participants

- Criticising, condemning or making fun of people's ideas

- Making people dependent on your advice

Source: Training of trainers; a handbook for training facilitators in participatory methods, Partners in Health. https://www.pih.org/practitioner-resource/training-of-trainers

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