

# Comprehensive Sexuality Education: Let's Talk about Sex

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SESSION 8



# What Is Comprehensive Sexuality Education?

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“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 to:

- Realize their health, well-being, and dignity.
- Develop respectful social and sexual relationships.
- Consider how their choices affect their own and others’ well-being.
- Understand and ensure the protection of their rights throughout their lives.”

Source: United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO), UNAIDS, United Nations Population Fund, UNICEF, UN Women, World Health Organization. 2009. *International technical guidance on sexuality education: An evidence-informed approach*. Paris: UNESCO.

# What Is CSE?

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CSE frames the conversation about sexuality from health and right perspective.

- It equips adolescents to make choices to maintain good health and protect their dignity and rights.

Examples of CSE curricula include UNESCO's *International Technical Guidance on Sexual Education* and DREAMS In-School Curricula.

# How Is CSE Relevant for VMMC Services?

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In-service counseling provided during VMMC services does not allow time to offer the full CSE curriculum (can require several sessions over several days).

CSE's general approach guided the development of the in-service counseling resources for adolescents shared in this training.

# The CSE Approach to Teaching Sexuality

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- Presents abstinence as a choice that adolescents make.
- Acknowledges that many adolescents will become sexually active.
- Teaches about contraception and condom use, sexually transmitted infections (STIs), and HIV.
- Acknowledges STI and HIV challenges faced by adolescents.
- Empowers adolescents to make informed decisions about sexuality.

# Abstinence-Only Education

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- Focuses on promoting abstinence from sex.
- Does not acknowledge that many teenagers will become sexually active.
- Does not teach about contraception or condom use.
- Cites STIs and HIV as reasons to remain abstinent.

Source: Collins C, Alagiri P, Summers T, Morin SF. 2002. *Abstinence only vs. comprehensive sex education: What are the arguments? What is the evidence?* San Francisco: UCSF AIDS Research Institute.

# Age of Sexual Debut in Select African Countries

- A large percentage of adolescent males will begin having sex by age 19.
- The table below shows the percentage of males who have had their sexual debut by age 15 and by 18, using data from recent Demographic and Health Surveys.
- The data suggest that a significant percentage of adolescents accessing VMMC will have already had sex.

Proportion of Adolescent Males Who Have Had Their Sexual Debut by Age 15 and 18									
	Kenya	Lesotho	Malawi	Mozambique	Namibia	Tanzania	Uganda	Zambia	Zimbabwe
15*	19.6%	24.6%	22.2%	26.5%	13.4%	13.8%	16.7%	18.3%	5.8%
18**	57.2%	63.6%	49.7%	68.9%	55.2%	48.2%	50.1%	47.6%	26.4%

\* Sample taken from/among males ages 15–19. For example, in Kenya, 19.6% of adolescents ages 15–19 surveyed had initiated sex by age 15.

\*\* Sample is from/among males ages 20–24 and is cumulative, so among males ages 20–24 in Lesotho, for example, 63.6% had initiated sex by age 18. (This includes those who had initiated sex by age 15.)

# Common Fears Related to CSE among Parents, Teachers, and Counselors/Providers

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- CSE may encourage early sexual initiation.
- CSE may lead to unhealthy behaviors.
- Counselors may feel that it is inappropriate in the local context to discuss issues related to sex with adolescents, particularly with younger adolescents.



# CSE Evidence

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Research provides **NO** evidence that abstinence-only programs delay sexual initiation, reduce the frequency of sex, or reduce risk of STIs or pregnancy.

Research indicates that CSE **DOES** lead to:

- Delayed initiation of sexual intercourse
- Decreased frequency of sexual intercourse
- Decreased number of sexual partners
- Increased use of condoms and contraception

Source: Collins C, Alagiri P, Summers T, Morin SF. Abstinence only vs. comprehensive sex education: What are the arguments. *What is the evidence*. 2002:1-16.  
Kohler PK, Manhart LE, Lafferty WE. Abstinence-only and comprehensive sex education and the initiation of sexual activity and teen pregnancy. *Journal of adolescent Health*. 2008;42(4):344-351.

# CSE Benefits

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CSE has positive effects, including increasing young people's knowledge and improving their attitudes related to sexual and reproductive health and behaviors.

CSE enables young people to protect their health, well-being, and dignity.

- Dignity is the feeling of self-respect or pride in oneself.
- Health and well-being are protected by empowering adolescents to make healthy choices.
- Dignity is protected by strengthening awareness and understanding of healthy relationships and the importance of consent in relationships.

# How to Talk about Sexuality with Adolescents

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- Consider age-related developmental differences.
- Ensure language is understandable for the age group. (Details and examples will be provided in a later session.)
- Frame the conversation from a health perspective.
- Make it clear that the conversation is not meant to encourage early sexual debut or risk behaviors but to equip adolescents with the knowledge they need to make informed decisions about their sexual health.

# References

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# Questions

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Are there any questions?