

PLAN INTERNATIONAL'S COMPREHENSIVE SEXUALITY EDUCATION (CSE) STANDARDS

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OVERVIEW OF STANDARDS

CONTENT



Standard 1: Context analysis

CSE programmes are informed by an in-depth analysis carried out with communities of the priority issues for children, adolescents and young people related to sexuality, including context and underlying gender and social norms.

Standard 2: Comprehensive information

CSE provides clear, comprehensive, accurate, non-judgmental information and includes substantive discussions on sex, sexuality, relationships and consent, contraceptive choices and abortion care.

Standard 3: Gender and power

CSE contributes to transforming unequal gender power relations through substantive discussions on gender, power and identity to challenge harmful norms and practices and other forms of gender-based violence (GBV).

Standard 4: Positivity and pleasure

CSE addresses sex and sexuality from a holistic perspective, looking at positive experiences such as pleasure, rather than focusing on negative ones such as risks and fear.

Standard 5: Diversity and non-discrimination

CSE emphasises inclusion of adolescents and young people in all their diversity, and provides sensitive, respectful and non-discriminatory messages.

Standard 6: Age and Stage

CSE curricula are age and developmentally appropriate, and respond to children, adolescents and young people's evolving capacities and needs.



DELIVERY



Standard 7: Safety

CSE programmes are delivered in a safe learning environment.

Standard 8: Educator Support

CSE programmes are based on quality training and continuous support to educators.

Standard 9: Participatory, skills-building

CSE uses participatory teaching approaches that provide opportunities to explore and discuss personal values and attitudes, and build relevant skills and the confidence to make decisions.

CREATING AN ENABLING ENVIRONMENT



Standard 10: Supportive whole school

CSE programmes are supported by an enabling environment in the school/organisational setting.

Standard 11: Youth engagement

CSE programmes promote and facilitate the meaningful engagement of children, adolescents and young people throughout all stages of the project cycle to ensure programmes respond to their needs and preferences.

Standard 12: Caregivers' involvement

CSE programmes support interventions with parents and caregivers to build their confidence and skills in talking to their children about sexuality from early childhood.

Standard 13: Service linkages

CSE ensures strong linkages with relevant adolescent and gender-responsive health services locally, and with child protection services that are also relevant for younger children.

Standard 14: Policies and laws

CSE programmes are supported by appropriate legislation and policies.

STANDARD 1: CONTEXT ANALYSIS



CSE programmes are informed by an in-depth analysis carried out with communities of the priority issues for children, adolescents and young people related to sexuality, including context and underlying gender and social norms.

CONCEPTS

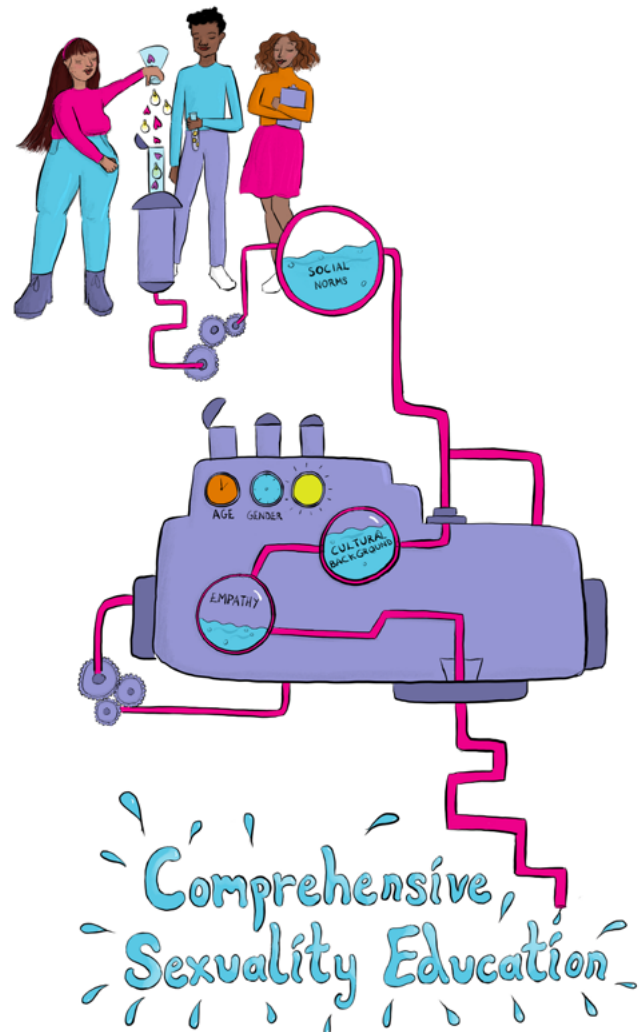
- **Gender:** the way society defines the roles, behaviours, activities, and attributes of girls, boys, women, men, and people who are transgender. Gender is socially constructed and is not biologically determined. These definitions are not fixed but change over time and across different communities.
- **Social norms:** these are informal shared beliefs, understandings and accepted behaviour that an individual is expected to conform to in a group, community, or culture.

and reproductive health, and statistics and qualitative research data on adolescent pregnancy, child, early and forced marriage and unions (CEFMU), contraceptive use, HIV prevalence, access to social media related to information on sex and sexuality etc. Analyse the local context including laws, policies, traditional beliefs or practices - that could impact on the acceptance of CSE, for example, gender norms including CEFMU, virginity testing, female genital mutilation/ cutting, prevalence and attitudes to GBV.

HOW THE STANDARD WOULD LOOK IN PRACTICE:

CSE programmes should be based on:

- Analysis of the knowledge and discussions on the sexuality and sexual and reproductive health of children, adolescents and young people (CAY) in the community.
- Discussion with CAY about the topics and information they want to know about and how they want CSE delivered. This includes the access and use of social media with parents and other adults around the challenges facing CAY and attitudes to CSE.
- Review research or consultations done with CAY locally around sexuality and sexual



STANDARD 2: COMPREHENSIVE INFORMATION



CSE provides clear, comprehensive, accurate, non-judgmental information and includes substantive discussions on sex, sexuality, relationships and consent, contraceptive choices and abortion care.

CONCEPTS

- **Comprehensive:** CSE is a curriculum-based process of teaching, covering all key topics in a logical sequence about the cognitive, emotional, social, interactive and physical aspects of sexuality
- **Accurate:** the content of CSE reflects the most current scientific evidence, based upon research results in the field
- **Non-judgemental:** CSE is not value-free. However, educators and learners need to understand the difference between facts and values. Educators should not teach based on one's personal standards or opinions.

HOW THE STANDARD WILL LOOK IN PRACTICE

- The content of CSE programmes is based on scientific evidence and covers the full range of topics including sex, sexuality, relationships and consent, contraception and abortion in line with agreed Plan CSE topics and includes focus on attitudes and skills development as well as knowledge.
- The content is inclusive and respectful of diversity and non-judgemental of gender and sexuality.
- The content meets the relevant needs and capacity of the learners, and equips and empowers learners with the knowledge, life skills and positive values to understand and enjoy their sexuality, and to make

conscious, satisfying and healthy choices regarding relationships, sexuality and their physical and emotional health.

- The content helps learners to reflect, understand and challenge harmful social and gender-based norms and the impact these have on relationships with peers, parents, teachers, other adults and their communities.
- Programmes do not include abstinence-only approaches or fear-based messages which have been proven to be ineffective.
- Programmes provide information on the full range of contraceptive choices, including emergency contraception, safe abortion where legal, and post-abortion care in the event of unintended pregnancy.
- Programmes provide information and support on how to look for accurate information about sex and sexuality online and how to enjoy safe encounters on the internet



STANDARD 3: GENDER AND POWER



CSE contributes to transforming unequal gender power relations through substantive discussions on gender, power and identity to challenge harmful norms and practices and other forms of gender-based violence (GBV).

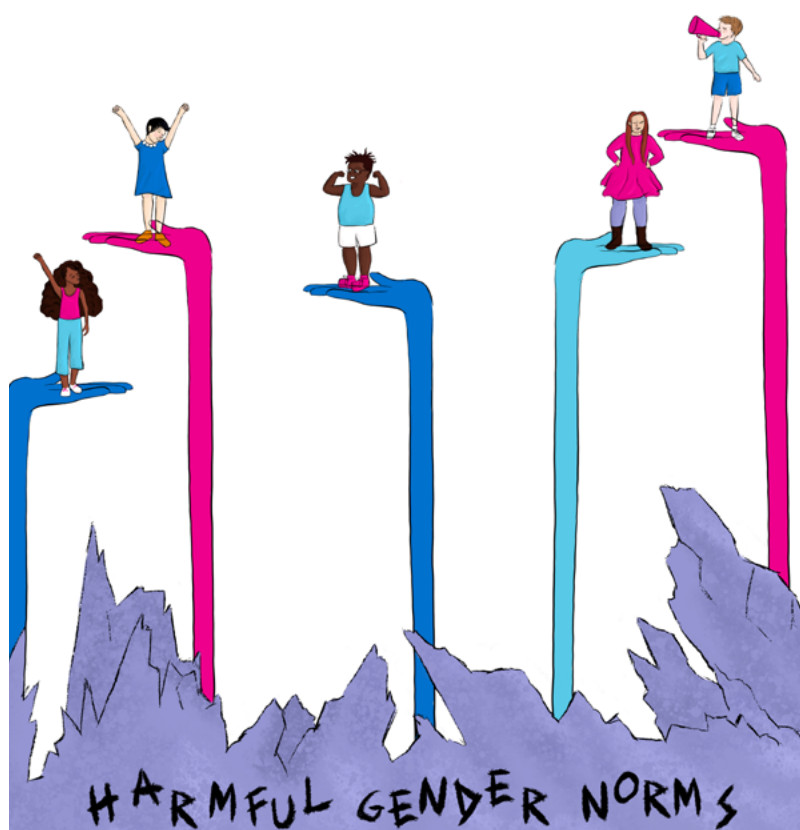
CONCEPTS

- **Gender transformative approaches:** tackle the root causes of gender inequality, particularly unequal gender power relations between persons of different genders, discriminatory social norms and legislation. The goal is not only to improve the daily condition of girls, but also to advance their position and value in society.

HOW THE STANDARD WOULD LOOK IN PRACTICE

- Messages are based upon principles of gender equality and avoid reinforcing negative gender stereotypes that are often harmful to both girls and boys. It calls attention to wider social change by going beyond individual sexual development to a focus on transforming structures of power.
- Interventions include space for reflection and critical thinking about power and social norms around gender, looking at individual behaviour change as well as wider social change.
- Sessions relating to harmful practices and other forms of gender-based violence are carefully and sensitively facilitated, recognising that young people in the group may be directly affected by these issues. Opportunities to follow up privately with CSE educators or relevant Plan staff are provided.

- Programmes address the heightened vulnerability of marginalised and excluded groups of young people to violence including LGBTIQ+ children, adolescents and young people, people with disabilities, girls living in extreme poverty and those in conflict-affected areas.
- Programmes adhere to Plan International's Guidance on Safety Online, and include information on how to remain safe online and what to do in case of bullying, unwanted sexting, and other harmful online encounters



STANDARD 4: POSITIVITY AND PLEASURE



CSE addresses sex and sexuality from a holistic perspective, looking at positive experiences such as pleasure, rather than focusing on negative ones such as risks and fear.

CONCEPTS

- **Sex positive:** this is an approach that presents sexuality as a natural and positive aspect of our lives and avoids the use of negative language. It includes understanding of pleasure and positive emotions around sex.

HOW THE STANDARD WILL LOOK IN PRACTICE

- CSE content celebrates sexuality as an enhancing and key part of being human and affects people throughout the life-cycle. It is about bodies, feelings and behaviours, and it includes issues related to gender, sex, sexual orientation, pleasure, relationships and reproduction. These can help to open discussions towards safer sexual behaviours and stronger negotiation skills to help prevent unwanted sexual pressure.
- CSE content includes sex-positive approaches that strive to achieve ideal experiences, rather than solely working to prevent negative experiences. At the same time, sex-positive approaches do not replace the information and discussion about the possible negative outcomes of sex, without reinforcing fear, shame or taboo of young people's sexuality.
- Programmes must recognise that people have sex for many reasons, not only for reproduction.
- Programmes recognise that sexual well-being and sexual health are a fundamental part of overall well-being and health

- Programmes seek to provide opportunities for adolescents and young people to discuss sex and sexuality positively, understanding rights to sexual pleasure, their sexuality and safe sexual life.
- One of the key issues in a sex-positive approach to CSE is consent – being able to say yes/no and to always accept a no when it comes to sexual encounters. If adolescents and young people can express their desires about sex to their partner, they tend to have better agency and empowerment, increased use of condoms and contraception, as well as a better understanding of HIV and AIDS.

TAKING IT FURTHER

- Discussions are held about ideal experiences, desire, and building confidence in having consensual and pleasurable sex including masturbation.



STANDARD 5: DIVERSITY AND NON-DISCRIMINATION



CSE emphasises inclusion of adolescents and young people in all their diversity, and provides sensitive, respectful and non-discriminatory messages.

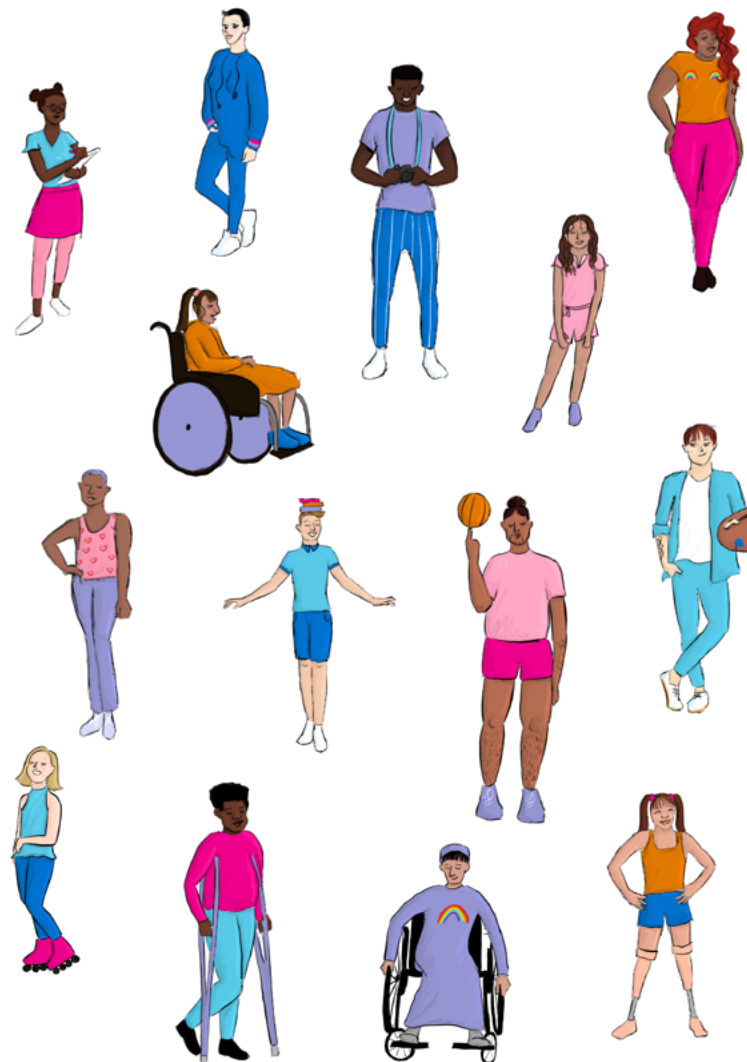
CONCEPTS

- **Diversity:** this concept is about the acceptance and respect of difference. It means understanding that each individual is unique, and recognising our individual differences linked to gender identity and sexual orientation, age, ability, ethnicity, beliefs, family structures.

HOW THE STANDARD WOULD LOOK IN PRACTICE

- CSE educators understand SOGIESC and use respectful and non-stigmatising language to refer to children, adolescents and young people (CAY) who are LGBTIQ+.
- Curricula, materials are used to reflect and recognise the diversity of different families e.g. single parents, same-sex parents, adoptive parents, and extended families.
- Confidentiality and safety of individuals related to SOGIESC are respected.
- Programmes/staff recognise that sexual relationships/attraction do not always happen with a member of the opposite sex and avoid language that assumes this.
- CSE programmes should emphasize that persons with disabilities are equal members of their communities. To promote rights and inclusion for all, activities should be assessed and adaptations designed and implemented to reduce barriers and promote the participation of people living with disabilities
- CSE educators need to ensure that they address diversity and equality by:

- respecting and valuing uniqueness and individual differences;
- seeing everyone as equal to others in worth and dignity;
- not tolerating racist, sexist, homo- and transphobic discrimination, or discrimination towards people living with disabilities, including the 'outing' / revealing of other people's personal identities or status related to sexuality or HIV, and bullying.



STANDARD 6: AGE AND STAGE



CSE curricula are age and developmentally appropriate, and respond to children, adolescents and young people's evolving capacities and needs.

CONCEPTS

- **Evolving capacity:** refers to the way that each young person gradually develops the ability to take full responsibility for their own actions and decisions.
- **Developmentally appropriate:** recognises that children do not all develop at the same pace. Children of different ages can be at different developmental stages physically, emotionally, psychologically and cognitively, for example children who have disabilities, children who have suffered abuse or trauma.



HOW THE STANDARD WOULD LOOK IN PRACTICE

- Programmes are using materials that are tailored to specific age and development stages across childhood and adolescence which include relevant language, topics and activities based on evidence and are in line with [Plan International's CSE Topics overview](#) and adapted as appropriate according to the variations in experiences and models of childhood and youth across socio-economic, cultural, and political contexts, which impacts on the nature of learning.
- CSE programmes emphasize the importance of empowerment and capacity building for the autonomy of children, adolescents and young people (CAY) by promoting self-confidence, knowledge and independence to enable CAY to protect themselves and be protected from (sexual) abuse, including where to seek support.
- Methods of delivery are aligned with the ages and preferences of adolescents and young people, based upon interactive approaches and are continuously delivered throughout childhood into early adulthood.
- CSE is delivered in age or developmentally similar groups, tailored to the specific needs of the group- e.g. disability, gender.
- Adults such as teachers, parents/caregivers, community/religious leaders - are informed about the importance of CSE that begins at birth and continues throughout childhood.

STANDARD 7: SAFETY

CSE programmes are delivered in a safe learning environment.



CONCEPTS

- **Safe setting:** spaces where dialogue can take place openly, where adults are gender-sensitive, non-judgemental and show respect for diversity and that bullying, discrimination and harassment, including sexual harassment, are not tolerated.



HOW THE STANDARD WOULD LOOK IN PRACTICE

- In formal settings, schools promote respectful communication norms without tolerance of violence and ensure a clean and safe physical environment.
- All learners should feel involved, listened to, comfortable and safe from ridicule, especially when they take risks with sharing new ideas. Participation should be encouraged, however, it should also be recognised that nobody should be pushed to share; giving input is a right and so is keeping silent.
- The organization/school ensures safety for its learners at different levels; physical (room etc.), social (between learners, and between learners and educator/teacher), and emotional (personal safety of learner)
- The organization/school has safeguarding, anti-discrimination and zero tolerance policies in place, which is known by both educators/teachers and learners. They are complemented with clear protocols in place on what to do in case of harassment, bullying, etc., including child protection/safeguarding policies with clear and safe reporting mechanisms
- The organization/school ensures the physical and emotional safety of its educators/teachers
- The organization/school has an up to date referral system in place in case learners need to be referred to medical or other services

STANDARD 8: EDUCATOR SUPPORT



CSE programmes are based on quality training and continuous support to educators.

CONCEPTS

- **Well-trained sexuality educators:** may be teachers or community facilitators. High-quality pre-service and follow-up in-service training, mentoring and support are required for educators to enable confident delivery of materials and ability to engage learners. Training programmes should ideally be tailored to educator's existing knowledge, skills and confidence.

HOW THE STANDARD WOULD LOOK IN PRACTICE

- Programmes include training and ongoing support for CSE educators to incorporate exploration and discussion on personal values, attitudes and beliefs around sexuality.
- Training for educators is informed by the latest evidence on the key CSE topics for children, adolescents and young people (CAY) in line with [Plan International's CSE Topics overview](#) which includes sexuality, including biology, fertility, contraception, sexual health, sexual rights, emotions, relationships, and sexual behaviour, with gender as a cross-cutting element.
- Training for educators includes the development of effective classroom skills, such as interactive learning methods, addressing learners' varying learning styles and supporting their learning, handling sensitive reactions from pupils, dealing with privacy and establishing mutual respect and trust.

- Training for educators includes information on the support systems for CAY, such as child protection structures and policies, and knowledge of relevant elements of the national legal system (e.g. age of consent) for child protection.
- Selection criteria for CSE educators include demonstrating positive attitudes for sexuality and diversity, belief in comprehensive content and consider gender balance and inclusion, to educate without prejudice, judgement or bias related to their own personal and/or religious beliefs.



STANDARD 9: PARTICIPATORY, SKILLS-BUILDING



CSE uses participatory teaching approaches that provide opportunities to explore and discuss personal values and attitudes, and build relevant skills and the confidence to make decisions.

CONCEPTS

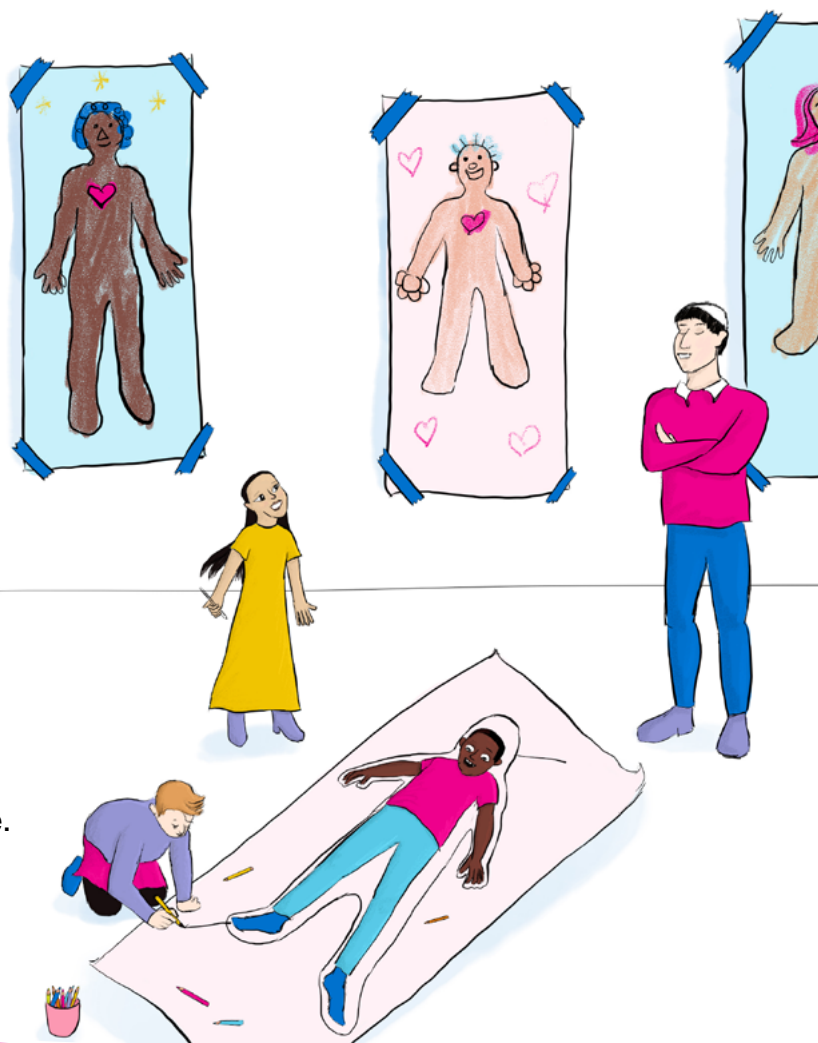
- **Participatory methodologies:** include a range of activities and processes which enable people to play an active and influential part in decisions which affect their lives and their voices and opinions shape the outcomes.
- **Learner-centred approach:** a way of interactive, participatory teaching, in which learners feel that they have the right to talk and contribute to their peers' learning. This approach builds on existing knowledge and experiences and prioritizes learner-teacher and learner-learner interaction. It is built on the recognition of the learner as a person with rights; it assigns agency to learners over their own learning process.

confidence and self-esteem to support responsible decision making, in addition to increasing knowledge.

- The delivery of CSE can utilize social media or digital platforms to support enhancing interactive learning and to serve as information platform but online safety including safe spaces must be ensured. Children, adolescents and young people should also be supported to build skills to critically assess whether information is accurate or not.

HOW THE STANDARD WOULD LOOK IN PRACTICE

- The delivery of CSE utilizes interactive teaching methods which is engaging and encourages collaborative learning
- CSE with a learner-centred approach is personalized and learners are supported to internalize and transfer lessons learned into own daily practices and their community environment
- The delivery of CSE programmes promotes exploration of personal attitudes, values around CSE through discussion and debate.
- Participatory interventions in CSE build skills in communication, critical thinking,



STANDARD 10: SUPPORT WHOLE SCHOOL



CSE programmes are supported by an enabling environment in the school/organisational setting.

CONCEPTS

- **Enabling environment:** means ensuring a safe and conducive learning environment for all learners and educators, independent of age, gender, sexual orientation and gender identity, ethnicity, class, HIV status and disability.

HOW THE STANDARD WOULD LOOK IN PRACTICE

- Management should take the lead to show that the provision of CSE is a matter for the whole school rather than the personal choice of individual teachers. They can do so by:
- Putting a policy framework in place to provide an institutional basis for the implementation of CSE programmes; set standards for appropriate behaviour; and protect and support teachers responsible for delivery of CSE and, if appropriate, protect or increase their status within the school and community.
- Giving guidance on how management ensures a safe and conducive school environment for all learners, regardless of age, gender, sexual orientation, identity, HIV status and disability.
- Mobilising support among parents/caregivers, governing boards through promotion of CSE, and demonstrating the evidence and impact of CSE
- CSE educators should feel supported by the school/organisation in their ability to deliver programme materials, particularly feeling

- backed by management, colleagues and authorities, and have access to training and resources to teach CSE effectively.
- Opportunities are created for dialogue between children, adolescents and young people (CAY) and school/organization's stakeholders to discuss the CSE programme.
- Champions need to be identified to help promote CSE within schools/organisations.
- Identify the social norms, policies and/or legislation that hinder the delivery of CSE in schools/organisations and the development of programme advocacy to call for change.



STANDARD 11: YOUTH ENGAGEMENT



CSE programmes promote and facilitate the meaningful engagement of children, adolescents and young people throughout all stages of the project cycle to ensure programmes respond to their needs and preferences.

CONCEPTS

- **Meaningful engagement:** Working with children, adolescents and young people in a way that creates the greatest impact and facilitates their full participation. It should be purposeful and relevant for them and involve them in every stage of the process.



HOW THE STANDARD WOULD LOOK IN PRACTICE

- Schools/organizations set conditions in place so children, adolescents and young people (CAY), in all their diversity, can participate in the development, implementation and evaluation of CSE programmes. This includes:
- CAY are asked about the challenges they face around sexuality and SRHR, where they get their information and where/how they like to access services and support. Leading to barriers being identified and addressed.
- CAY are engaged in developing the content of programmes, the interventions and reviewing and evaluating their success.
- The active engagement of CAY in programme delivery such as peer support, and promoting demand for and access to services. Peer education is promoted only when accompanied by adult-led education.
- The specific and unique needs of CAY from all backgrounds and identities are recognised and adaptations are made to ensure the inclusion and participation of marginalized CAY.

STANDARD 12: CAREGIVERS' INVOLVEMENT



CSE programmes support interventions with parents and caregivers to build their confidence and skills in talking to their children about sexuality from early childhood.

CONCEPTS

- **Sexuality:** is a fundamental aspect of human life that refers to gender roles and identities, sexual orientation, intimacy and pleasure. It is experienced and expressed through thoughts, desires, emotions, beliefs, values, behaviours, roles and relationships. Being able to express sexuality freely and openly is central to being human and important to every individual's well-being, happiness and development.



HOW THE STANDARD WOULD LOOK IN PRACTICE

- Programmes are developed with and for parents/caregivers to practice conversations, debate topics and explore their attitudes and values about sexuality to build positive attitudes and skills, including discussing in the family what they have learned in school in a non-judgmental way and talking from time to time about sexual issues, even though this seems difficult.
- Opportunities for intergenerational dialogue through programmes and community events that promote the rights of young people to CSE, the removal of barriers and shifting of social norms that hinder its delivery.
- Provision of information and materials to parents/caregivers to support conversations with different age groups and developmental stages. This would include materials for working with children in early years programmes, and those tailored for the specific needs of children with disabilities.
- Parents/caregivers and family of learners with diverse SOGIESC or learners living with disabilities are provided with support to discuss sexuality with their children.

STANDARD 13: SERVICE LINKAGES



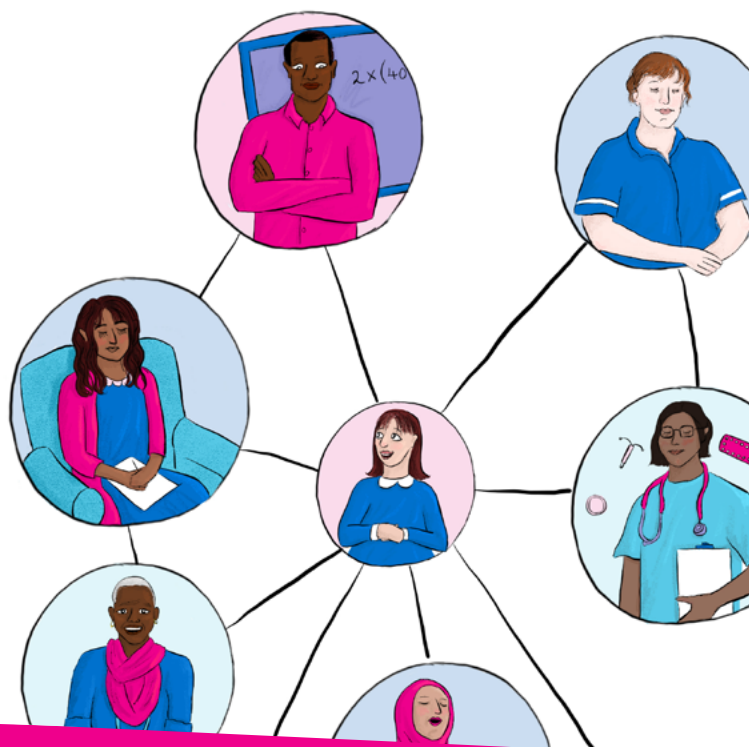
CSE ensures strong linkages with relevant adolescent and gender-responsive health services locally, and with child protection services that are also relevant for younger children.

CONCEPTS

- **Adolescent and gender-responsive:** services targeting adolescents that are sensitive and responsive to their particular needs, are non-judgmental and gender-sensitive, and ensure confidentiality and privacy. Specific attention should be paid to the availability, accessibility, acceptability and quality of the services. In addition, services should be scientifically and medically appropriate with personnel throughout the organisation, from reception staff, medical staff to managers, trained to care for adolescents with adequate facilities and scientifically accepted methods.
 - **SRHR services:** these include a full range of sexual and reproductive health services, including safe abortion and post-abortion care services, for all, regardless of age, economic/cultural/religious background, sexual orientation, gender, etc.
- especially those who express signs of physical or emotional problems.
- Referrals are provided to the full range of SRHR services, for all CAY, irrespective of age, gender or background
 - CSE programmes include information on where to access contraception, sexual and reproductive health, including abortion, child protection and other relevant services locally, and/or online.
 - Programmes provide clear information on how the age of consent laws/policies relate to CAY's access to services, including where the age of consent is different for boys and girls.
 - Programmes support and encourage CAY to share their views and experiences of local services which are used to strengthen services and referral to adolescent and gender-responsive services.

HOW THE STANDARD WOULD LOOK IN PRACTICE

- Programmes develop and strengthen relationships with local services to promote effective referral mechanisms to, and from, the CSE programme.
- Educators / teachers collaborate with health providers and others (social workers, community workers, police) on how best to interact with and respond to children, adolescents, and young people (CAY),



STANDARD 14: POLICIES AND LAWS



CSE programmes are supported by appropriate legislation and policies.

CONCEPTS

- **Advocacy:** this is about calling for change for example in practice, policies, laws and regulations to respect, protect or fulfil young people's rights. This can be undertaken at international, national/state or local levels and should help facilitate meaningful dialogue and engagement between a variety of actors, stakeholders and young people on CSE/SRHR.

HOW THE STANDARD WOULD LOOK IN PRACTICE

- Develop a clear rationale for the introduction of CSE using evidence from the local/national situation and context.
- Identify local champions among policymakers, teachers, parents, community leaders and youth who can raise awareness and enhance positive approaches to CSE e.g. parliamentarians' groups sensitised on issues of SRHR. They can be key allies during debates on CSE inclusion in formal curricula.
- Develop key messages that parliamentarians and other stakeholders can use in debates, speeches or meetings with the communities they represent.
- Work closely with the (social) media to ensure misinformation and 'fake news' will be spread about CSE
- Enable youth-led organisations and movements to develop CSE advocacy strategies so they can be the voice of young people.

