

# CSE

## THE CASE FOR HEALTHY, INFORMED AND EMPOWERED LEARNERS

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.

The word ‘sexuality’ has various meanings in different languages and is complex. It includes biological, social, psychological, spiritual, religious, political, legal, historic, ethical and cultural dimensions that evolve over a lifespan.

From an educational perspective, CSE is delivered in formal and non-formal settings (in and out of school).

### CSE IS:

**Scientifically accurate:** based on facts and evidence related to SRH, sexuality and behaviours.

**Incremental, curriculum-based, and age- and developmentally-appropriate:**

Following a written curriculum, with key learning objectives, educators’ efforts are guided and structured to support students’ learning from an early age. CSE takes a spiral-curriculum approach, building on the child’s knowledge at each stage and addresses developmentally relevant topics, when it is most timely for the learners’ health and well-being.

**Comprehensive:** CSE provides opportunities to acquire comprehensive, accurate, evidence-informed and age appropriate information on sexuality. It addresses sexual and reproductive health issues, including, but not limited to: sexual and reproductive anatomy and physiology; puberty and menstruation; reproduction, modern contraception, pregnancy and childbirth; and STIs, including HIV and AIDS.

It supports learners’ empowerment by improving their analytical, communication and other life skills for health and well-being in relation to: a healthy and respectful family life, interpersonal relationships, personal and shared values, cultural and social norms, gender equality, non-discrimination, consent and bodily integrity, sexuality and sexual behaviour. It also addresses difficult issues such as gender-based violence, unintended pregnancy, sexual abuse and harmful practices such as child, early and forced marriage and female genital mutilation/cutting.

‘Comprehensive’ also refers to the breadth and depth of topics and to content that is consistently delivered to learners over time, throughout their education, rather than a one-off lesson or intervention.

**Based on gender equality and a human rights approach:**

It builds on and promotes an understanding of universal human rights – including the rights of children and young people to health, education, information equality and non-discrimination. SE explores how gender norms, shaped by cultural, social and biological factors, can influence inequality, and how these inequalities can affect the overall health and well-being of children and young people, while also impacting efforts to prevent HIV, other STIs, early and unintended pregnancies, and gender-based violence.

## CSE IS:

### **Transformative, culturally relevant and context appropriate:**

CSE fosters respect and responsibility within relationships. Supporting learners as they examine, understand and challenge the influence of cultural structures, norms and behaviours. It empowers individuals and communities to create a fair and compassionate society by promoting critical thinking skills and strengthening young people's citizenship



## CSE: CONTENT AND DEVELOPMENTAL GOALS

International guidance on CSE recommends that an effective sexuality education curriculum needs to address eight key concepts. These concepts are all equally important, mutually reinforcing and intended to be taught alongside one another. It is critical that children develop the language and capacity to talk about and understand their bodies, feelings and relationships from a young age.

Key concepts and topics are repeated multiple times with increasing complexity, building on previous learning using a spiral-curriculum approach.

The key concepts are further delineated into a small number of 'topics', each with key ideas and knowledge, attitudinal, and skill-based learning objectives per age group.



1. Relationships

2. Values, Rights, Culture and Sexuality

3. Understanding Gender

4. Violence and Staying Safe

5. Skills for Health and Well-being

6. The Human Body and Development

7. Sexuality and Sexual Behaviour

8. Sexual and Reproductive Health



## EVIDENCE-BASED IMPACT OF CSE

- 1 Sexuality education has positive effects, including increasing young people's knowledge and improving their attitudes related to sexual and reproductive health and behaviours.
- 2 Sexuality education – in or out of schools – decreases sexual activity, sexual risk-taking behaviour and STI/HIV infection rates.
- 3 Programs that promote abstinence as the only option have been found to be ineffective in delaying sexual initiation, reducing the frequency of sex or reducing the number of sexual partners. Programmes that combine a focus on delaying sexual activity with other content are effective.
- 4 'Gender-focused' programmes are substantially more effective than 'gender-blind' programmes at achieving health outcomes such as reducing rates of unintended pregnancy or STIs.
- 5 Sexuality education has the most impact when school-based programmes are complemented with the involvement of parents and teachers, training institutes and youth-friendly services.
- 6 Conclusive evidence shows that CSE leads to: Delayed initiation of sexual intercourse. Decreased frequency of sexual intercourse. Decreased number of sexual partners. Reduced risk taking. Increased use of condoms. Increased use of contraception.

