



United Nations  
Educational, Scientific and  
Cultural Organization



## Religious Leaders:

KNOW MORE about CSE and Youth Friendly Services!

***A better, healthier future for young people!***

Religious leaders have the welfare of their communities at heart. Comprehensive sexuality education is culturally and age appropriate information that teaches young people about sexuality and sexual and reproductive health issues.

Evidence shows that comprehensive sexuality education increases children's knowledge about HIV, helps them delay sexual activity, reduces the number of sexual partners they have and increases their knowledge and use of contraceptives when they need to prevent sexually transmitted infections (STIs) and HIV, as well as early pregnancy.

***Support CSE – Support our future leaders!***

## Why CSE and youth friendly services go together

Sexuality education needs to be supported with accessible, affordable and effective health information and services. Young people and their communities remain at risk without the products that support them, including: condoms, modern contraceptives, treatment of HIV and sexually transmitted infections, pregnancy advice and care and other services. This is why combining CSE in schools and YFS in communities is the key to long-term health improvements in eastern and southern Africa.

## What are Youth Friendly Sexual and Reproductive Health Services (YFS)?

Youth friendly sexual and reproductive health services provide health services based on a comprehensive understanding of what young people in any given society or community want and need. They cater for young people's sexual health, rights and diversity.

YFS services include:

- Sexual and reproductive health counselling
- Relationship and sexuality counselling.
- Sexual abuse counselling
- Counselling on contraception and contraceptive provision, including emergency contraception.
- Prevention of sexually transmitted infection (including HIV), testing and counselling services
- Services for termination of pregnancy (where legal and when permissible)
- Prenatal and post-partum services.

*Sexual and reproductive health is supported by knowledge, skills and the ability to make responsible, positive, informed and safe sexual choices – including choosing NOT to have sex.*

## **Why should religious leaders get involved and support CSE?**

Some people feel that CSE is against religious teachings, values and morals and that it takes away the innocence of the child, but statistics on teen pregnancy in Africa prove that young people are already having sex. When parents and communities limit access to information, children will go to other sources. Today these are many. This means children can be ill-informed about issues around sexuality and relationships, putting them at risk.

As spiritual beings, sexuality is an important aspect of being human; both spirituality and sexuality interact to shape our characters. Knowledge is an important element in ensuring a healthy life.

*“Seeking of knowledge is an obligation upon every Muslim man and woman.”*

**Hadeeth of Prophet Muhammad (SAW),  
as reported by Ibn Maajah (Al Albaani: Saheeh)**

By creating positive links between the provision of CSE and YFS in communities and religious values, you can:

- Reassure teachers and community members that the provision of CSE for children and young people is in line with the values and principles by which they seek to live.
- Reassure parents that sexual and reproductive health services for young people (youth friendly services) ensure young people’s good health.
- Help adults and young people to appreciate the value of comprehensive sexuality education.

*The role of a pastor, imam or other religious leader is not to judge young people but to bring them hope, love, care and spiritual support!*

## **What is my role as a religious leader?**

**Know the issues:** Religious leaders need to stay up-to-date on the issues their congregations face. One in three people in eastern and southern Africa is aged 10–24 years, and 40% of these young people have inadequate information about HIV.

**Support young people’s access to information, treatment and care:** Youth friendly services are needed for all young people, whether sexually active or not. Youth friendly services mean giving advice on abstaining and having healthy relationships and intimacy without sex.



They are not only for sexually active young people. Accurate information directly from health service providers can have a very positive impact on young people's healthy behaviour.

**Leaders protect all:** It is your role to ensure that the rights of children and young people are upheld so that they can make informed, responsible decisions and live healthy, productive and fulfilled lives.

**Speak up:** People look to you for guidance and leadership regarding how CSE in schools and YFS in communities fit with religious teachings. Young people are our future – help them.

**Proverbs 22:6** *Start children off on the way they should go and even when they are old they will not turn from it...*

**New International Version**

## What can I do?

- **Share the positive aspects of CSE** and how they fit with religious teachings and values – deliver as a letter to the community and in your sermons and other teachings.
- **Explain that CSE and YFS promote abstinence** as the primary and most effective safer sex strategy. However, CSE programmes which only promote abstinence and do not share information on other options, have been found to be less effective in promoting healthy, responsible behaviours in children and young people.
- **Support CSE clubs in religious centres** and find ways to integrate responsible behaviour education for children and young people along with religious education – this way you can help reach those young people who cannot be reached through schools or CSE clubs. Involve the schools to make sure you are both singing from the same song book.
- **Initiate joint counselling sessions with school and health clinic staff on growing up**, as well as in Sunday school teachings, madrassa ,baptism classes, or other opportunities.

**Informed Children and Young People:  
Informed Choices – You Can Lead The Way**



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