

Sexuality information, education and communication

“Young people need to feel that they are respected as thinking, competent human beings ... capable of making educated decisions about their sexual health of their own volition.”

– Jennifer, youth activist, UK¹

All young people have the right to comprehensive sexual and reproductive health information, education and communication services – rights which are embodied in several international treaties and conventions, including the Convention on the Rights of the Child (CRC) and the ICPD Programme of Action. By ensuring that young people have access to high-quality information, comprehensive sexuality education and open channels of communication, it is possible to equip them with the knowledge, skills and attitudes they need to make informed choices now and in the future, enhance their independence and self-esteem, and help them to experience their sexuality and relationships as positive and pleasurable.

Evidence shows that young people who have experienced open communication with parents or a caring adult – such as a teacher or counsellor – are better prepared to communicate honestly and openly about sexuality, emotions and fears, and are less likely to engage in risky behaviour.² Therefore, policies and programmes should be adopted to ensure that young people have the sexual health information, education and communication services they need to prepare for healthy and fulfilling lives. Policymakers, teachers, parents and other adults all have roles to play in this process, first and foremost by recognizing that young people are sexual beings who want to feel comfortable about their bodies and their sexuality – physically, intellectually, socially and emotionally.

Involving and supporting parents and professionals

Many parents find it awkward, embarrassing or difficult to discuss sexual issues with their children, and do not have the information and knowledge to do it effectively. Therefore, training for parents is crucial. Other people can also provide information, education and communication on sexuality, including teachers, health professionals, peer educators, youth recreation leaders, psychologists, and sexual health trainers from non-governmental organizations (NGOs).

→ GOOD PRACTICE IN ACTION

UK

The Speakeasy programme operated by the UK Family Planning Association (UK fpa), IPPF's UK Member Association, provides training to enable parents and carers to become 'sex and relationship educators' at home. Comprehensive, age-appropriate information is provided on a wide variety of topics, including puberty, contraception, sexually transmitted infections (STIs), social pressures and abuse. Collage and artwork, role play and games, and more traditional written work are used, with an emphasis on making the courses as accessible as possible for participants. Parents who complete the Speakeasy course can also get training to share what they have learned with other parents in their community. And upon the initiative of IPPF European Network, the UK fpa Speakeasy project has been successfully replicated in a number of European countries, including Ireland, Lithuania, Bosnia and Herzegovina, and Russia.

“I enjoyed all of the learning across the different areas, especially the development of children. I also learned about the myths which I had in the back of my mind, and those myths have been cleared now that I have learned the facts.”

– Parent from UK fpa Speakeasy course³

SCOTLAND

UK fpa created the Aw'right project to help boys and young men in deprived areas of Scotland to challenge traditional images and roles of masculinity and improve their self-awareness, self-esteem and confidence. Through weekly sessions, Aw'right helps the participants to better make informed decisions about their personal and sexual lives. The project's success prompted UK fpa to create “The Boys are Aw'right” training programme, which trains professionals who already work with boys and young men to better address sexual health issues. The three-day course is supported by a handbook, The Boys are Aw'right: young men and sexual health, which examines some of the things individuals and organizations need to work effectively with young men.⁴

What is sexuality information, education and communication?

Comprehensive, rights-based sexuality information and education involves disseminating general and technical information, facts and issues which create awareness and provide young people with the essential knowledge and training in communication

¹ www.advocatesforyouth.org/youth/advocacy/activists/formeractivists/yajennifer.htm

² IPPF European Network (2006) Sexuality education in Europe. A reference guide to policies and practices. Brussels: IPPF European Network.

³ www.fpa.org.uk/community/speakeasy/index.cfm?contentid=705

⁴ www.fpa.org.uk/community/youngpeople/detail.cfm?contentID=63

and decision-making skills they need to determine and enjoy their sexuality – both physically and emotionally, individually as well as in relationships. Information and education should be adapted to the age and stage of development of the target group and should enable young people to:

- Develop life skills, such as critical thinking and communication, negotiation, self-development and decision-making skills;
- Nurture positive attitudes and values, such as open-mindedness, respect for oneself and others, positive self-esteem, and a non-judgmental attitude; and
- Acquire accurate information on their sexual and reproductive health and rights (SRHR).

This information should not be restricted to the biological aspects of sex and reproduction, but should also cover sociological perspectives, such as relationships, diversity, sexual orientation, abortion, masturbation, gender, pornography, and violence. Programmes have proven to be more effective if sexuality is approached in a positive way, rather than focusing exclusively on the undesirable aspects of sexuality, such as STIs and unwanted pregnancy. In addition, IPPF's experience shows that the involvement of young people in the development, implementation and evaluation of programmes is crucial to success.

"Discussing sex only in the context of danger is psychologically damaging. Sex does not have to be a problem-oriented subject; there are many aspects of sex and sexuality that have little to do with HIV/AIDS, teen pregnancy, or sexually transmitted infections."
– Jennifer, youth activist⁵

New media

It is vital to reach young people both in and out of school, and at various stages in their development. New technologies, including CD-ROMs, mobile phones and websites, are innovative and effective ways to widen the reach of information, education and communication initiatives to young people wherever they are and whatever their age.

→ GOOD PRACTICE IN ACTION

LITHUANIA

Through its youth website (www.saugesnisseksas.lt), Seimos Planavimo ir Seksualines Sveikatos Asociacija (FPSHA) – IPPF's Member Association in Lithuania – provides answers to young people's questions on sexuality and sexual health. The website makes information available to a large number of young people without them having to search for FPSHA's own site, and means that young people can receive accurate information freely and anonymously.

DENMARK

The Youth Sex Helpline, set up in 1992 by IPPF's Danish Member Association, Sex & Samfund, offers both an anonymous telephone service and a website dedicated to answering questions on sexual and reproductive health. In 2006, the online helpline (www.sexlinien.dk) received an average of 940 visits per day and answered a total of 7720 questions.

Other SRHR websites for young people

Iceland:	www.totalradgjof.is
Germany:	www.sexundso.de
Belgium:	www.sensoa.be/jong
Estonia:	www.amor.ee
Czech Republic:	www.planovanirodiny.cz
Finland:	www.seksuaaliterveys.org
Latvia:	www.jaunc.lv
Spain:	www.fpfe.org/guiasexjoven

BELGIUM

The 'Laura' campaign is based on a comic book story about a 16-year-old girl who becomes pregnant. Developed by the Belgian IPPF Member Association, Sensoa, and launched in 2004, the campaign produced a book for 13-year-olds and their parents, television and cinema commercials, and a unique website which includes a free-to-download podcast of a radio show on youth and love. Visitors can also add 'Dr. Love' to their MSN messages, and each time a session with Dr. Love is opened, the user receives a question to evaluate their knowledge of safer sex.

For more information, see: www.laura.be

Elements of good practice

Sexuality information, education and communication should not be isolated activities, but important components in broader initiatives to improve the health and well-being of young people. Ideally, they should also encompass related issues such as alcohol and drug use, which can influence sexual behaviour⁶ but are often ignored in sexual and reproductive health programmes. Research in Spain⁷ and Sweden,⁸ for example, confirms that risky sexual behaviour is more frequent among young people who regularly consume alcohol on weekends.

Sexuality information and education programmes also need to have strong links to appropriate services. These could be general sexual and reproductive health services (e.g. access to contraception, STI/HIV testing and counselling) or more specialist services (e.g. those that deal with cases of sexual violence). Effective referral systems must be in place to ensure that young people have easy access to these types of services and resources, if and when they need them.

Information, education and communication on sexuality needs to be provided in a culturally sensitive manner. In some cultures there can be prevailing taboos against the open discussion of sexuality, and it can seem a difficult task. However, in each cultural setting providers must try to introduce sexuality education in a way that will be acceptable and that is tailored to a culture's needs and values while emphasizing gender equality and rights.

⁶ See www.cspinet.org/booze/natlsurveys.htm

⁷ Castilla, J, Barrio, G, Belza, MJ and de Fuente, J (1999) Drug and alcohol consumption and sexual risk behaviour among young adults: results from a national survey, *Drug and Alcohol Dependency* 1999; 56:47-53

⁸ Ekstrand, M, Larsson, M, Von Essen, L and Tyden, T (2005) Swedish teenager perceptions of teenager pregnancy, abortion, sexual behaviour and contraceptive habits: A focus group study among 17-year-old female high school students, *Acta Obstetrica et Gynecologica Scandinavica* 2005; 84:980-6

“My father told me that the best protection against pregnancy is to use the natural method – interrupted sexual intercourse. I was so surprised when they told me that this is the worst method! Now I know that I have to use condoms ...”

– Martin, age 19, after a sexuality information session at the Roma club in Roznava, Slovakia

Telephone helplines

A telephone helpline enables young people to receive sexuality information anonymously, from trained professionals, at limited or no cost. Many IPPF Member Associations provide helplines, including those in Belgium, Denmark, France, Finland, Germany, Greece, Poland, Portugal and Spain.

→ GOOD PRACTICE IN ACTION

DENMARK

Sex & Samfund operates a youth-oriented telephone counselling service called Youth Sex Helpline. It is dedicated to providing free, anonymous answers to questions related to STIs, abortion and HIV, and in 2006 received more than 2200 calls.

SPAIN

IPPF European Network's Member Association in Spain, Federación de Planificación Familiar de España (FPFE), operates a national youth telephone helpline during the weekends and on holidays. Responsibility for operating the helpline is shared among FPFE's branches throughout Spain, and changes every three months. Helpline staff are carefully selected and approved by the FPFE Board, and receive specialized training. In 2006, FPFE developed a special training course for all FPFE branches to become proficient at running the helpline.

Peer education

Peers can be a trusted and credible source of information on sexuality and relationships because they share similar experiences and social norms. With appropriate training and support, young people can become active in the educational process through peer education programmes.⁹

→ GOOD PRACTICE IN ACTION

LATVIA

IPPF's Member Association in Latvia, “Papardes Zieds”, has 20 active young volunteers providing peer education to young people from the ages of 14–19 in schools and youth centres, primarily in and around the capital city Riga. In 2006, 3439 young people attended the sessions, which are held at secondary schools and through evening classes. The schools can choose the topics to be discussed, which include physiology, sexuality, relationships, decision-making on starting relationships, safe sex and STIs, and sometimes abortion. The most requested topic is contraception.



Peer education session on condom usage

CZECH REPUBLIC

Společnost pro plánování rodiny a sexuální výchovu (SPRSV), the IPPF Member Association in the Czech Republic, hosts introductory and follow-up peer education sessions each year in the Czech Republic through its Peer Project. In 2006, it reached 2948 young people with 105 different education sessions. Introductory sessions involve 40–80 young participants and are held in the countryside at a camp, while advanced follow-up sessions, usually involving about 20 participants, are held for those who have already participated in a peer education session. In recent years, the Peer Project has also arranged special sessions on sexual health for young people with physical disabilities.

“The biggest achievement was that some of our participants started to be really interested in sex education, to learn more about its importance, and wanted to become actively involved in our Association's SRHR efforts.”

– Coordinator of the Peer Project, Czech Republic

Campaigns

Young people receive mixed messages on sexuality in the media, so it is important to have campaigns that promote healthy sexual behaviour and communication. These help to raise young people's awareness about sexual health so that they will ask questions, initiate conversation and reflect on the issues. Experience has shown that repeated initiatives are more effective than one-off measures.

→ GOOD PRACTICE IN ACTION

BELGIUM

IPPF's Flemish Member Association, Sensoa, has demonstrated the importance of delivering SRHR information for young people in settings beyond formal classroom settings and health services. The Praat Over Seks (Talk About Sex) campaign, which began in 2005, featured six campaign images and a

⁹ IPPF CO (2006) Included, Involved, Inspired: A Framework for Youth Peer Education Programmes, London: IPPF CO

television commercial to show that there are many ways to say what you want. Two images were published as an advertisement in newspapers and magazines and on trams and buses, and posters were distributed to schools and youth centres.



“Lost your tongue while kissing?”

GREECE

The Youth-to-Youth Safe Summer campaign was the 2006 annual information initiative of the youth group of the Family Planning Association of Greece (FPAG), IPPF's Greek Member Association. Youth volunteers distributed 4000 leaflets with information about contraception and condoms on the Greek islands of Crete, Paros, Mikonos and Mitilini, and at the same time recruited new volunteers to join the youth group.

Video, radio, music and art

→ GOOD PRACTICE IN ACTION

NORWAY

Norsk Forening for Seksuell og Reproductiv Helse og Rettigheter (NSSR), the IPPF Member Association in Norway, developed a 40-second video for use in an advertising campaign on safer sex entitled *Fuck Klamydia*. The video is shown in cinemas before the film and on the NSSR website. It shows a young couple having unprotected sex, and the girl says that her name is 'Klamydia'. The website version, however, features an alternative video as well, in which the couple have protected sex and the girl says her name is 'Lydia'.

To view the video, see: www.tredenpa.no/index.html

“It's so good – that's what I call a realistic approach! It should work so much better than all the sad and moralizing stories about youngsters with destroyed lives ... ”

*– IPPF youth group member, in reaction to the *Fuck Klamydia* short video*

BULGARIA

In June 2006, IPPF's Member Association, the Bulgarian Family Planning and Sexual Health Association (BFPA), started the Youth Against Trafficking project, aimed at addressing the SRHR needs of those affected by trafficking, and at increasing the awareness of young people on the SRHR aspects of trafficking. The project uses a variety of information channels, including a radio programme on safer sex and trafficking, promotional events, and collaboration with the local media and with other NGOs. For example, two teams of young people, including young girls from boarding schools who were former sex workers, developed 14 radio broadcasts for a young people's radio programme.

POLAND

The biggest rock music event in Poland – Przystanek Woodstock – attracts about 200,000 fans every year and has become much more than just a music festival: it is now a platform of cultural exchange for young people in Poland. Every year, Towarzystwo Rozwoju Rodziny (TRR), the IPPF Member Association in Poland, takes part in the event, demonstrating the effectiveness of providing young people with SRHR information in an informal and fun setting. In 2006, TRR distributed more than 70,000 materials related to sexuality and 25,000 condoms, and provided 516 consultations on HIV and family planning during the festival.

BELGIUM

Sensoa started an innovative, comprehensive sex education project for young people, called *Goede Minnaars* (Good Lovers), in 1999. Among other channels of information, this project included a striking exhibition on relations and sexuality. The content of the exhibition appeals to young people, by including information on, for example, how to seduce, sex in language, sex and relationships, and physical changes. STIs, pregnancy, and contraception are also discussed, in addition to more difficult themes such as sexual harassment and sexual abuse. The exhibition is interactive, so young people can feel, experience and touch, which is not possible with other exhibitions. For more information, see: www.sensoa.be/3_5_8.php



For more information, see *A Guide for Developing Policies on the Sexual and Reproductive Health and Rights of Young People in Europe* (IPPF EN, 2007) online at www.ippfen.org or e-mail info@ippfen.org

The SAFE Project

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IPPF European Network

IPPF is a global service provider and an advocate of sexual and reproductive health and rights for all; a worldwide movement of national organizations working with and for communities and individuals. The IPPF European Network is one of IPPF's six regions and promotes support for and access to sexual and reproductive health services and rights through the work of its 41 member associations in Europe and Central Asia.

IPPF European Network

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