



TALKING PLEASURE WITH PLEASURE

A guide to the “Why” and “How”
of Pleasure-Based Sexual Health
in Youth Programming

Message from

Tomoko Fukuda, Regional Director, IPPF ESEAOR

Sexual and reproductive health and rights (SRHR) organisations, such as IPPF, have increasingly recognized that pleasure is critical to sexual health and rights. While traditional sexual health programs have focused on preventing unwanted pregnancies and sexually transmitted infections, a pleasure-based approach prioritises the positive aspects of sexuality and emphasises the importance of pleasure in sexual experiences. This can lead to greater satisfaction and empowerment for individuals and can significantly impact reproductive health outcomes by increasing contraceptive use, reducing unintended pregnancies, and promoting positive attitudes towards sexual health and rights.

A growing body of research suggests that sexual pleasure plays an important role in contraceptive behaviour and acceptability. Several studies have found that a desire for sexual enjoyment can influence contraceptive behaviour, with individuals prioritising their sexual pleasure being more likely to use contraception. A study by Grady et al. (1999) in the US found that pleasure was equally important as other factors when evaluating contraceptive acceptability.

Moreover, women who experience pleasure during sex are more likely to have positive attitudes towards contraception and communicate with their partners about contraceptive use. In a study conducted by John et al. (2015) in Malawi, participants described pleasurable sex as “sweet,” “spontaneous,” “unplanned,” and “uninterrupted.” They preferred using the least obtrusive methods and preserved the nature and regularity of their sexual practices.

These findings highlight the importance of a pleasure-based approach to sexual health and contraception. By prioritising pleasure in contraception discussions and education, we can help individuals make informed choices that align with their sexual desires and promote healthy sexual practices.

Despite the potential benefits, pleasure-based approaches to sexual and reproductive health programs are still not widely implemented, particularly in programs for youth. IPPF has developed a guidance document for youth programs to address this gap. This document was created with the help of youth representatives and programme leads and provided valuable tools and evidence for taking a pleasure-based approach to youth sexual health programming. The tools were designed to explore how to implement pleasure-based youth programming within the context of IPPF's Youth-led and Gender-Transformation SRHR Program.

IPPF is committed to ensuring that everyone can have safe, positive, and equal sexual experiences based on clear, free, informed, and meaningful consent. Young people play a crucial role in shaping the future of sexual and reproductive health and rights. By promoting SRHR with young people from a pleasure-based approach, we can empower individuals to fully realise their SRHR positively, changing how SRHR is perceived and approached in future generations.

Acknowledgements

Principal Authors:

Laura Ramos Tomás, The Pleasure Project - Pleasure Fellow

Francesca Barolo, The Pleasure Project

Anne Philpott, The Pleasure Project

Illustrations by Ipsita Divedi

Layout Design and Cover Design by Laura Ramos Tomás

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Acronyms

CSE - Comprehensive Sexuality Education

HIV - Human Immunodeficiency Virus

IPPF - International Planned Parenthood Federation

MA - Member Association

PBA - Pleasure-Based Approach

PBSH - Pleasure-Based Sexual Health

SRHR - Sexual and Reproductive Health and Rights

STIs - Sexually Transmitted Infections

TOC - Theory of Change

WAS - World Association for Sexual Health

WHO - World Health Organization

Foreword

Welcome to this fun-filled rollicking ride towards pleasure-based sexual health! We at The Pleasure Project, and all the amazing people and organisations involved in the creation of this Guidance Note, are thrilled to be talking about the “How” and “Why” of pleasure-based sexual health (PBSH) in Youth Programming.

We know this is important for improving sexual health. We also know that young people regularly demand honest, realistic and practical sexuality education. Ensuring young people get the sex education they deserve in order to have fulfilling relationships, good safer sex, and fulfilling sexuality is exciting and essential. Pleasure matters. Good safe sex matters. Young people matter.

IPPF and The Pleasure Project have a joint sex-positive vision of how to advance sexual and reproductive health and rights (SRHR). IPPF’s endorsement of the Pleasure Principles shows the Federation’s commitment to a pleasure-based approach to sexual health interventions.

In this document ‘Talking Pleasure with Ease’ we show how this joint vision comes together and how pleasure-based approaches are ingrained in the four impact areas of IPPF’s Youth-led Programme’s Theory of Change (TOC). We also show how the IPPF TOC calls for a more pleasure-based approach, and how to use our fun Pleasure Principles. We hope these links are inviting and exciting to Youth CSE programming facilitators, enablers, developers and advocates, and help them to ‘Talk Pleasure with Ease’.

The pleasure-based approach to sexual health is not a one-size-fits-all approach. In the IPPF ESEAOR region, countries, cultures and contexts are very varied. This is true all over the world. We can Be Universal, as all people have the ability to feel pleasure if they want to, but we can also Be Flexible. You and other youth SRHR implementers can adjust and select the materials based on the conversations you want to have, and the shift you want to create, relevant to your setting. The way you will use these tools will not be the same everywhere, and that’s exactly the way forward!

We take you on a pleasure journey, giving you the history of the pleasure-based approach, the evidence that supports it, and how the Pleasure Principles are present in the IPPF TOC. We give you tools to help you reflect as you start the journey and help you understand how to Talk Sexy where you are working, and we also offer activities you might choose to Embrace Learning with your teams, your learners, and/or your wider communities. We want to help you approach the work you are already doing from a pleasure-focused perspective or through a “pleasure lens”. We hope these tools will ensure your journey to pleasure-based sexual health is one where you can Be Positive and Love Yourself and your new knowledge.

This document provides the what, why and how... and you provide the when and where.

You have knowledge and experience with the communities you work in and with, and you know what you wanted from your own sexuality education, but maybe didn’t get. Even if you are convinced about the benefits of increasing the pleasure in your work and life, you may feel nervous when you think that you are potentially the first one(s) implementing PBSH in your context. In your pleasure ‘debut’, remember that pleasure-based sexual health is evidence-based and supported by learning from a growing community of pleasure practice, and that, at IPPF, **you have institutional backing to talk Pleasure... with ease!**

Have Fun, and tell us how it goes and how useful the guide was!

- *The Pleasure Project*



Introduction: Setting the Scene for Pleasure-Based Sexual Health at IPPF

Sexual health is vital, but it is also a delicate subject that remains a taboo in many contexts. When promoting sexual and reproductive health and rights services and products, it can be tempting to hide behind the science by making the content hyper medical and complicated - but this often alienates the audiences instead of making them more engaged with it. Shifting the focus to what most people will understand and relate to as one of the main drivers for engaging in any sexual activity —Pleasure— is critical in making Sexual and Reproductive Health and Rights (SRHR) information and services more accessible, effective, and relevant to all people.

If talking about sex is considered taboo in many circles, talking about *pleasure* can be more so... and talking about pleasure *with youth* can encounter even more resistance, despite it being key in centering the very real needs of young people as they learn to navigate their SRHR. To support youth program leads and youth



representatives in MAs, IPPF has developed this guidance note that breaks down the reasons (including the evidence!) and the methodology (including useful tools), for taking a pleasure-based approach to youth sexual health programming.

Sexual health, sexual rights and sexual pleasure are not new to IPPF. Sex- and pleasure-positivity align with the Federation's objectives, and have been outlined in key documents such as [IPPF's Sexual Rights Declaration](#), [IPPF's Framework for Comprehensive Sexuality Education \(CSE\)](#), the [Putting sexuality back into Comprehensive Sexuality Education](#) discussion paper and, more recently, the [IPPF 2028 Agenda](#) and the [Youth-led and Gender-Transformative SRHR Program's Theory of Change \(TOC\)](#). In this way, this guide will contribute to operationalizing the TOC, which embraces sexual pleasure as an integral part of advancing the broader SRHR agenda.

IPPF 2028 Agenda

The [IPPF 2028 Agenda](#) is a roadmap for “reaching for sexual and reproductive dignity for all - for everyone, to the exclusion of none, and in the interests of all”. It commits to more daring and [feminist action](#), acknowledges that [everyone deserves a pleasure-filled and healthy sex life](#), and highlights that [young people are key drivers for change](#).

In the agenda, an entire critical pathway within the Move the Sexuality Agenda pillar is dedicated to Acting with Youth. Within that, the first change commitment highlights the ambition

for “[an increased number of adolescents \[to\] recognize pleasure and the conditions necessary for clear, free, informed and meaningful consent as the foundation to safe, positive and equal relationships](#)”. It also commits to “work[ing] with youth to shape and deliver change agendas and [go] further on comprehensive sexuality education [by] expanding best practices and advocating for supportive legal frameworks.” This guide for integrating a pleasure-based approach in youth programming is a practical tool to support these efforts.

Youth-led and Gender-Transformative SRHR Program's Theory of Change

The [youth-led and gender-transformative SRHR Program's Theory of Change \(TOC\)](#) summarises perspectives of youth co-creators from MAs, regional youth networks and external youth networks from Africa, Asia, Europe and Latin America. It puts forth their ideas for program strategies and the outcomes necessary to achieve a world where they can realize and enjoy their SRHR. The TOC's core principles (gender transformative, inclusive and rights-based,

recognizing the diversity of youth; inclusive of sexuality and reproductive health of the youth of all genders and sexual orientations) organically align with pleasure-based sexual health, making this approach to SRHR highly suited for work done achieve the envisioned change.

The section on [Guidelines for Pleasure-based Sexual Health Interventions in Youth Programming](#) highlights how IPPF's TOC specifically links to different aspects of pleasure-based sexual health.



Understanding Pleasure as an Entry Way to Effective Comprehensive Sexuality Education (CSE)



Defining Pleasure and Contextualising it within Human Sexuality

There are several definitions of Pleasure that have been put forth over the years of SRHR development. Likely the universal definition is by the World Association of Sexual Health (WAS), which they adapted from the Global Advisory Board for Sexual Health and Wellbeing's working definition of sexual pleasure:

"Sexual pleasure is the physical and/or psychological satisfaction and enjoyment derived from shared or solitary erotic experiences, including thoughts, fantasies, dreams, emotions, and feelings. Self-determination, consent, safety, privacy, confidence and the ability to communicate and negotiate sexual relations are key enabling factors for pleasure to contribute to sexual health and well-being. Sexual pleasure should be exercised within the context of sexual rights, particularly the rights to equality and nondiscrimination, autonomy and bodily integrity, the right to the highest attainable standard of health and freedom of expression. The experiences of human sexual pleasure are diverse and sexual rights ensure that pleasure is a positive experience for all concerned and not obtained by violating other people's human rights and well-being."

Importantly, this definition specifically pertains to sexual pleasure, which references the existence of non-sexual pleasure – a concept often disregarded in the day-to-day, and which can be a very useful starting point for pleasure-based SRHR conversations. Furthermore, this definition also acknowledges that (sexual) pleasure is a holistic sensation, and not purely physical. This is key because it frames pleasure-based interventions as contributors to overall health (i.e. physical, mental, social well-being, etc.).

Pleasure is arguably the most common reason why people choose to engage in sexual activity. People—including young people—likely have sex far less with the intention of conceiving than they do for the sake of enjoyment, of positive sensations in their body, in their relationship, and in their life overall. Pleasure is inextricably linked to most, if not all, aspects of human sexuality, which includes anatomy and physiology, consent and healthy relationships, sexual development throughout the lifecycle, gender identity and expression, sexual preferences, sexual health, sexual rights, etc.



Integrating Pleasure in Constructive CSE Dialogues

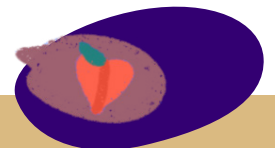
As per IPPF's Framework for Comprehensive Sexuality Education (CSE), CSE:

“covers a broad range of issues relating to the physical, biological, emotional and social aspects of sexuality. It recognizes and accepts all people as sexual beings and is concerned with more than just the prevention of disease or pregnancy. CSE seeks to equip young people with the knowledge, skills, attitudes and values they need to determine and enjoy their sexuality – physically and emotionally, individually and in relationships. It views ‘sexuality’ holistically and within the context of emotional and social development. It recognizes that information alone is not enough. Young people need to be given the opportunity to acquire essential life skills and develop positive attitudes and values.”

For this reason, CSE increases young people's awareness of their options for engaging in healthy, safe sexual activity – and a pleasure-based approach is highly conducive to this. Rather than framing pleasure as a separate “knowledge

area” in the realm of human sexuality, it is helpful to incorporate it as an underlying approach — similar to how sex positivity, rights-based and social justice approaches or feminist values transpire in our work. Therefore, a pleasure-based approach helps us guide constructive CSE dialogues in a range of settings (formal and non-formal education settings, in health centres, youth groups etc.).

Rights-based approaches and Feminism are underpinned by evidence; similarly, pleasure-based sexual health also has been shown to improve sexual health significantly and positively. Furthermore, rights, gender equity and pleasure are closely connected as well as highly individualised and determined by lived experiences. A participatory approach to pleasure-based interventions creates spaces where everybody can explore what Pleasure means to them, and normalises Pleasure as a shared experience regardless of intersecting identities. It also encourages people to consider embracing pleasure practices into their day-to-day lives in very personalised ways.



Young People's Pleasure

Young people's pleasure is both tremendously important and, in many contexts, incredibly challenging. There are two common myths that create the taboos around youth's pleasure:

1. Young people's bodies are not yet fully developed, so they are not “meant to be” exploring their bodies/sexuality/pleasure. This is a myth because, whilst young people's bodies may still be developing, sexuality is an aspect of our beings that accompanies us during all stages of life... even in utero! Being curious about how our bodies work and exploring what feels good are natural behaviours for many people, including babies, children and youth! To deny people (of any age) the right to safely explore their bodies and pleasure in developmentally-appropriate ways is denying them their sexual rights, which are human rights.

2. Talking about young people's pleasure with them will encourage more sexual activity. Not only do we have [evidence of the effectiveness of CSE](#) in fostering positive general behaviors around sex and sexuality (including prevention of intimate partner violence, prevention of child sexual abuse, development of healthy relationships, appreciation of sexual diversity, improved social emotional learning (SEL), and increased media literacy), it has also been [demonstrated that curriculum-based CSE contributes to](#) delayed sexual initiation, and more responsible and informed decision-making when sexually active. In short, CSE inspires (youth) sexual wellbeing – empowering them to make conscious decisions around their sexual activity.

These incorrect statements parallel the frequently cited reasons for resisting youth access to information on sexuality and sexual health... and they are unfounded! Developmentally, humans are sexual beings throughout all stages of their life – from the last weeks of gestation, to the last moments of life as seniors. Negating that children, adolescents and youth are developing sexually in these different stages in their lives, is negating an important aspect of their growth into adulthood. In fact, allowing them to explore themselves—even sexually—in age-appropriate ways when they choose so is very healthy for their development into fully functioning, conscious and healthy adults.

Furthermore, studies show that formal CSE has a positive impact well beyond the prevention of unintended pregnancies and STI transmission; CSE leads to an appreciation of sexual diversity, dating and intimate partner violence prevention, development of healthy relationships, prevention of child sex abuse, improved social/emotional

learning, and increased media literacy,. If CSE consciously incorporates a pleasure-based approach, the outcomes are expected to align with these results, making youth more aware of their options of engaging in good, safe sexual activity — when they are ready, and whichever form(s) of activity they choose.

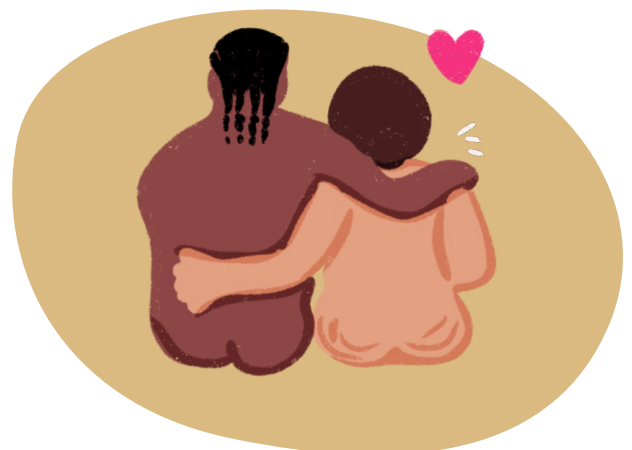
Redefining sex as more than just penis-in-vagina penetration for procreation is an important step towards reframing the act of sex beyond heterosexuality, understanding how pleasurable other partnered sexual activity can be (hugging, kissing, touching yourself or each other, exploring, licking, talking, etc.), and perceiving masturbation as an important way of self-exploration and self-pleasure. These formats of intimacy are especially important for young people who want to be intimate and experience sexual pleasure, but don't feel ready to have full sexual intercourse.

What are Pleasure-Based Sexual Health Interventions?

Pleasure-based sexual health interventions incorporate a pleasure-based approach. According to The Pleasure Project:

“A pleasure-based approach is one that celebrates sex, sexuality and the joy and wellbeing that can be derived from these, and creates a vision of good sex built on sexual rights. It focuses on sensory, mental, physical and sensual pleasure to enable individuals to understand, consent to, and gain control over their own bodies and multi-faceted desires. Well-being, safety, pleasure, desire and joy are the objectives of a programme with a pleasure-based approach. This approach measures empowerment, agency, and self-efficacy by whether or not an individual has been enabled to know what they want, and can ask for it, and request this of others, in relation to their sexuality, desires and pleasure.”

Incorporating the pleasure-based approach [will look different in different contexts](#). However, it is important to highlight that pleasure-based work is possible in any context. It is intentionally adaptable so that age, cultural, religious and social parameters are appropriately respected, and counterproductive barriers are respectfully and carefully reconsidered.



The Evidence Base for Pleasure-Based Sexual Health Interventions

The pleasure-based approach to SRHR has been gaining momentum and solidifying over the last approximately 20 years. Key players in the field have investigated what makes some sexual health interventions more successful than others, and distilled what the key ingredients

are to promoting access and uptake of services in different settings worldwide. In this journey, Pleasure has emerged and been endorsed by global organisations striving to ensure people's SRHR everywhere:

Selected Milestones on the Journey towards Pleasure-Based Sexual Health

Year	Event/Occurrence	Relevance
2006	WHO includes Pleasure in the definition of sexual health : <p>“Sexual health is a state of physical, emotional, mental and social well-being related to sexuality; it is not merely the absence of disease, dysfunction or infirmity. Sexual health requires a positive and respectful approach to sexuality and sexual relationships, as well as the possibility of having pleasurable and safe sexual experiences, free of coercion, discrimination and violence. For sexual health to be attained and maintained, the sexual rights of all persons must be respected, protected and fulfilled.”</p>	The specialised agency of the United Nations responsible for international public health links Pleasure to safe sexual experiences, and frames it in the context of sexual health conversations.
2008	The Pleasure Project completes a literature review on the evidence available for pleasure-inclusive sexual health.	An evaluation that presents practitioners with findings that can improve their sexuality education and sexual health programmes and activities, while giving researchers, funders and programmes evidence and encouragement to consider increasing their focus on sex and pleasure for people of all sexual identities and in all settings and contexts.
2008	The Pleasure Project creates the Global Mapping of Pleasure : a directory of people, organisations, programmes and media who eroticize safer sex.	This begins to build a Pleasure-positive community of practitioners, which allows for actors to be mutually inspired and build on the knowledge of each other's implementations.

2010	IPPF publishes the IPPF Framework for Comprehensive Sexuality Education (CSE) .	Includes Pleasure as the fourth of seven essential components of CSE, and references IPPF's Youth Policy which states the Federation's commitment to promoting, protecting and upholding the sexual and reproductive health rights of all young people, including the right to pleasure.
2011	IPPF publishes its Declaration on Sexual Rights , and the related Young People's Guide .	Recognises the complexity of acknowledging young people as sexual beings who have a need for both protection and empowerment. It presents both sexuality, and pleasure deriving from it, as central aspects of being human, whether or not a person chooses to reproduce. It also links the practice of seeking pleasure to the right to personal autonomy and sexual freedom.
2014	WAS publishes the Declaration of Sexual Rights and the accompanying Technical Guide .	Clearly explains how sexual rights are necessary to sexual health, referencing Pleasure as a central aspect of human sexuality, and establishing the importance of a pleasure-positive approach to CSE.
2016	<p>Global Advisory Board (GAB) for Sexual Health and Wellbeing put forth a working definition of Sexual Pleasure:</p> <p>"Sexual Pleasure is the physical and/or psychological satisfaction and enjoyment derived from solitary or shared erotic experiences, including thoughts, dreams and autoeroticism.</p> <p>Self-determination, consent, safety, privacy, confidence and the ability to communicate and negotiate sexual relations are key enabling factors for Pleasure to contribute to sexual health and wellbeing. Sexual Pleasure should be exercised within the context of sexual rights, particularly the rights to equality and non-discrimination, autonomy and bodily integrity, the right to the highest attainable standard of health and freedom of expression. The experiences of human sexual Pleasure are diverse and sexual rights ensure that Pleasure is a positive experience for all concerned and not obtained by violating other people's human rights and wellbeing."</p>	Established to promote positive and inclusive approaches to sexuality, GAB's establishing of the working definition of Pleasure highlights its importance towards positive sexuality.

2016	<p>IPPF puts forward a definition of a sex-positive approach, which is foundational to the pleasure-based approach:</p> <p>“an attitude that celebrates sexuality as a part of life that can enhance happiness, bringing energy and celebration. Sex positive approaches strive to achieve ideal experiences, rather than solely working to prevent negative experiences. At the same time, sex positive approaches acknowledge and tackle the various risks associated with sexuality, without reinforcing fear, shame or taboo surrounding the sexualities of young people.”</p>	<p>Defining what it means to take a sex-positive approach is critical in framing SRHR conversations in a positive and open-minded way, which translates to inclusivity, flexibility and de-stigmatization.</p>
2019	<p>Guttmacher-Lancet Commission recognizes the importance of Pleasure in the context of sex-positivity:</p> <p>“A positive approach to sexuality and reproduction should recognise the part played by pleasurable sexual relationships, trust, and communication in the promotion of self-esteem and overall well-being.”</p>	<p>A group of international experts, and a highly regarded peer-reviewed journal (which is one of the longest-standing of its kind) endorse Pleasure as an integral part of sex-positivity, further underlining the need for pleasure-based approaches. useful recent work to re-frame sexual health towards well-being and pleasure.</p>
2019	<p>The Pleasure Project publishes the first definition of a pleasure-based approach:</p> <p>“A pleasure-based approach is one that celebrates sex, sexuality and the joy and wellbeing that can be derived from these, and creates a vision of good sex built on sexual rights. It focuses on sensory, mental, physical and sensual Pleasure to enable individuals to understand, consent to, and gain control over their own bodies and multi-faceted desires. Well-being, safety, pleasure, desire and joy are the objectives of a programme with a pleasure-based approach. This approach measures empowerment, agency, and self-efficacy by whether or not an individual has been enabled to know what they want, and can ask for it, and request this of others, in relation to their sexuality, desires and pleasure.”</p>	<p>The definition of pleasure-based approach lays the foundations of having a tangible framework for implementing Pleasure as a key component in SRHR work.</p>

2019 - 2020	WAS proclaims and ratifies the Declaration on Sexual Pleasure .	The normative agency representing sexological societies and sexologists worldwide publishes its second Declaration (following that of Sexual Rights published in 2014) to encourage SRHR professionals and wider social actors such as governments and the media to promote Pleasure in its diverse forms through law and policy, education, services, and beyond.
2022	WAS publishes the Technical Guide that complements the Declaration on Sexual Pleasure.	This document provides supporting evidence of all statements in the Declaration on Pleasure, and provides guidance and examples about how to integrate Pleasure in SRHR interventions.
2022	WHO and The Pleasure Project with support from The Case for Her publish a systematic review and meta-analysis sexual health interventions which include Pleasure.	The WHO returns to the Pleasure conversation to collaborate on the first (systematic) review of evidence to answer the question “What is the added value of incorporating Pleasure in sexual health interventions?” which concludes that Pleasure inclusive sexual health has a significant and positive impact on SRHR outcomes and that future SRHR work should include pleasure.

Find the above break-down helpful for your advocacy work or for conversations pitching your programs to stakeholders? Access the [Journey towards talking about Pleasure \(Tool 7\)](#) to take to meetings, include in presentations, attach to emails etc. to help make your case for pleasure-based youth programming!



Reasons for Pleasure-Based Approach in (Youth) Programming

The pleasure-based approach was developed as a way of counteracting the death and disease narrative frequently used in sexual health conversations. We know that [abstinence-only programs are ineffective](#), and that the fear-based approach is counterproductive to effective youth programming. Here are some of the most important reasons for taking a pleasure-based approach in youth —and arguably all— programming:

- 1. Sex can improve people's physical and mental health:** solo and/or partnered sexual activity is associated with improved health, longevity, immunity, pain management, as well as reduction in stress, and increase in self-esteem. Find out more [here](#)!
- 2. A Pleasure mindset encourages better communication and consent:** Knowing what gives them pleasure, or what they do and don't like, allows people to pinpoint what is important to communicate to their partner(s), and what they do and don't want.

3. **Pleasure can be an indicator of empowerment:** better communication about/during sex can lead to better sexual experiences for all people involved, which can contribute to the reduction in the female/gender pleasure gap.
4. **Pleasure empowerment can challenge damaging gender norms:** by promoting sexual empowerment of all genders including women, pleasure counteracts the stereotypes of masculinity being enhanced by sexual pleasure and femininity being diminished by it.
5. **Knowledge on Pleasure reduces the normalisation of interpersonal violence and protects people's sexual rights:** Pleasurable relationships are consensual relationships - if someone doesn't know what a positive, pleasurable sexual relationship looks like, it might be difficult for them to recognise abusive behaviour. Conversations about pleasure and pleasurable relationships can allow people to recognise abusive relationships/behaviour, and empower them to seek safer relationships.
6. **Pleasure makes SRHR interventions more relatable:** Pleasure is a fundamental reason for people in many cultures to have sex; including it in the scope of sexual health discussions makes these more effective.
7. **Pleasure-positive approaches can help survivors of trauma:** Pleasure-inclusive sexual health interventions may be particularly effective with vulnerable populations who have experienced trauma in their journey of letting self-love triumph and work to re-engage with the pleasure they want. Find out more [here](#)!
8. **Pleasure and sex positivity are not new tendencies:** Pleasure has been a part of faith, belief and historical and pre-colonial narratives. Read more [here](#) and [here](#)!
9. **Pleasure makes CSE conversations inclusive:** Sexuality education that prioritises sex as a means for having babies excludes queer people who may be in same-sex relationships, and other people who engage in sexual activity for reasons other than procreation.
10. **Pleasure promotes safer sex:** Pleasure-based approaches help people to reframe the definition of sex and understand that there are ways to share pleasure that have lower risk than vaginal or anal intercourse. Furthermore, pleasure can be linked to condoms and contraception, helping people understand that feeling protected during sex may improve their enjoyment and ability to relax.

Find this summary useful? Share the [Pleasure Advocacy Infographic \(Tool 6\)](#) in meetings, emails or include in presentations as a reminder of all the advantages of pleasure-based sexual health programming!

Want to explore these reasons more? Here are some related resources used to inform this non-comprehensive list of reasons for pleasure-based sexual health!

- [Taking a pleasure-based approach to Comprehensive Sexuality Education \(CSE\) \(IPPF\)](#)
- [‘I tell them that sex is sweet at the right time’ – A qualitative review of ‘pleasure gaps and opportunities’ in sexuality education programmes in Ghana and Kenya](#)
- [Declaration of Sexual Rights \(WAS\)](#)
- [What is the added value of incorporating pleasure in sexual health interventions? A systematic review and meta-analysis](#)

Guidelines for Pleasure-based Sexual Health Interventions in Youth Programming

Pleasure-based conversations are more common than we think. However, the pleasure-positive approach is only now beginning to gain ground in official documents, and by extension, in sexual health programming for youth. We know that the research shows the importance of talking pleasure in CSE and sexual health interventions, but how can we implement it?

One of the characteristics of impactful interventions around sex and pleasure is that they are evidence-based. Besides robust evidence and science, you also need to bear in mind the cultural and religious norms in the countries and communities you work with. To make your work/training/conversations contextually relevant you need to collect information to make the content relevant and understand how we can connect your community's values and social norms and the realities of people's sexuality, sexual wellbeing, and pleasure.

A culturally sensitive approach respects the cultural characteristics of sexuality and offers evidence-based information while promoting critical thinking, human rights and empowerment for self-determination. Even if you have certain beliefs, you still need to explain sexuality as neutral, respectful, complete, professional, and academic. Be always very clear about what is a fact and a value or belief. Introducing sexuality and sexual pleasure can be a tricky conversation. There can be people in the discussions or training who have opposite ideas and values about sex and sexuality. Try to treat both positive and negative expressions equally. Keep in mind that there is a wide diversity of sexual practices –

some of which change across time and contexts – which are influenced by many factors like, for instance, technology. To start a conversation, it's crucial to keep an open mind and contextualise them in a sexual rights framework. Reflecting on the diversity of sexual practices in their own context is always a good start.

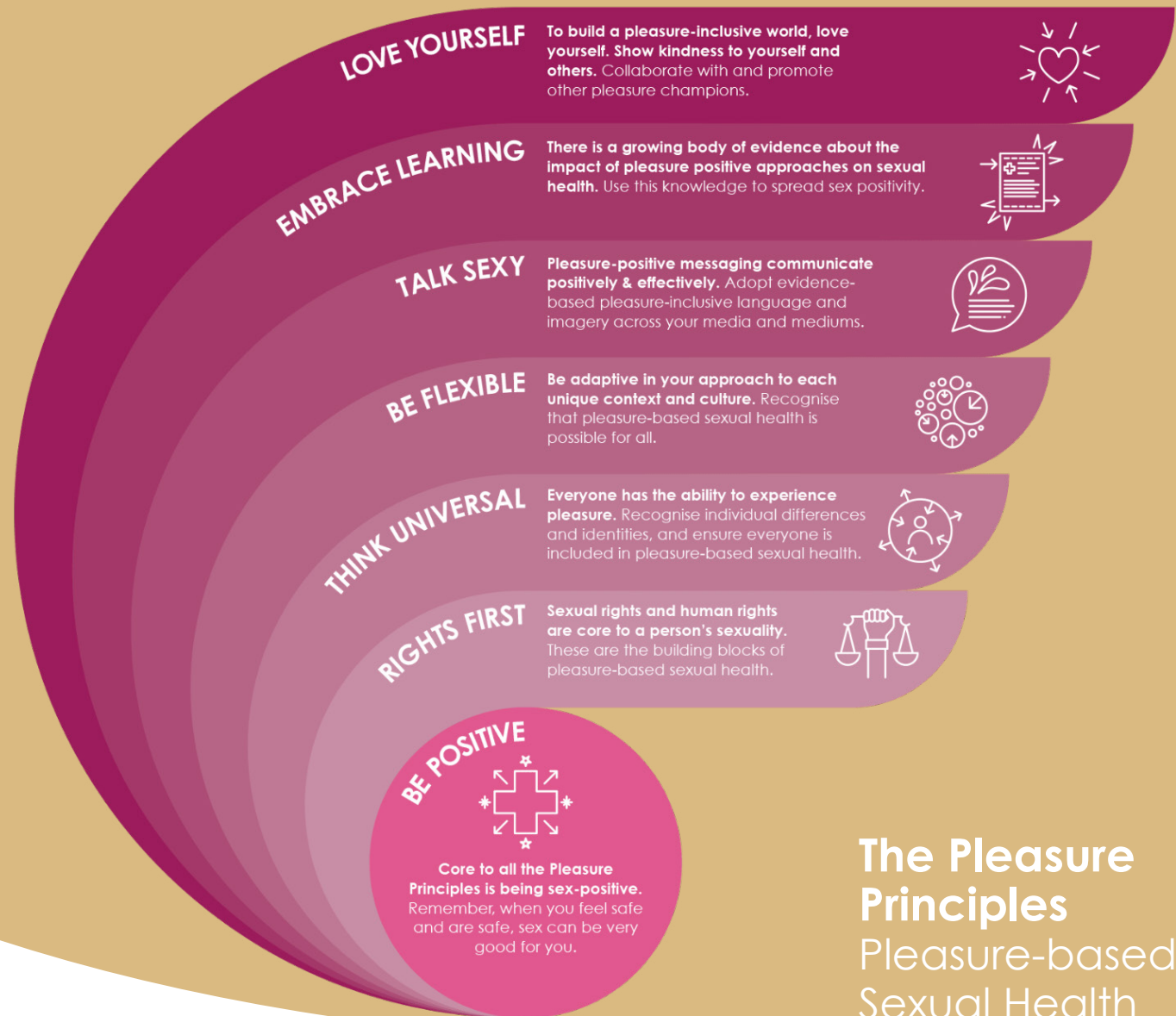
Worldwide, societies and culture are constantly changing. We often forget that there is no one culture or norms and value systems, and that there can be differences between generations and between groups in society. As champions for pleasure-based sexual health, we need to understand how different stakeholders influence our thinking and behaviour.

You can refer to the section titled Society, Culture and Sexual Pleasure in [The Pleasure Project Toolkit](#) to find exercises which would help you at looking at the wider context pleasure-based sexual health and discuss how and how far work on pleasure-based sexual health should be adapted to the prevalent norms and values in the society.

The following seven key attitudes together can help you pave the way for pleasure-based conversations. They reflect The Pleasure Project's [Pleasure Principles](#), which were designed as a way of translating the theory and proof of the benefits of a pleasure-based approach to Sexual Health into practice. These 7 Principles are an implementable framework for SRHR actors — including educators/facilitators, program writers and project developers, researchers, activists etc.— to tune their attitudes into ensuring a pro-pleasure approach in their work.



The Pleasure Project's Pleasure Principles for Pleasure-based Sexual Health



1. Be Positive

Core to all the Pleasure Principles is being sex-positive. Remember, when you feel safe and are safe, sex can be very good for you.

Key Concepts

Being positive is the foundation of pleasure-based sexual health interventions... After all, how can we promote the right to pleasure without being sex-positive? Many of us have learnt about sex and our sexuality through negative messages that focus on fear and shame. By turning these negative messages into sex-positive ones, we move towards acknowledging pleasure as essential and central to sexual, physical and mental well-being. This is critical as sexual pleasure remains one of the most important motivations to have sex.

The opportunity to change the narrative in our conversations around SRHR is a more positive one. Conventionally, SRHR interventions and sex education mainly focus on preventing unintended pregnancy and STIs, including HIV, emphasising the risks associated with these consequences of sexual behaviour. In addition, health education and services portray sex (especially outside marriage) as dangerous and risky. But research shows that safe sex can improve your health, physical and mental well-being – so conversations about sex do not have to only revolve around managing risks. The goals of decreasing discrimination and stigma, promoting critical thinking in recognizing agency over and enjoyment of sexuality should be part of all sexual health and sex education interventions.



Consider this!

PBSH is a relatively new approach, and therefore does not always align with the long-standing legal frameworks which were established in times where decolonization and appreciation for sexual diversity were undiscussed subjects. In other cases, such as the [Indonesian government's 2022 move to criminalise sex outside marriage](#), the newer laws equally don't align with PBSH but are part of the realities we need to work within. It is therefore important that you be in the know of the legal restrictions involved in the work that you do, and seek effective allies to work as a network to progress PBSH!

Here are some key messages you can convey as part of "being positive":

- All humans are sexual beings and have a right to make their own choices, and experience desire and pleasure in their daily lives - whether sexually active or not.
- All humans have control and agency over their bodies - whether sexually active or not.
- Open discussions on the different ways to experience pleasure - orgasms do not have to be the only goal, not all sex has to include penetration, etc.
- Highlight that not all sex is amazing - sex can be messy, awkward and disappointing, and not acknowledging that can be very disempowering and increase people's self-doubt.



Practical tips to apply in your work

To make your work (more) sex-positive:

- Aim to make people feel good about themselves - whether sexually active or not
- Aim to help people enjoy the relationships and sex they choose, and to also enjoy not engaging in relationships/sexual behaviour, if that is what they choose!
- Raise awareness about sexual rights
- Try to build people's sexual self-esteem
- Make people feel free to speak about their sex lives if they feel comfortable doing so
- Help people overcome their fears about sex and sexuality
- Support people to enjoy their sexual identity, if it doesn't harm anyone else
- Promote healthy lifestyles and be open about how safe sex can be good for you
- Understand sexuality holistically as part of someone's whole life
- Use language and vocabulary that people can relate to themselves
- Be comfortable to talk about sex and understand your own values (and don't present them as facts)
- Stay respectful and non-judgmental about why people want to (or not) have relationships (that are consensual and based on sexual rights for all)
- Help people to understand how they can flourish and be happy

Additional Resources

- [Be Positive Pleasure Principle Details \(The Pleasure Project\)](#)



And for your own development as an SRHR practitioner, you can:

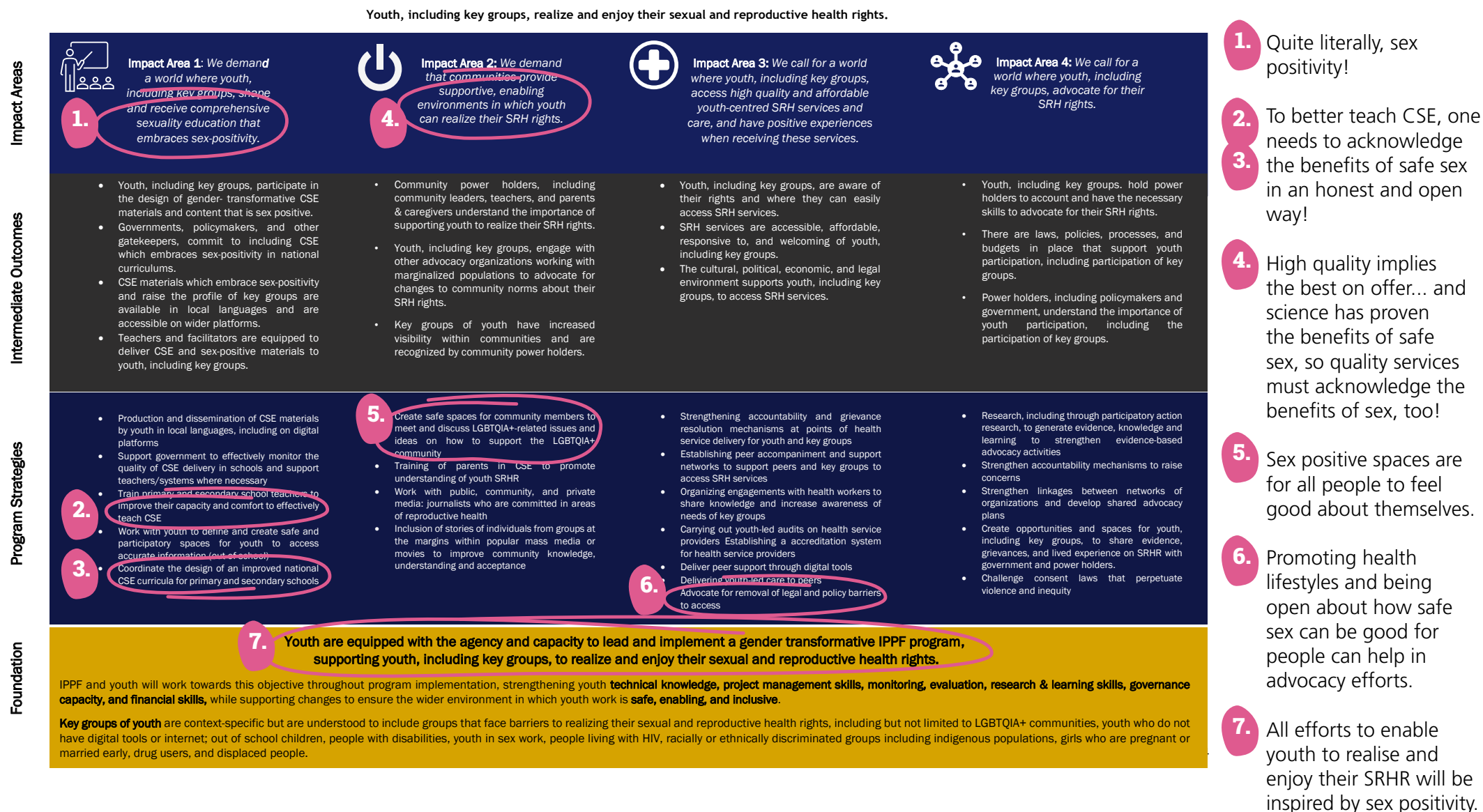
- Seek to familiarise yourself with the laws on consent and sexuality
- Think about your own boundaries and what you are comfortable sharing or not, and speak to trusted friends/colleagues about how your past and present may be affecting your work
- Develop media literacy to critically evaluate media content (especially in relation to porn), and guides on safe use of social media



You may find [Tool 4: Safe and Brave Spaces](#) helpful as you think of how to prepare for sex-positive and respectful conversations in a group setting: Establishing ground rules ensure all participants don't make or accept comments that stigmatise or discriminate against people for their sexual identities and/or desires.



The Links between “Be Positive” and the IPPF TOC



1. Quite literally, sex positivity!
2. To better teach CSE, one needs to acknowledge the benefits of safe sex in an honest and open way!
3. High quality implies the best on offer... and science has proven the benefits of safe sex, so quality services must acknowledge the benefits of sex, too!
4. Sex positive spaces are for all people to feel good about themselves.
5. Promoting health lifestyles and being open about how safe sex can be good for people can help in advocacy efforts.
6. All efforts to enable youth to realise and enjoy their SRHR will be inspired by sex positivity.

2. Rights First

Sexual rights and human rights are core to a person's sexuality. These are the building blocks of pleasure-based sexual health.

Key Concepts

Interventions that take a rights-based approach are the foundation for pleasure-based discussions. This is because **when human rights, and more specifically sexual rights, are respected, people feel safe, which helps them feel pleasure.**

- **Human rights** are the basic rights and freedoms that belong to every person in the world, from birth until death. They apply regardless of where you are from, what you believe or how you choose to live your life. These basic rights are based on shared values like dignity, fairness, equality, respect and independence.
- **Sexual rights** relate to a person's sexuality, sexual orientation, gender identity, sexual behaviours and sexual health. However, your sexual rights, for example your freedom of sexual expression, should not violate the rights of someone else. No one should have the right to force sex on another person, because that amounts to the violation of the other person's right to bodily integrity, among other rights.

Currently, there exists no universal human right to express and experience sexual pleasure. However, many of the internationally recognized and fundamental human rights such as the **universal human rights to autonomy, freedom, non-discrimination, equality, equal treatment under the law, right to privacy and safety as well as the bodily integrity of the person, are the core building blocks of our ability to safely enjoy sexual pleasure**, alongside respect for individual differences.

Practical tips

To ensure your work takes a pro-pleasure, rights-based approach:

- Move away from conventional models of sexual liberation (for example, don't assume that pleasure needs to lead to orgasms in sex that is heterosexual and monogamous)
- Use images and narratives that feature the joy, pleasure, and well-being of a wide range of groups, including people with disabilities, rather than showing that pleasure is only for a privileged few.
- Advocate for equal access to what makes pleasure possible for people (i.e. health services, information, CSE, etc.)
- Remind sexual health practitioners that the evidence shows that the inclusion of pleasure is proven as key to achieving SRHR outcomes
- Raise awareness among young people to claim their sexual rights to value and achieve the pleasure they want
- Collaborate with health providers, educators, policymakers and other stakeholders to ensure that sexual rights are translated into policies, implemented in sustainable programmes, included in program evaluations etc.

And to ensure your team and your workplace reflects human and sexual rights, you can:

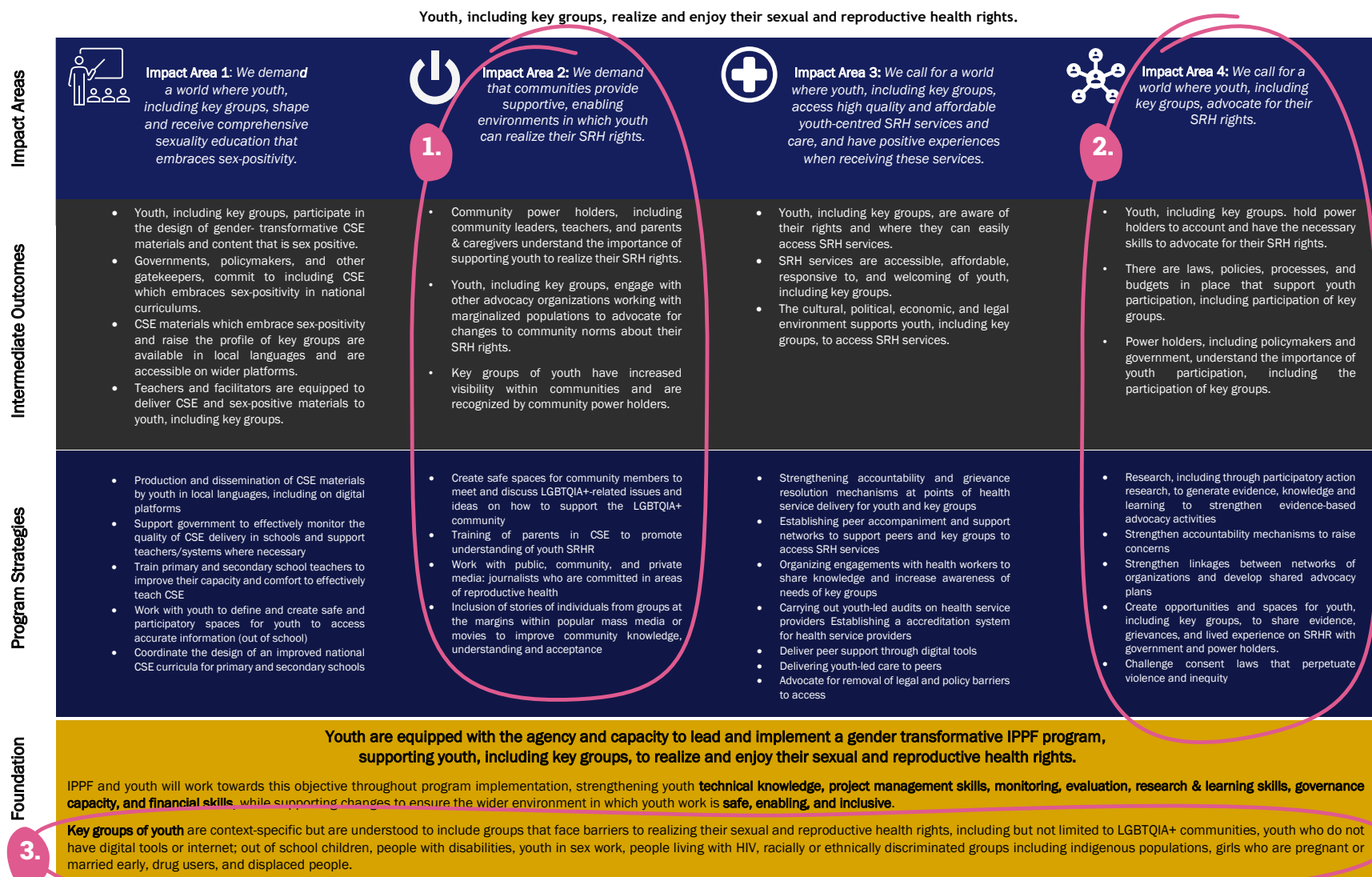
- All humans are sexual beings and have a right to make their own choices, and experience desire and pleasure in their daily lives - whether sexually active or not.
- All humans have control and agency over their bodies - whether sexually active or not.
- Open discussions on the different ways to experience pleasure - orgasms do not have to be the only goal, not all sex has to include penetration, etc.
- Highlight that not all sex is amazing - sex can be messy, awkward, disappointing. Not speaking to this can be very disempowering and increase people's self-doubt.

Additional Resources

- [Rights First Pleasure Principle Details \(The Pleasure Project\)](#)
- [The Pleasure Project Training Toolkit](#)
- [Exclaim! Young People's Guide to the Declaration on Sexual Rights \(IPPF\)](#)
- [Declaration on Sexual Pleasure and Declaration of Sexual Rights \(WAS\)](#)
- [Universal Declaration of Human Rights \(UN\)](#)
- [Healthy, Happy and Hot: A Guide to your Rights, Sexuality & Living with HIV \(IPPF\)](#)



The Links between “Rights First” and the IPPF TOC



1. An entire impact area dedicated to mobilizing ecosystems to ensure youth SRHR!

2. An entire impact area dedicated to encouraging youth to advocate for their rights!

3. All efforts to enable youth to realise and enjoy their SRHR will be inspired by sex positivity.

3. Think Universal

Everyone has the ability to experience pleasure. Recognise individual differences and identities, and ensure everyone is included in pleasure-based sexual health.

Key Concepts

Every human has the capacity to experience sexual pleasure if they wish, and sexual pleasure is different for everyone. Sexual pleasure can include a range of feelings and emotions from the excitement of orgasm to the heightened self-awareness from sexual experiences. Sexual pleasure can be associated with eroticism, fantasies, and emotions of love, emotional intimacy, and romance. Whoever you are or wherever you are, you can define your sexual pleasure. You decide what sexual pleasure means for you. People may not want to experience sexual pleasure at all. Your intentions might change over time, depending on your age and situation. Still, every experience counts.

In a pleasure-inclusive world, everyone is able to experience sexual pleasure if they want to*. This includes those who are traditionally not expected or allowed to experience sexual pleasure. Think, for example, of how unmarried women, people with disabilities, LGBTQI people, or people living with HIV are judged for having pleasure or assumed not to have the ability to have pleasure. Sex positivity and pleasure-based sexual health is important: it holds space for a wider range of people to access their sexual rights, including the right to pleasure. Diversity of sexual pleasure should be recognised, valued, and celebrated as a unique and self-determined experience.

* Pleasure-based sexual health advocates for clear communication and enthusiastic consent. This means that pleasure-based sexual health interventions only encourage activities where both/all parties involved are respectful of each other, and where everyone is willing and able to give consent. Being advocates for pleasure, by definition, means we reject behaviours that involve people who are unable to provide consent (such as minors, people who are under the influence of legal or illegal drugs, etc.).





Consider this!

The [age of consent may vary from country to country](#). It's important to verify the laws governing consent in your jurisdiction, as the definition of consent may coincide with each country's legal age of consent.

Practical tips

To ensure your work is as universal as possible, do the work to get clear about the following:

- Your own values on sexuality and pleasure; think about what your culture taught you, and to what extent that aligns with the fact that human and sexual rights are universal, and that pleasure is a human experience available to us all.
- Sexual pleasure can mean different things to different people, and that your experience of it may not reflect that of the people you are working with.
- Whilst sexual pleasure is a possibility for all, it may not necessarily be wanted by all - non-sexual relationships (asexuality) are valid sexual expressions. Remember that sexual pleasure only exists when all people involved enjoy the activity with consent.
- The effect of the stigma and additional barriers regarding sex and pleasure that historically marginalised groups have to navigate to be able to express and enjoy their sexual health.

- When people show resistance to discussing sexual pleasure (or sex in general) and use "culture" as a justification: Who defined this culture? Who is reflected in that morality? (Also see the Principle of [Be Flexible](#))

Also consider:

- Discussing together with the people you are working with what they mean by "sex" and "pleasure", exploring how it doesn't only mean penetrative sex but a wider range of activities including masturbation, talking dirty, massaging, fantasies, role play etc.
- How you can be positive and supportive in your conversations about people's own experience of sexual pleasure (within the frame of consensual and fulfilling relationships) - even when their experiences and lenses vary from your own? ([Tool 2](#) is designed for this!)
- Training your colleagues and friends on stigma-free attitudes through the use of values-clarification and attitude-transformation exercises.
- Involving and intentionally naming marginalised and underserved groups in the design of policies, programmes etc. so as to provide visibility and ensure they are justly included.



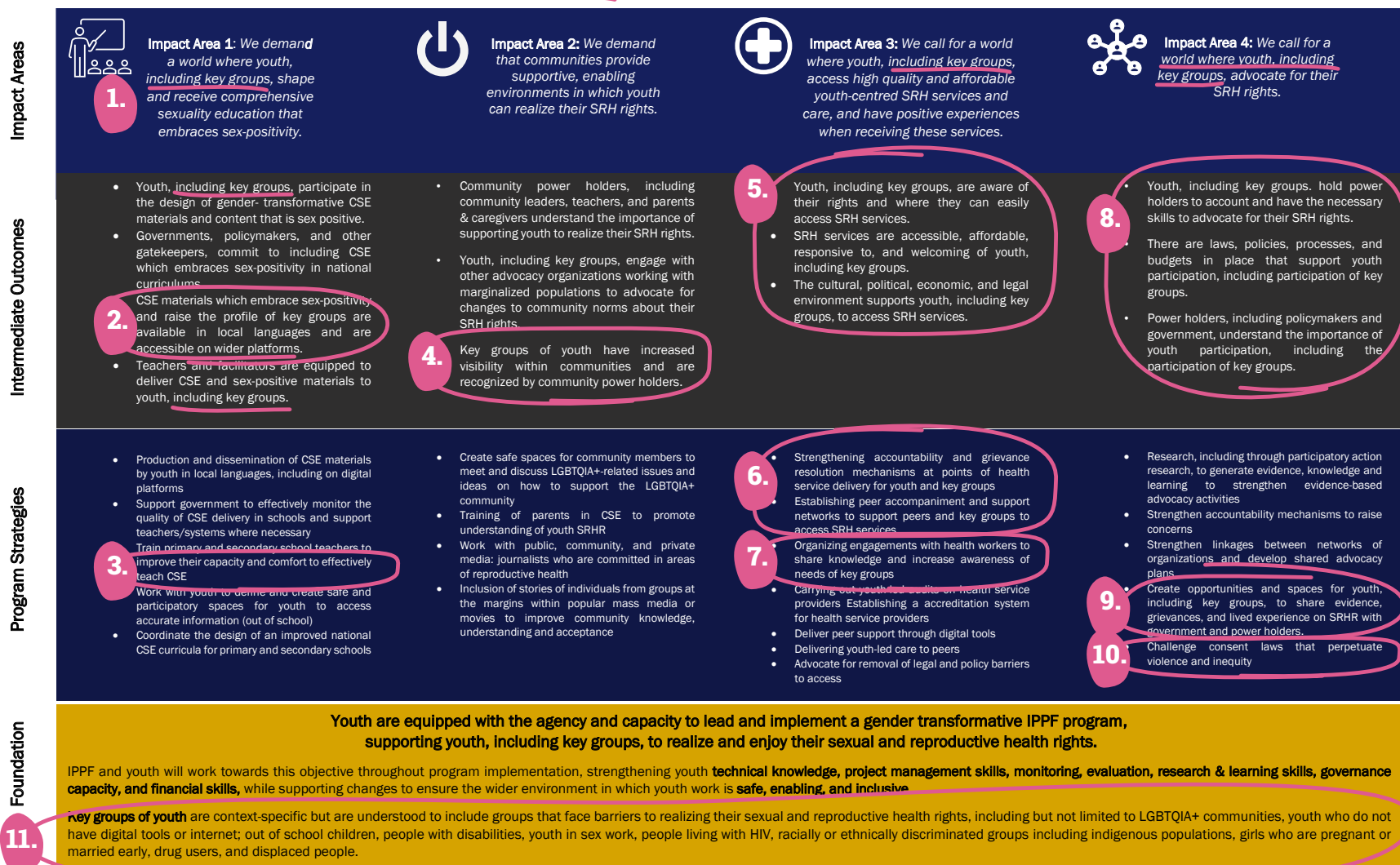
Additional Resources

- [Think Universal Pleasure Principle Details \(The Pleasure Project\)](#)



The Links between “Think Universal” and the IPPF TOC

Youth, including key groups, realize and enjoy their sexual and reproductive health rights.



- Multiple mentions of key groups to specifically highlight their need for involvement in all facets of SRHR.
- Intention of promoting specifically sex-positive materials which emphasise key groups in typically low-access settings.
- Bringing the lesser known (or lesser normalised) perspectives to training of trainers allows for more inclusivity downstream.
- Recognition of key groups so as to promote their perspectives and their rights
- Equal right to access supportive services and spaces.
- Encouraging key groups to take up space and advocate for their rights.
- Making (Taking) opportunities to change the existing regulations with a more diverse perspective in mind.

4. Be Flexible

Be adaptive in your approach to each unique context and culture. Recognise that pleasure-based sexual health is possible for all.

Key Concepts

If you ask people why they have sex, most people from around the world will mention satisfaction and pleasure as key reasons why they have sex. But there is no “one-size-fits-all” way to have sexual pleasure, and there are many factors that play a role in how sexual pleasure is perceived (including political, religious/faith-based and social views on sex, media norms, the laws in that context and educational policies, etc.) Practices that might be the norm to one person or community can be very transgressive to another. It is also important to remember culture or norms are not static and change over time.

In our work, we should acknowledge the diversity of backgrounds, lived realities, and cultures when it comes to experiences of pleasure, and be contextually relevant, which requires centering your audience’s realities. Beyond considering more technical/logistical aspects such as localised languages, making your content accessible for illiterate people and/or people with disabilities, etc., being flexible also means that you can fit and connect to the age, identity, sexual experience, family and community values, social circumstances, and the culture of your clients and learners.

Adapting to context and culture, however, is not the same as adapting to the values of people who have power in the community. Whatever the context is, it is important to strengthen values about sexuality and sexual wellbeing from a sexual rights perspective, while at the same time realising that this may pose challenges in some cultures and for some religious to traditional groups. It is only through dialogue that we can begin to address sexual pleasure – either with clients/learners or within a sexual relationship. As professionals, finding common ground between faith or traditional values and sex-positive values of dignity, equality, respect, and compassion is vital.



Consider this!

The Singapore-based [Something Private podcast](#) discusses several sexual wellness topics and has achieved organic growth by adapting its podcast-based content into YouTube videos, Instagram and TikTok, expanding its audience by meeting them where they are at, in the formats that suit them best.



Consider this!

Thai culture has adopted (in some cases based on English terms), adapted and developed language to create [terms for over 18 gender identities and sexual orientations](#), with cultural adaptations and nuances. It should be noted that, whilst these labels can be considered a step in the right direction to inclusive SRHR, true inclusion people of sexual diversities requires similar flexibility in many other aspects of the legal, health and social systems.

Practical tips

To “be flexible” in your pleasure-based work:

- Be ‘sex critical’ – discuss the dominant social and cultural norms about sexuality and support your learners to be critical of these norms, too. Being critical doesn’t mean that you must disagree with dominant social norms about sex and sexuality in your community. It means that you need to be able to identify what is seen as ‘normal’ and ‘abnormal’, ‘good’ and ‘bad’ within your community and think about whose interests these categories serve. Who has the power to define what is ‘normal’ and ‘good’?
- Be respectful of existing norms, but define a minimum of what you would consider as an effective introduction of sexual pleasure/well-being.

- Understand the demographics of your audience. Identify and work with them to understand their context, realities, communities, safe spaces, and identities.
- Even if you have certain beliefs that run counter to the declaration of sexual rights, it is important to strengthen values about sexuality and sexual well-being from a sexual rights perspective (See [The Pleasure Principle Rights First](#)).
- Keep in mind that there is a wide diversity of sexual practices. Some of them may change over time and across contexts. Additionally, they are influenced by many factors like, for instance, the information you are able to access through the internet/social media. To start a conversation, it's crucial to keep an open mind and contextualise sexual practices in a sexual rights framework.
- Remember that there can be multiple layers of stigmatisation, oppression and power which might come into play – throw light on them and enable people to affirm their autonomy and identity.
- Be a role-model by encouraging more open communication about sexuality. Check out [The Pleasure Principle Talk Sexy](#) on crafting sex-positive language and messaging.
- As a professional, you can address much broader aspects of the context that restrict people's ability to have rights-based sexual pleasure. Effective interventions include challenging social, political, economic, and religious structures, systems and inequalities that affect women, youth, and discriminated groups' sexual expression.

Additional Resources

- [Be Flexible Pleasure Principle Details \(The Pleasure Project\)](#)
- [Sexuality Education - The Wheel of Context \(Dr. Sara Nasserzadeh\)](#)



Consider this!

Laws can reflect culture and context... or is it vice versa!? Either way, they too must be kept flexible so that they may defend the sexual and reproductive health and rights of all people.

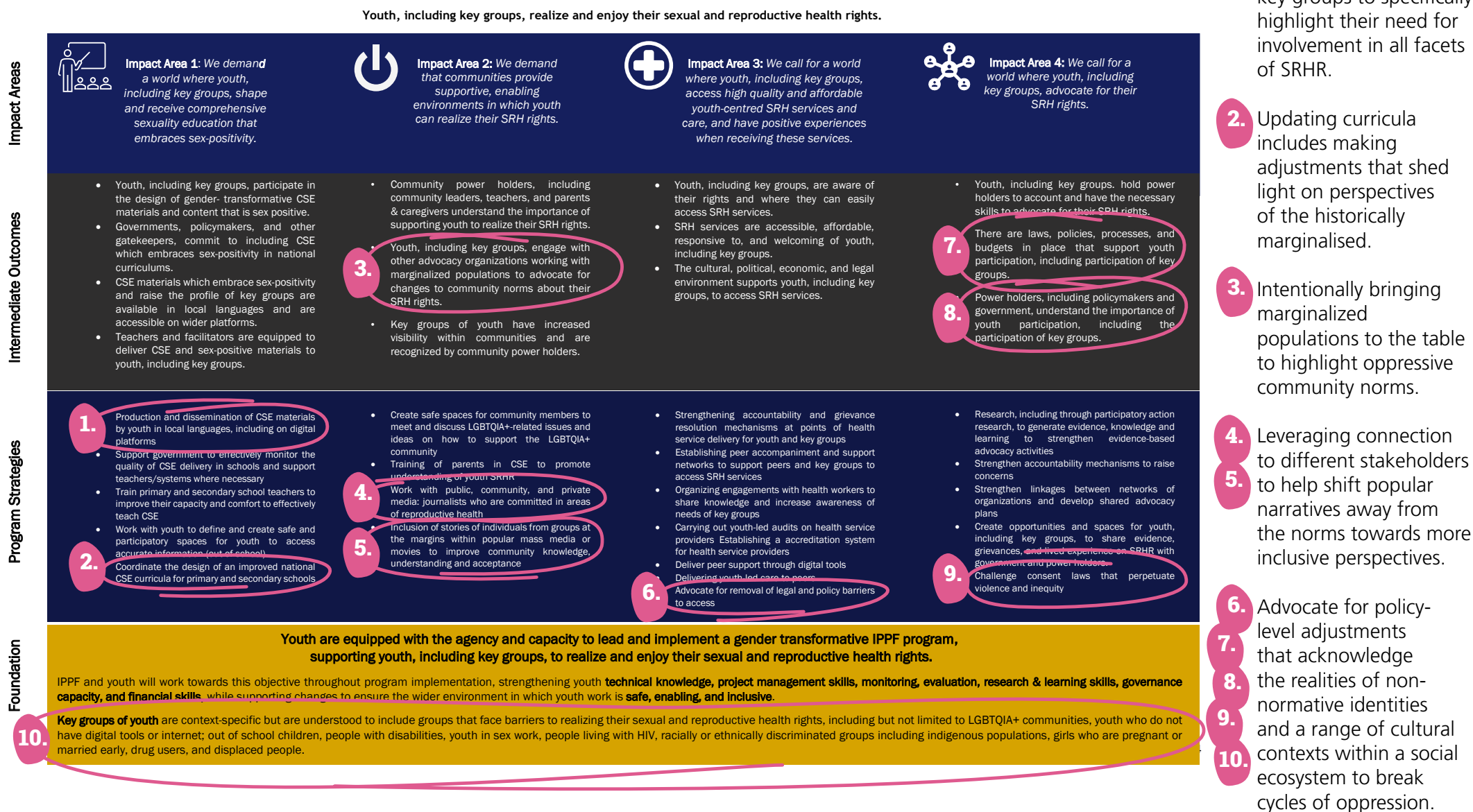
Unfortunately, laws don't always defend the rights of all people, especially sexual minorities. An example of this is the laws in [Malaysia, Myanmar, Papua New Guinea, Samoa, and the Solomon Islands which criminalise same-sex sexual behaviour](#).

Through advocacy and education, however, laws can shift to ensure the sexual and reproductive health and rights of the people that live within them. For example, [Cambodia and New Zealand now legally recognize a third gender!](#)

And for your own general development as an SRHR practitioner, you can reflect on the following:

- Many pleasure-positive norms or practices were shamed and outlawed by colonial powers and continue to be upheld as such by social norms. Who creates (or created) these narratives of pleasure, and how do these recognize people's experiences, including history of suppression of pleasure for certain groups?
- What are the legal issues versus the social norms with regard to sexual behaviour, including first age of sexual intercourse, access to SRH services?
- How does information (including pornography) contribute to knowledge on sexuality?
- What is the timing of having sex: before marriage, outside marriage; monogamy versus polygamy; acceptable sex positions; alternative ways for sexual pleasure/orgasm?
- What are the gender role expectations of a sexual encounter?
- Are there specific rituals around hygiene and sexual encounters?

The Links between “Be Flexible” and the IPPF TOC



5. Talk Sexy

Pleasure-positive messaging! Communicate positively and effectively, adopting evidence-based pleasure-inclusive language and imagery across your media and mediums.

Key Concepts

For pleasure-inclusive sexual health, we need to consider how communicating with others can affect how they feel about their own sexuality and sexual identity. This is especially true as many of us have had sex negative experiences where we learnt shame or stigma about our sexualities. We should try to avoid replicating those negative images in sex education or explicit media.

The way we communicate should vary depending on who we are talking with. We may change or adapt our pleasure-positive language if we are talking to our sex partner(s), our child(ren), our family, or as a professional. What is often missing in our professional interactions is providing information about how to have positive sexual relationships, how to experience and give pleasure, and get the most from our intimate relationships - and this often is linked to not possessing the vocabulary to discuss sex, sexual acts and pleasure with our audiences or clients.

It is important to learn new vocabulary and be aware of the exact meaning of different words to ensure that messages do not get diluted or misunderstood. We may, in some cases, need to create new language for pleasure and experiences that go beyond existing terminology.

Many people may think that talking about sex and pleasure is the same as “talking dirty” or being sexually explicit, but it is really about using language that lets people know how to have safer sex whilst still accepting that sex can feel good. It’s important to not be offensive, and to be conscious and respectful about language and the meaning and intent behind our messaging. It is often most helpful to use language that is accurate, explicit, and clear, but at the same time, ensuring that the words we use don’t make people feel ashamed about their sexuality.

In our communication as professionals, the use of images on and offline is equally important. We want everyone to feel sexually empowered and enjoy the kind of sex that they want. This means whatever method of communication we use needs to be clear, realistic, inclusive and positive:

Clear	Realistic	Positive	Inclusive
Transparent Not vague (“down there” or “between your legs”) Balance bio-medical with more mainstream words your audience recognises	Don’t use metaphorical images to explain things (whereever possible) Use correct diagrams (ex. the clitoris should be pictured as the entire organ, not just be bulb)	Find enjoyable entry points to talk about sex Avoid referring only to risks and unwanted consequences of sex Say “sexual initiation” instead of “losing your virginity” Make safer sex more pleasurable: promote pleasure as a key ingredient of safer sex with protection Avoid using jargon or wording that has negative meaning	Ensure everyone’s sexual pleasure is addressed Celebrate all kinds of (consensual) sexual activities Don’t make assumptions about how people experience or enjoy sex Think of everyone’s ability to access your content (captions, subtitles, transcripts, translations etc.)



Consider this!

In some contexts, talking about sex, sexuality and pleasure is particularly challenging for a lack of non-offensive language. In these situations/ cultures/languages, due to the taboos around sexuality, the vocabulary around these topics has often been used in rude ways, making educational conversations extra tricky. If this is the case in your settings or language, consider exploring which words everyone is comfortable with at the start of a conversation/workshop... which may lead you to come up with new vocabulary that works for everyone, or at least feels better than the existing words for all participants!

You may find the exercises in the section titled Normalising Communication about sexual pleasure activities from [The Pleasure Project's Training Toolkit](#) particularly useful for this!

You can also check out the [New Sex Slang](#) campaign!

Practical tips

Focusing on pleasurable, positive sexual experiences can help open discussions about safer sexual behaviours and stronger negotiation skills. A great example of this is how St. John's Infirmary asks sex workers about the sex they enjoy, to have a conversation about safer sex. (See page 68 of the Global Mapping of Pleasure.) The Pleasure Project asked people to think about their most pleasurable experience and this really got conversations started about what people enjoyed and wanted to try again.

Having limited knowledge about their bodies prevents people from enjoying their own bodies, communicating with a partner about what feels good, and knowing how to seek and give pleasure. So sometimes, providing realistic information on how the body works can be a good start. Sexuality education/information and counselling that is clear and positive is a sexual right, and sex-positive sexually explicit media shows realistic bodies that represent a wider range of sexual identities and body types.

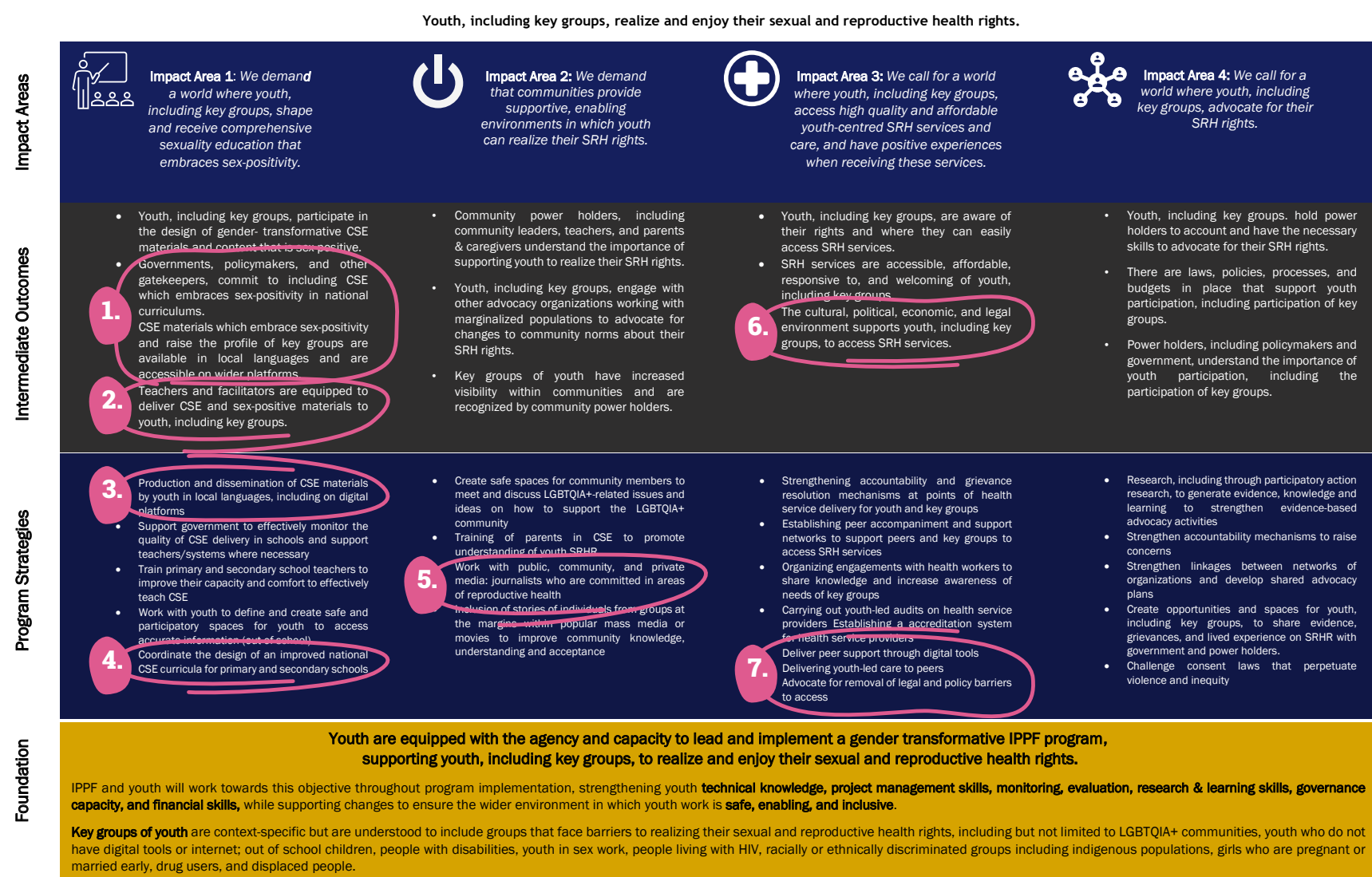


Additional Resources

- [Talk Sexy Pleasure Principle Details \(The Pleasure Project\)](#)
- [Love In Indian \(Agents of Ishq\)](#)



The Links between “Talk Sexy” and the IPPF TOC



- Updated curricula can be framed with clear, realistic, inclusive and positive language and imagery that more youth can understand.
- Training of educators and facilitators in using clear, realistic, inclusive and positive language and examples.
-
-
- Pleasure positive visual and verbal languages in the wider ecosystem are will result in more sex positive attitudes about access to SRH services, and more inclusion of all peoples' SRHR
-
- Peer learning fosters a shared understanding over similar experiences, which can lead to the normalization of more positive, pleasure-based language.

6. Embrace Learning

There is a growing body of evidence about the impact of pleasure-positive approaches on sexual health. Use this knowledge to spread sex positivity.

Discover this!



Popek Popek is Malaysia's first comprehensive sex education web show. Over the years, the show has received international recognition, regularly highlighted at prominent sex education events. A review by UNICEF found Popek Popek to be evidence-based and age-appropriate. These videos are still used regularly as an educational resource by schools, families, and organisations working with hard to reach populations.

Key Concepts

Sexual well-being and sexual pleasure are emerging as new narratives and aspirational goals in sexual and reproductive health, despite most (international) organisations/governments traditionally having preferred to fund research that looks at the unintended/unwanted consequences of sex and shy away from learning more about sexual well-being and pleasure.

It is important to build more evidence, as well as share the evidence we have that pleasure inclusive sexual health leads to more sexual health and sexual empowerment. There is increasing evidence that shows linkages between improved sexual health and sexual pleasure, safer sex and contraceptive behaviour. Furthermore, failure to address sexual well-being and pleasure detracts from an exploration of sexuality or safer sex, limiting conversations about the real concerns related to contraceptives and other sexual health programmes. This often denies people with uteruses and people with marginalised identities sexual pleasure or emphasises that sex isn't for fun or for general well-being and happiness.



Consider this!

Tabu.id, Indonesia's leading sexual and reproductive health information platform, found that short-form videos (TikTok and Instagram Reels) with minimal text showcasing real SRH stories are typically more successful. Although it's advised to create a framework detailing key messages and sources before producing content to ensure quality, this process should be done quickly for creators to capitalise on TikTok/Reels trends that tend to be short-lived.



Practical tips

- Create goals, objectives, and key performance indicators (KPIs) that focus on pleasure and well-being to measure and track your journey towards them.
- Expand areas of learning to include the impact of lived experiences, social contexts and systems.
- Expand and explore new ways of learning and collecting evidence indicators that work for you and your community and for the pleasure-based sexual health world.
- Adopt a [strengths-based approach \(SBA\)](#) to focus our learning on the strengths and assets of individuals and contexts. This is in contrast to the traditional approach which centres on weaknesses and challenges. Applying this approach to address gaps in our learning will make it more empowering and productive for both the learners and the educators/teachers.
- Work towards using indicators on how people can be supported at different ages and in different contexts to resolve the fears, doubts, contradictions, misconceptions, and behaviours that cause anguish about sexual pleasure. This will help them to develop their ability to enjoy sex physically, emotionally and mentally.
- Learn more about the meaning of sexual pleasure in different social contexts and systems and during the life cycle of diverse populations.
- To expand our learning about sexual pleasure, we may need to find new ways outside the existing evidence box. This means we should move away from only using traditional randomised control research and embrace research methods that are often documented as “grey” literature or evidence. What is particularly needed is to learn and find evidence about how to put the issue of sexual pleasure into practice for practitioners, educators and policymakers. There are various scales to measure clients’ attitudes, emotions and behaviour. The [Comfort with Sexual Behaviours Scale \(CSBS\)](#) and [The Sexual Pleasuremeter](#) by GAB are among the useful methods to assess and discuss sexual pleasure and wellbeing with clients.

Additional Resources

- [Embrace Learning Pleasure Principle Details \(The Pleasure Project\)](#)
- [Sexual Pleasure: The forgotten link in sexual and reproductive health and rights \(Global Advisory Board \(GAB\) for Sexual Health and Wellbeing\)](#)

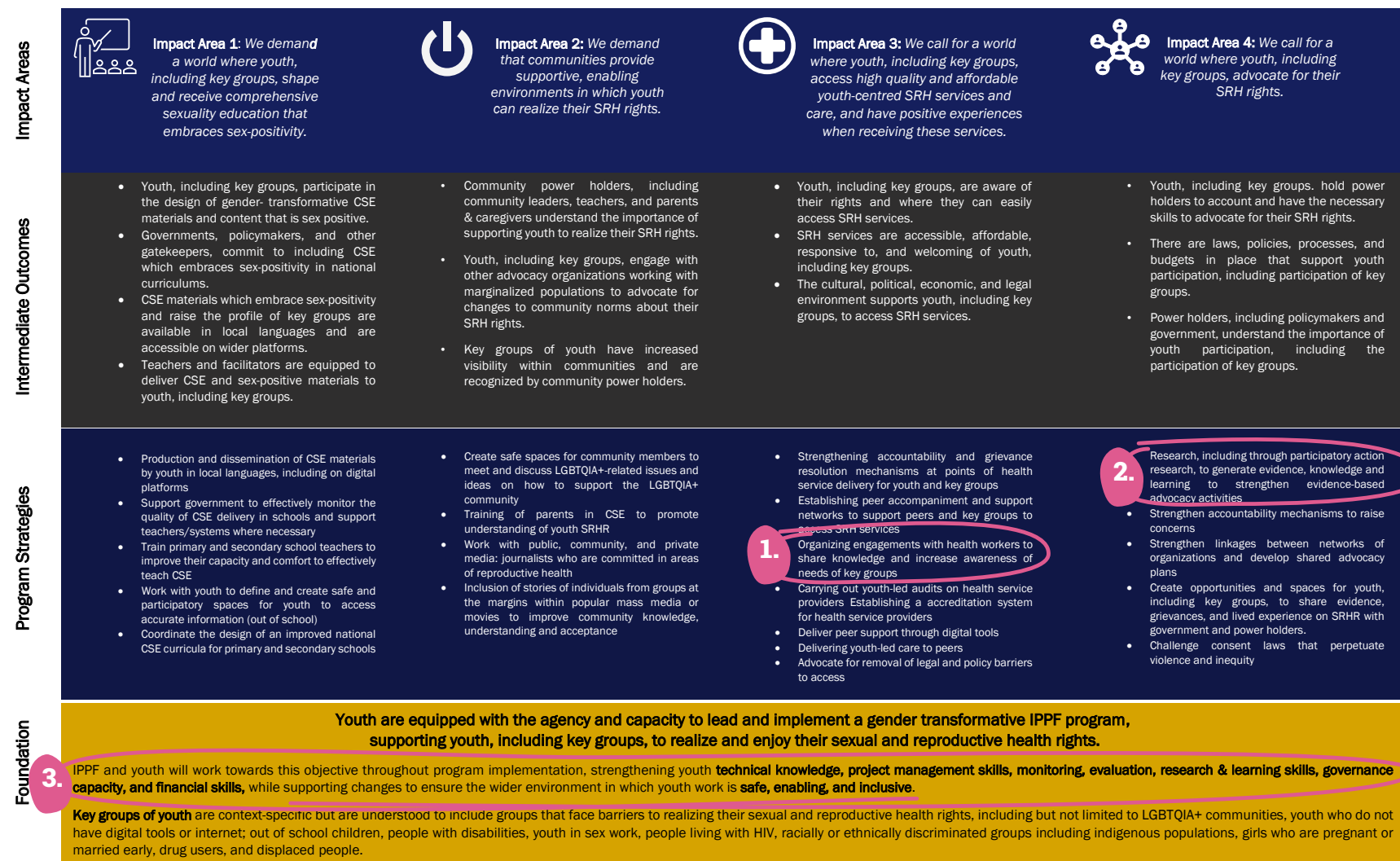
Explore this!

[The Love9 YouTube channel](#) addresses youth concerns on sexual and reproductive health, relationships, safe sex and STIs, using a combination of drama, comedy and celebrity talk. Designed by youth, the programme reached more than half of the country’s young people (1.7 million) in a single year.



The Links between “Embrace Learning” and the IPPF TOC

Youth, including key groups, realize and enjoy their sexual and reproductive health rights.



1. 2. 3.

Research, knowledge sharing, and more research!

7. Love yourself

To build a pleasure-inclusive world, love yourself. Show kindness to yourself and others. Collaborate with and promote other pleasure champions.

Key Concepts

The three dimensions to this principle are:

1. loving yourself: asking yourself and then understanding what you want (and don't want), how you want to express your sexuality. It is about allowing yourself to learn what your body likes in the form of solo sex or masturbation, partnered sex and what thoughts give you pleasure.
2. loving and being kind to others: recognising the lived experiences of your sexual partners and supporting them to also overcome shame and get the pleasure they want. This can mean working with them to be able to know themselves, talk and ask for what they want and not increase their sense of discomfort or shame. Healthy sexual development is not the same for everyone.
3. loving our planet: recognising that the earth's resources are not just for the taking, but we need to act with kindness, have boundaries for sustainability and not be greedy for immediate gratification. Sexual health, sexual rights, sexual pleasure and climate justice are closely linked. When we love the wonder of our planet, we also love ourselves.

It's a political act of self-care to allow yourself a personal act of pleasure. The way many of our societies are constructed, the systems in place aim to structurally and/or socially restrict how we show up, behave and interact with each other. When you prioritise yourself through a deliberate act of pleasure, you are putting yourself first,

Explore this!

The [toolmorrow](#) channel takes a social experiment format to explore issues Thai teens face, including those related to sex. The goal is to inspire and empower youth, reduce risk behaviours and improve communication.

which can be interpreted as a way of rejecting a system that does not consider your individual well-being. This is especially important for those of us who suffer discrimination, racism, sexism, trans and homophobia and micro-aggressions day after day. Sometimes merely holding our identity, moving about in our communities will take huge courage, energy, and strength. Love yourself for that and honour your pleasure – and recognise the strength in others and congratulate them for that. Sexual pleasure is not a competition, and it is not a scarce resource. You can get it for free, you can talk about it with friends, and it can improve the well-being of the global population. So let's keep flipping the narrative towards Pleasure.

Consider this!

In many contexts, women masturbating is considered taboo, and yet this act can be the best way for them to understand their own pleasures and enrich their life. Another example of how pleasure and self-care are political acts is the [Women at Leisure project](#). It documents women enjoying themselves, which is often what they feel they need to deny themselves in being 'productive or carers'.

Practical Tips

You may encounter some misunderstandings and misconceptions about sexual pleasure in your work. Here are some suggestions for addressing them:

- Be kind to listen to clients/learners and accept without judgement their lived realities of pleasure. SHRH educational and service spaces should be safe spaces as well as places that people can discuss what sex toy or condoms they use – no judgement on what Pleasure means to people and how they choose to express it if it is within the realms of sexual rights and informed consent.
- We need to challenge misconceptions, such as 'you should only have sex with someone you love or are in love with.' That might be some people's preference, but not everyone's experience and it is not a fact. Sex is about

eroticism, fantasies, physical desire, and excitement. We often want the partner we love to be our best friend as well as our lover. But those two wishes can collide.

- Reframe the prerequisites to pleasurable sex: instead of love, focus on understanding what you want and being kind to yourself about that and the others involved. Just be kind to yourself, act when you feel safe, and give permission to enjoy physical and emotional pleasure whether it's in a 'one night stand' or a longer relationship.
- When we have the honour of working in SRHR, we also have the responsibility of not re-traumatising our learners and ensuring that they will live their best sex lives. Teach them to love themselves, appreciate that their capacity for pleasure is a key element of their sexual health and can bring them great joy. We also need to support people to not think that sexual pleasure is the same as "pleasing your partner". Most people want to please their sexual partners, but when this desire to give pleasure turns into an obligation you may downplay your own needs and wants.
- The fight for sexual pleasure and sexual justice is an exciting one. But it is also about fighting against patriarchy, racism, wealth privilege, inequalities, and discrimination. It can be emotionally and physically draining. Have compassion for yourself and others.

And for your own general development as an SRHR practitioner (and frankly, as a sexual being!), you can also reflect on the following:

- Promoting sexual pleasure takes courage, creativity, and valuing all sexual experiences. When talking about sexual pleasure, know your own boundaries and accept the boundaries of others. Write them down for yourself. Speak them out in private.
- We must know our own boundaries before talking about sex and pleasure with others. Self-reflection can help us realise what we are comfortable sharing and where we draw the limits. And how that changes with different people and at different times of our life. When it comes to establishing our comfort level in the name of loving yourself, there are no right or wrong answers.

- Consider writing down on a piece of paper what we want from our sex and love lives, we can keep it COMPLETELY private if we want, or burn it afterwards, or we can share it with our partners and potential partners. Just the act of writing our pleasure wishes and desires down can open up our personal aspirations for our own pleasure lives.
- You can show kindness in sexual relationships when you and your partner(s) recognize that sexual joy is found in giving pleasure and receiving it. Find out what you and the other person(s) want. Ask for an enthusiastic "yes" to sexual acts but always be ready to graciously accept a "no".
- Consider and respect the needs and emotions of others. Understand what the other person wants.
- Think of Self Pleasure or Self Care as acts of rebellion against social norms or stigma and necessary in the fight for sexual, racial, and social justice. Practice self-care, which can be as simple as sitting quietly for 5 minutes and breathing slowly, to avoid burnout.
- Getting in touch with what we want from our sex lives and helping others to do the same actively dismantles the shame upheld by social norms, and might unearth much broader visions of liberation – the kind that moves beyond the individual to recognise collective visions of change.
- Many of us associate sexual experiences with trauma. Forgiveness in this context means accepting what happened, giving it a place in your life, and trying to let love for yourself triumph as you do the hard work to survive the abuse and re-engage with the pleasure you want

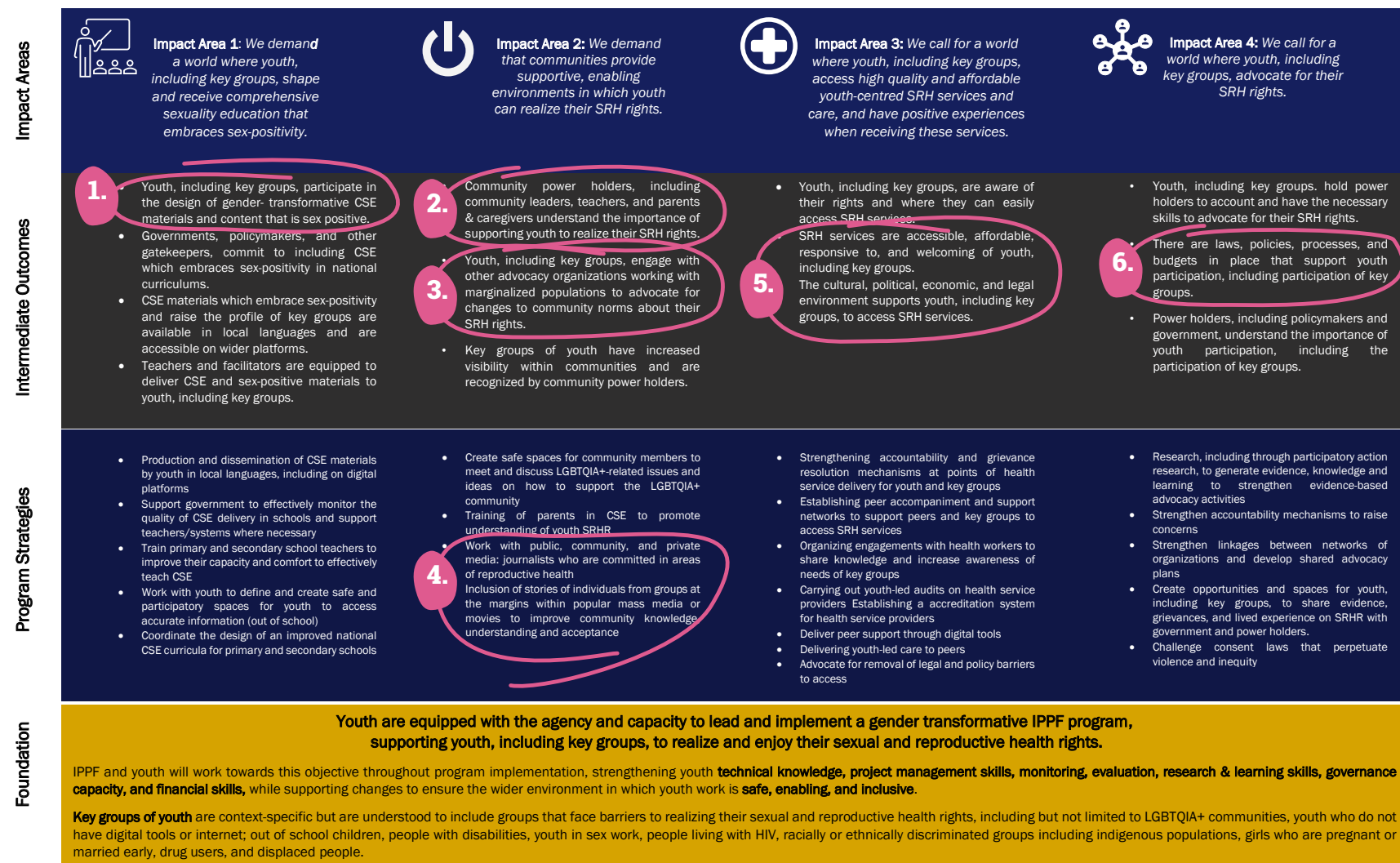


Additional Resources

- [Love Yourself Pleasure Principle Details \(The Pleasure Project\)](#)
- [The Climate Crisis and Sexual and Reproductive Health and Rights \(IPPF\)](#)
- [Climate Justice And Gender Justice Have To Go Hand-in-Hand \(Plan International\)](#)
- [Pleasure Activism \(adrienne maree brown\)](#)

The Links between “Love Yourself” and the IPPF TOC

Youth, including key groups, realize and enjoy their sexual and reproductive health rights.



1. 1. The act of loving yourself and loving your others is a political one that contributes to gender equity.

2. 2. Mobilizing the wider community through understanding that ensuring SRHR is a systemic change for good.

3. 4. 5. 6.

Systemically lifting the shame around accessing SRHR services.

Specific Recommendations and Tools for Delivering Pleasure-Based CSE to Youth

After having outlined the “Why” of pleasure-based sexual health programming for youth and explored the different Pleasure Principles that can help in its implementation, we will now focus on tangible tools to explore the “How” of implementing pleasure-based youth programming within the context of the IPPF’s TOC.

All suggested tools can be adapted to suit different audiences and formats, but in their current form, lend themselves to specific Impact Areas within the TOC - make sure to look out for the relevant icon if you are looking to operationalize PBSH within a specific area!

Also, be aware that the tools are relevant for a range of actors in a given sexual health intervention or initiative (facilitators, peer/



youth educators, adult and youth participants, parents/family of youth participants, and other professionals involved). Therefore, as you work on programming that links to specific Impact Areas and their relevant program strategies, consider how you can leverage them for most success:

- Are you using the(se) tool(s) as (a) **self-reflection** exercise(s) ahead of engaging with learners or other professionals, creating new CSE materials, or doing advocacy/outreach work?
- Can you **recommend** the(se) tool(s) **to peers or colleagues** to benefit from using it/them in their work?
- Will you implement the(se) tool(s) **as part of a session with learners**, or as a post-workshop **follow-up activity for participants**?

Use the below summary of the IPPF TOC icons to easily locate the most relevant tools for you in the following section:

Tools with this icon...



... are specifically relevant to SRHR actors focused on sexuality education.

Tools with this icon...



... are specifically relevant to community organisers, mobilisers and engagers.

Tools with this icon...



... are specifically relevant to actors working to democratize the access to SRHR services.

Tools with this icon...



... are specifically relevant to SRHR advocates promoting access at a structural/systemic level.

Intersectional Identities: Awareness and acknowledgement of our lenses

Tool 1: “Check Yourself”: Self-Assessment of biases regarding Pleasure, and Youth CSE



This is a tool to help you evaluate your biases regarding pleasure and youth CSE. There are three stages to the evaluation:

1. Complete the chart by reading the prompts, and (without spending too much time on them) selecting your answer on a scale of 1 to 5 (1 being you don't agree, and 5 being you wholeheartedly agree). Some of the prompts are intentionally provocative, so as to help you define where your boundaries and biases are, we encourage you to treat this as an entirely personal experience that you do not have to share with anyone - this will allow you to be the most honest with yourself whilst using the tool.

2. Review your responses and evaluate which of the ratings are most likely going to show up in your work - either because you are **more reserved** than your audience or the objectives of the project/program, or because you are **more open-minded** than your audience or other stakeholders involved in the project/program.

- What social pressures led you to form these opinions?
- How do these opinions harm, influence, pressure, or support other people who have similar or different opinions?

- If this is the first time you are considering your point of view on a specific matter, why do you think you haven't done so before? How might you encourage others to explore their opinions on the matter in a constructive way?
- Were there any responses to the prompts that you recorded based on what you think you should believe/rate, instead of what you actually believe? Why do you think that is?

3. Make a conscious effort to keep these responses in mind, and to “check yourself” when you notice them interfering with your efforts, or when something in your work triggers a related unhelpful reaction.



This tool can also be used in a workshop/group setting for participants to self-assess themselves. As these prompts are rather personal, and some quite provocative, it may be beneficial to follow-up the individual assessment with a guided discussion with all participants (as far as they are open to it). For this, you may find the talking points in [Annex 2](#) useful.



“Check Yourself”

Self-Assessment of biases regarding Pleasure, and Youth CSE

	1	2	3	4	5
Pleasure					
“Real” sex must include any type of penetration (ex. vaginal, anal, oral).					
Safe sex is great because it reduces risks, but it's less enjoyable than unprotected sex.					
People with a penis can enjoy sex more than people with a vulva.					
People with vulvas should always naturally produce lubrication during sex.					
Sex toys can be amazing Pleasure accessories during sexual activity between consenting partners.					
It's only sex if you're doing it with at least one other person.					
Sex is better when you love your partner.					
Good sex should always end in orgasm.					
Achieving Pleasure is impossible for people who have been through (sexual) trauma.					
Sex is better when it's spontaneous.					
Relationships between people who have been together longer are more prone to be pleasurable.					
Your own Pleasure is more important than that of your partner(s).					
After a certain age, people stop seeking Pleasure or wanting sex.					
Youth CSE					
Youth are going to have more sex if they learn about it.					
Youth that engage in sexual activity are irresponsible youth.					
Youth are exposed to many sources of informal sexuality education that they don't need access to more formal CSE.					
Youth believe they need to learn about sex and sexuality by having sex.					
Youth are exposed to many sources of informal sexuality education so they often know more than adult CSE teachers.					

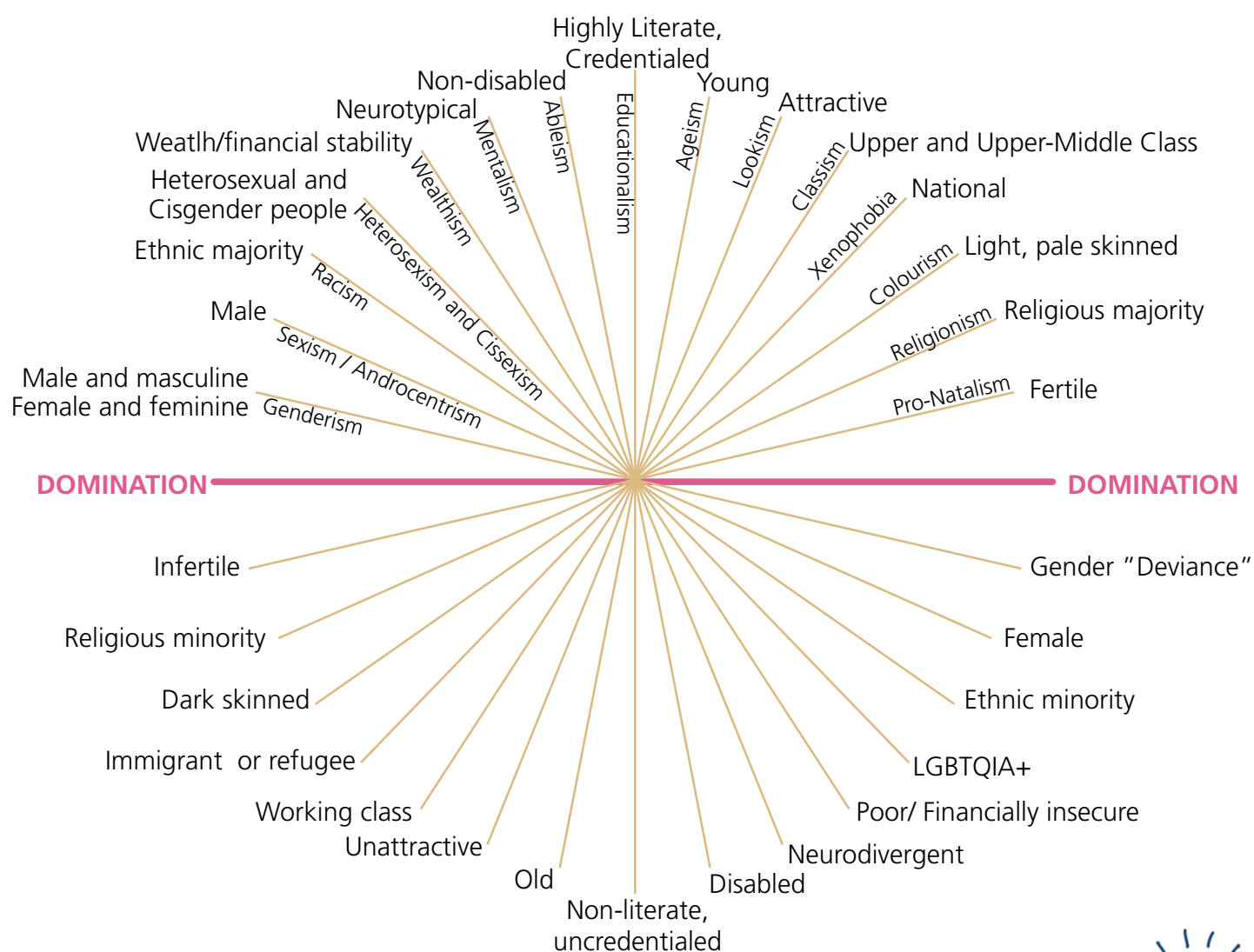
	1	2	3	4	5
Talking about sex with Youth is uncomfortable.					
Sex is something only responsible people should do, and youth are not responsible until they are legally adults, therefore they don't need to know about it until they are of legal age.					
Youth are still learning about healthy boundaries, therefore my role as a facilitator is particularly challenging because I am at risk of having to navigate personal questions.					
The youth CSE programming developed for one context is likely transferable to another audience provided they are the same age-range.					
There are things that youth CSE in non-formal settings can discuss which are outside of the scope of youth CSE in formal school settings.					
Youth Pleasure					
Youth's bodies are still developing, and they only start to physically desire sex once they are legal adults.					
Young people deserve to extend their innocence as long as possible before delving into the complicated world of sex.					
The only way youth can realistically feel sexual Pleasure safely is through masturbation.					
Pleasure is an integral part of sexual experience, and it should therefore be included in youth CSE programming.					
Youth are generally too young at heart to develop a deep connection with another person that will provide them enough intimacy for true sexual pleasure.					
Talking about Pleasure with youth is going to make them more experimentative and risk-takers in their sexual behaviour.					
More recent generations of youth have shown earlier signs of development (i.e. reaching puberty sooner than before), so it is normal that older generations are resistant to talking to children and youth about sex and pleasure.					
Young people are likely to think they have learned about Pleasure in pornography, so they have it all wrong.					
Youth tend to be healthier and more flexible, so their potential for Pleasure is greater than that of adults.					
Every person, regardless of their age, has the right to enjoy the highest attainable standard of sexual well-being and sexual pleasure.					

Tool 2: “The Eyes Through Which We See”: Facilitator’s and Audiences’ Intersecting Identities



Intersectionality is a term coined by Kimberlé Crenshaw’s which she describes as “a metaphor for understanding the ways in which multiple forms of inequality or disadvantage sometimes compound themselves and create obstacles that often are not understood within conventional ways of thinking about anti-racism, feminism, or [other] social justice and advocacy structures we have.” For example, any SRHR experience such as STI testing or even accessing information at a health centre is going to be experienced differently by a transgender girl with a disability versus a cisgender, disabled girl, or an able-bodied cisgender boy, or even a queer person from a disadvantaged socio-economic background.

Intersectionality is a very useful framework to analyse how the convergence of stereotypes related to different aspects of human identity plays out in different settings. It can also be applied to the way in which different facets of our identities help shape the perspectives we bring about specific topics. In this way, **intersectionality** can be used to examine how our points of view as SRHR practitioners may vary from those of our audiences. Acknowledging this positionality allows us to better understand how to lead **Pleasure-based sexual health conversations without imposing our own views on others**, or getting blind-sighted by differences in opinions and attitudes.

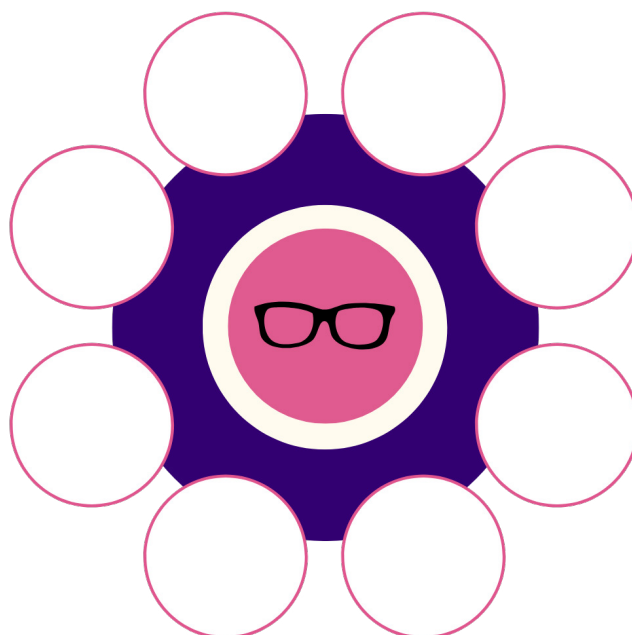


Note: This wheel is highly context-specific, and will need to be adjusted to the communities you are working with. For example, in some circles, being old may be considered a privilege over youth, and in others, being young may be considered advantageous.



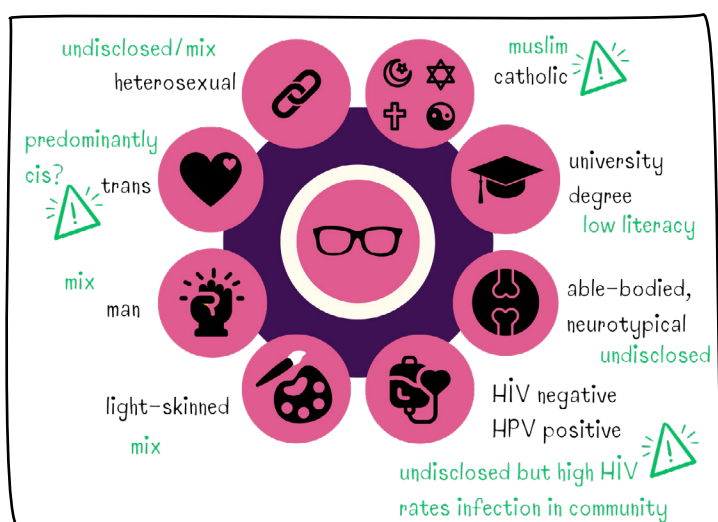
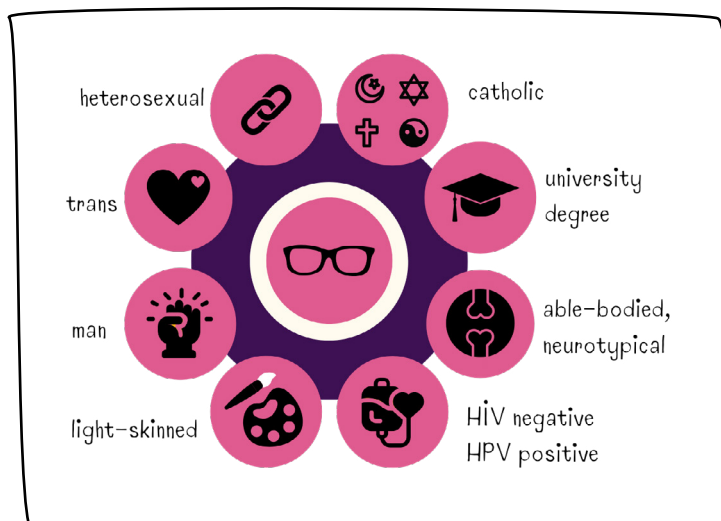
The wheel is made up of a series of axes (the straight lines or “spokes”) that all converge in the middle. Each axis is an opportunity to consider one’s level of power (and/or privilege) in a given context: On either end of each of the spokes are two characteristics which are usually perceived to be opposing (ex. The “educationalism” axis compares credentialed (i.e. university degree), vs. non-literate). Depending on which end of the axis you fall under, you will (be perceived to) have more or less power versus people who are positioned on the other end of the scale.

You can examine all the different aspects outlined in the wheel, and then proceed to capture those aspects of your identity you find most heavily influence your perspectives about your work in a visual map such as the below (left blank in case you want to screengrab or print out and complete yourself!):



Here is an example of what this visual map might look like filled out. Each of the eight circles has a symbol to remind of the respective axis on the [intersectionality wheel](#) seen on the previous page. The characteristic that applies is written to the side of the symbol/drawing. This simple exercise can help you recall your perspectives, the social positions you hold because of your identities, and the power attributed to you (or not!) because of them.

Once you have completed this analysis of your own intersecting identities, you can consider how a specific audience you are designing for or will be working with compares to you and write their characteristics in (a) different colour(s) in the same wheel. This will help you visualise the differences in perspectives, help you recall those differences more clearly, and make you more aware of the immediate and more nuanced impact this will have on your interactions.



Tool 3: “Pleasure Do’s And Don’ts”



This checklist outlines what to avoid and what to aim to do in pleasure-based CSE and sexual health interventions. You may find it especially useful to re-read it ahead of designing or delivering CSE interventions for peers, training parents on youth SRHR, working with journalists and media outlets, and collaborating with health providers on (youth) SRHR services.

Pleasure DOs

- **Do** use pleasure as a way of normalising sexuality and as a common ground for people of all backgrounds and walks of life to engage in dialogue around SRHR
- **Do** acknowledge that talking about pleasure, just as talking about sex and sexuality, can be difficult. Explain that this is because of the taboos that society upholds, and that actually they are all part of the human experience. Create a space where people are encouraged to work through the taboo, but can also remain quiet until they are ready to actively contribute.
- **Do** listen with curiosity and with presence - this will allow you to “check yourself” and control your reaction towards others’ comments
- **Do** establish community/space guidelines at the beginning of a session that will enable everyone to understand the boundaries that are jointly agreed upon
- **Do** remember your positionality and your lenses, and be on the lookout for how they show up in your speech/writing, your body language and your reactions to others
- **Do** actively consider how your perspectives vary from those of the people you are working with or facilitating for, and seek to acknowledge them so they can be managed and do not take over the space
- **Do** allow and encourage people to express their own views, even if they openly oppose others’ - so long as they are shared respectfully and without trying to forcefully change others’ opinions

Pleasure DON'Ts

- **Don’t** believe anyone can know everything about pleasure - every body is its own universe, and every one perceives and interprets pleasure differently!
- **Don’t** think that there is a “right” way of feeling pleasure
- **Don’t** assume what gives you pleasure it was gives others pleasure
- **Don’t** share more than you feel comfortable with about your own experiences/perspectives - this limit may vary
- **Don’t** share more than other people feel comfortable hearing/receiving - actively seek to read people’s body language to assess their level of ease
- **Don’t** assume it is only your responsibility to keep the spaces you hold safe(r) - as a facilitator, you are responsible in reminding every participant that they are equally responsible
- **Don’t** allow anybody to “yuck anyone’s yum” - no one should be made to feel like what gives them pleasure is not “normal” and “acceptable” (provided it seeks consent of all involved parties)

Community Guidelines: Creating Spaces that are Conducive to Pleasure-based Sexual Health

Tool 4: Safe and Brave Space Guidelines



Safe and Brave Space Guidelines serve as a way of encouraging a workshop group, team, etc., to establish how they chose to work together, and which boundaries are key for their work to happen safely and as comfortably as possible for all. The below serves as an example only - these guidelines should be compiled from the beginning with every new group to fit the context you are working in and the people you are working with.

- ➔ **Respect above all:** we will not all agree on everything, but we will chose to respect each other as individuals regardless
- ➔ **Respect each others identities & pronouns**
- ➔ **Speak from the "I" and own your own perspective:** your positionality heavily influences your opinions. Do not generalise as if they are "normal", and expect that others will not always agree with it.
- ➔ **Take space & make space:** if you want to share something that will contribute to the group discussion and dynamics, do so. Also make space for others to do the same, to keep the group equally focused on all participants.
- ➔ **Self-care throughout:** look after yourself, and take a time out if you find a topic particularly triggering. Do not hesitate to seek care or space if needed.
- ➔ **Don't yuck my yum:** don't make anyone feel lesser for their likes and dislikes.
- ➔ **Assume good will:** people express themselves differently, and words or expressions can be used in different ways. Assume that they are not on the offensive, and ask for clarification if needed.
- ➔ **Call each other in, not out:** When you disagree with someone and intend to highlight and further explore the difference in opinions, do so in a way that constructively invites further dialogue, rather than criticising their opinion and/or reprimanding them.
- ➔ **What's said here stays here, what's learned here leaves here:** some discussions or activities may inspire people to willingly share things they would, in other contexts, not share. Humbly hold space for them, and respect their privacy by not sharing beyond the safe space. Inversely, the insights, conclusions and learnings you reap from the space should absolutely be taken beyond and applied and shared within your own circles.

Tool 5: Design Checklist for Pleasure-Based Programming



The Design Checklist below is a helpful reminder of how to do pleasure-based sexual health when designing and reviewing curricula and/or activities for youth programming, reviewing materials for training with parents, auditing health service providers, and developing advocacy materials. You can use this to “check in” throughout the development/review, as well as at the end, as a follow-up evaluation tool.

The program/curriculum/activity/video/article/script/service...

- ... is sex-positive and promotes safe sex as something that can be very good for all people.
- ... promotes sexual rights as human rights, which are universal for all people.
- ... includes everyone’s right to pleasure, sexual health, and SRHR - regardless of their gender identity, sexual preference, age, etc.
- ... recognizes that people’s experiences of pleasure are unique, and require intentional inclusion.
- ... is adapted to the context/culture that it is developed/created for in terms of the content (i.e. the overarching messaging is contextually relevant and presented in a culturally sensitive way even though it may push specific boundaries).
- ... is adapted to the audience that it is developed for in terms of the format (i.e. consider if inclusive of people with different levels of literacy, auditive and/or visual disabilities, neurodiversity, etc.)
- ... effectively and positively uses pleasure-positive language to communicate about pleasure and SRHR in an enticing way for the audience.
- ... maximises pleasure-inclusive language, visuals and media to support the objective of promoting pleasure beyond penis-in-vagina sex.
- ... uses inclusive language that speaks to a range of identities that may or may not have self-identified outside of the binary (ex. in english: “people with vulvas” vs. “women”, or the singular they instead of he/she)
- ... is factually accurate and builds on existing evidence about the impact of pleasure-positive approaches to support key messaging.
- ... shows (self) kindness and empathy for the full range of human pleasure experiences.
- ... lifts the work of other pleasure promoters wherever possible/relevant, so as to collaboratively promote pleasure efforts.
- ... supports community efforts with kindness by sharing your learnings with other PBSH professionals

If you found this design check-list helpful, and would like to go more in-depth, we also suggest:

- [Share-Net’s Pleasure Checklist](#)
- [GAB’s Sexual Pleasure Assessment Tool](#)





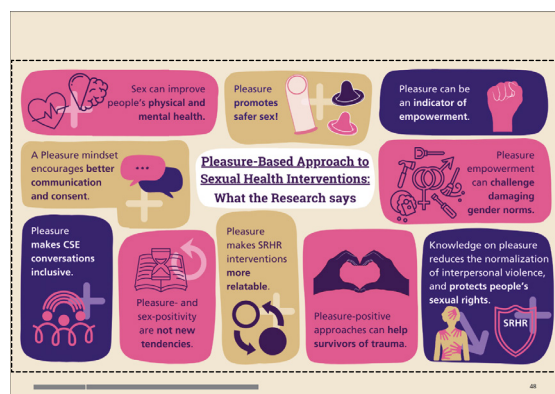
Image by doidam10 on Canva

Remember the Journey: Pleasure-based sexual health is backed by science... leverage the work that's been done!



Tool 6: Pleasure Advocacy Infographic: What the research says

This infographic is a one-page visual summary of the reasons for pleasure-based approach in (Youth) Programming. You will find it on the next page, and it is set up in landscape format so you can easily screengrab and insert it to a 16:9 ratio PowerPoint to use in meetings, attach to emails or include in presentations as a reminder of all the advantages of pleasure-based sexual health programming!

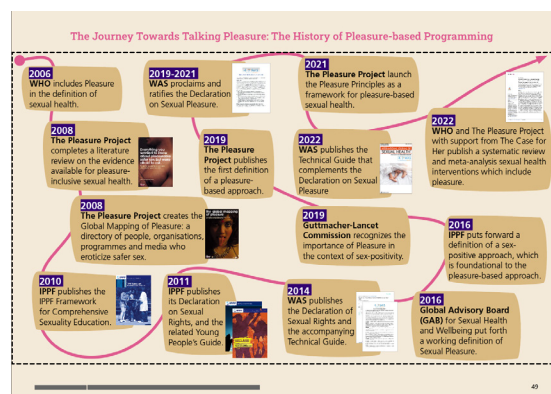


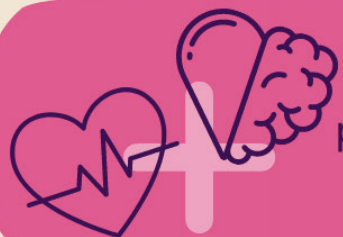
←
Screengrab
the following
pages like
this to insert
into a 16:9
PowerPoint!
→



Tool 7: Journey Towards Talking Pleasure: Overview of the History of Pleasure-based Programming

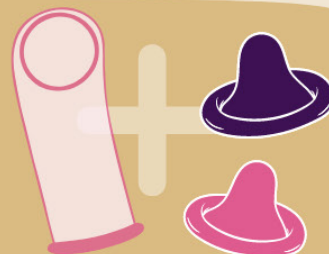
This overview is a snap-shot, one-page summary of the key milestones on the journey towards pleasure-based sexual health. You will find it on the page after next, and it is set up in landscape format so you can easily screengrab it and include it in your 16:9 presentations where you think that your audience may benefit from seeing the journey, and accessing further readings through QR codes.





Sex can improve people's **physical and mental health.**

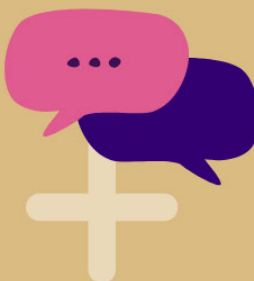
Pleasure promotes **safer sex!**



Pleasure can be an **indicator of empowerment.**



A Pleasure mindset encourages **better communication and consent.**



Pleasure-Based Approach to Sexual Health Interventions: **What the Research says**



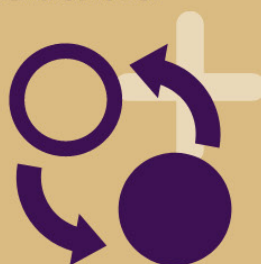
Pleasure empowerment can **challenge damaging gender norms.**

Pleasure makes **CSE conversations inclusive.**



Pleasure- and sex-positivity are **not new tendencies.**

Pleasure makes SRHR interventions **more relatable.**



Pleasure-positive approaches can **help survivors of trauma.**

Knowledge on pleasure reduces the normalization of interpersonal violence, and **protects people's sexual rights.**



The Journey Towards Talking Pleasure: The History of Pleasure-based Programming

2006

WHO includes Pleasure in the definition of sexual health.

2008

The Pleasure Project completes a literature review on the evidence available for pleasure-inclusive sexual health.



2008

The Pleasure Project creates the Global Mapping of Pleasure: a directory of people, organisations, programmes and media who eroticize safer sex.



2010

IPPF publishes the IPPF Framework for Comprehensive Sexuality Education.



2011

IPPF publishes its Declaration on Sexual Rights, and the related Young People's Guide.



2019-2021

WAS proclaims and ratifies the Declaration on Sexual Pleasure.

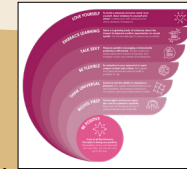


2019

The Pleasure Project publishes the first definition of a pleasure-based approach.

2021

The Pleasure Project launch the Pleasure Principles as a framework for pleasure-based sexual health.



2022

WAS publishes the Technical Guide that complements the Declaration on Sexual Pleasure



2022

WHO and **The Pleasure Project** publish a systematic review and meta-analysis that proves sexual health inventions which include pleasure improve sexual health.



2019

Guttmacher-Lancet Commission recognizes the importance of Pleasure in the context of sex-positivity.

2016

IPPF puts forward a definition of a sex-positive approach, which is foundational to the pleasure-based approach.

2014

WAS publishes the Declaration of Sexual Rights and the accompanying Technical Guide.



2016

Global Advisory Board (GAB) for Sexual Health and Wellbeing put forth a working definition of Sexual Pleasure.

Specific Considerations for Youth Volunteers

1. **You are not expected to know everything!**

This applies to CSE, and also specifically to pleasure-based sexual health interventions. Because pleasure is not a “knowledge area” per-sé, and is far more of an attitude (see [Integrating Pleasure in Constructive CSE Dialogues](#)), you do not need to feel like you have to have all the answers to any questions that arise. Instead, focus on pleasure-based CSE being an exchange, where everyone’s perspective is relevant, and can be safely shared and explored in the spaces you facilitate with the 7 Pleasure Principles in mind.

2. **You do not know everything!**

Linked to the prior consideration, not only are you not expected to know everything, you also cannot know everything. In the same way that the experience of one adult does not equate to the journeys of all adults, your experience as a young person does not represent the experiences of all young people. Your perspectives on Pleasure are valid, but they are not everyone else’s perspective (see [Tool 2](#)). The lenses through which you see the world are heavily linked with different aspects of your identity. Everyone in your audience brings their own lenses, and therefore you cannot assume to know their truths. What you can help them do, as a pleasure-based facilitator, is work through potentially problematic assumptions and concepts.

3. **You do not have to share anything that you are not comfortable with.**

Boundaries are important in any sexual health conversation, but especially as a peer educator. Stepping into the role of facilitator or educator involves certain power dynamics - and sometimes, in an effort to provide a more educational experience for your audiences, it may feel tempting to share personal examples. Depending on the situation, these may be relevant and add value to the exchange. However, you should never feel the need to share your own experiences if you are not comfortable doing so. Be aware of

your boundaries, and be the first to respect them! In fact, showing how you respect and maintain your own boundaries can be one of the most effective ways to show others how to protect their own boundaries!

4. **You are in a privileged position.**

As a peer educator, you can connect with your peers in ways that older colleagues may not be able to. Even if you were raised in different contexts, belonging to the same generation automatically connects you in ways that other generations do not. Leverage this position with your audience to make the space as inspiring and inviting for all!

5. **You are in a position of vulnerability.**

Even as a peer educator/facilitator, the power dynamics in the spaces and conversations that you facilitate mean that, at some point during the exchanges, you will be in the limelight. This position means that others may, consciously or unconsciously, project things onto you (and these things may or may not be true). In this process, participants may then choose to comment or ask you about the things they are projecting or assuming about you, your identities, and your sexuality, and they may not be aware that they are doing it, or how they are doing it. You may find it helpful to assume goodwill in these situations, meaning that you expect all participants are following the “brave and space guidelines” to the best of their abilities, and that they don’t mean to offend you or intrude in your personal space. You will also find it useful to remember point 3 in these situations - you do not have to share anything you want to keep private.



Glossary

Comfort with Sexual Behaviours Scale (CSBS):

A scale developed and validated in an effort to assess people's comfort with discussing sexuality and to create training to help counsellors increase their sex positivity.

Equality:

Providing identical types, qualities or quantities of services or goods to everyone, irrespective of differences between or among groups of people.

Equity:

A notion of social justice that involves providing differentiated treatment, or quality and quantity of services or goods based on specific conditions or characteristics with the aim of ensuring everyone is equally able to exercise and fulfil their rights.

Pleasure-based approach:

Pleasure-based approach is "one that celebrates sex, sexuality and the joy and wellbeing that can be derived from these, and creates a vision of good sex built on sexual rights. It focuses on sensory, mental, physical and sensual pleasure to enable individuals to understand, consent to, and control their bodies and multi-faceted desires. Well-being, safety, pleasure, desire and joy are the objectives of a programme with a pleasure-based approach. This approach measures empowerment, agency, and self-efficacy by whether or not an individual has been enabled to know what they want, and can ask for it, and request this of others, in relation to their sexuality, desires and pleasure." (The Pleasure Project, 2019 Medicus Mundi)

Sex-positive approach:

"an attitude that celebrates sexuality as a part of life that can enhance happiness, bringing energy and celebration. Sex positive approaches strive

to achieve ideal experiences, rather than solely working to prevent negative experiences. At the same time, sex positive approaches acknowledge and tackle the various risks associated with sexuality, without reinforcing fear, shame or taboo surrounding the sexualities of young people." (IPPF, 2016)

Sexual Health:

"Sexual health is a state of physical, emotional, mental and social wellbeing in relation to sexuality; it is not merely the absence of disease, dysfunction or infirmity. Sexual health requires a positive and respectful approach to sexuality and sexual relationships and the possibility of having pleasurable and safe sexual experiences free of coercion, discrimination, and violence. For sexual health to be attained and maintained, the sexual rights of all persons must be respected, protected and fulfilled." (WHO working definition).

Sexual Pleasure:

"Sexual pleasure is the physical and/ or psychological satisfaction and enjoyment derived from solitary or shared erotic experiences, including thoughts, dreams and autoeroticism. Self-determination, consent, safety, privacy, confidence and the ability to communicate and negotiate sexual relations are key enabling factors for pleasure to contribute to sexual health and wellbeing. Sexual pleasure should be exercised within the context of sexual rights, particularly the rights to equality and non-discrimination, autonomy and bodily integrity, and the right to the highest attainable standard of health and freedom of expression. The experiences of human sexual pleasure are diverse and sexual rights ensure that pleasure is a positive experience for all concerned and not obtained by violating other people's human rights and wellbeing." (World Association for Sexual Health (WAS). Declaration of Sexual Pleasure).

Sexual Pleasuremeter:

The Pleasuremeter is a tool by GAB to discuss the links between sexual pleasure, sexual health and sexual rights while taking a client's sexual history. It is not a validated quantitative scale, but rather a tool that serves as a script to guide the process of sexual history taking, using the pleasure approach." (Global Advisory Board (GAB) for Sexual Health and Wellbeing, 2018)

Sexual Rights:

"Sexual rights: human rights that relate to a person's sexuality, sexual health, sexual orientation and sexual identity." (IPPF, 2011)

"The responsible exercise of human rights requires that all persons respect the rights of others. The application of existing human rights to sexuality and sexual health constitutes sexual rights. Sexual rights protect all people's rights to fulfil and express their sexuality and enjoy sexual health, with due regard for the rights of others and within a framework of protection against discrimination." (WHO, 2006, updated 2010).

Sexuality:

"Sexuality is a central aspect of being human throughout life and encompasses sex, gender identities and roles, sexual orientation, eroticism, pleasure, intimacy and reproductions. Sexuality is experienced in thoughts, fantasies, beliefs, attitudes, values, behaviours, practices and relationships. While sexuality can include all these dimensions, not all of them are always experienced and expressed. Sexuality is influenced by the interaction of biological, social-economic, political, cultural, legal, historical, religious and spiritual factors." (WHO, 2006).

Stigma:

Assigning shame, disgrace or disapproval of others and/or the process of shunning, rejecting or marginalising a group or class of people based on characteristics or actions that are stereotyped by some as undesirable or unacceptable. Stigma often leads to discrimination.

Strengths-Based Approach (SBA):

"Strengths-based approaches concentrate on the inherent strengths of individuals, families, groups and organisations, deploying personal strengths to aid recovery and empowerment. In essence, to focus on health and well-being is to embrace an asset-based approach where the goal is to promote the positive. It identifies and builds on the strengths and capacities of those supported by services, as a means to help them resolve problems and deliver their own solutions. In essence, to focus on health and well-being is to embrace an asset-based approach where the goal is to promote the positive." (IRISS, 2012)



Annexes

Annex 1: Let's Measure Pleasure – and Embrace Learning

How to measure pleasure – Key messages

- Aim for Pleasure-inclusive sexual health that is empowering as the basis for the intervention – and use methods to measure how much you reached those aspirations
- Measuring Pleasure based sexual health doesn't need new types of monitoring and evaluation methods - you can use measures and research methods that align with your client groups and ones you feel confident using.
- Try and measure the difference including Pleasure made in your intervention
- Don't worry we are all learning how we can best measure Pleasure inclusive sexual health..... adapt and record your lessons and learnings and share your learnings

Flipping the narrative – how being Positive in sexual health can link to other ways to Be Positive

Core to [Pleasure-Based Sexual Health](#) is the idea that being positive ensures people can choose what they want in their sexual lives and supports them to achieve it. The Pleasure Principle [Be Positive](#) details this. This can be applied to evaluation too; '[Asset framing](#)' describes this approach to community empowerment as defining people by their aspirations not their challenges. Evaluation too can be based on how populations have reached goals of sexual well-being, good safer sex or fulfilment. The Office of Economic Co-operation and Development has a whole [framework to compare national populations' well-being](#). However, it does not detail how to measure Pleasure and sexual health.

Why measure Pleasure?

The Pleasure Principles aim to inspire us to take steps towards Pleasure-based sexual health, and the sixth one [Embrace Learning](#) is inspired by a growing body of evidence about the impact of Pleasure-positive approaches on sexual health. It also includes many tips, ideas, and resources to help you introduce learning, measurement, and evaluation into your work.

Measuring Pleasure allows us to document the work and impact that Pleasure-based sexual health initiatives have. By documenting and sharing these impacts we can encourage others to include Pleasure in their sexual health programmes and suggest ways in which to do this best.

How including Pleasure improves sexual health – and how others have measured impact

Suggested methods for measuring Pleasure

When you choose your research methods for your Pleasure-inclusive study or learning process, use methods you feel would create comfort with your clients and people. Sometimes, having a conversation in a group of people who share lived experiences or gender or sexual identity can facilitate easier conversations, and you might want to create a [focus discussion group](#) to do that. You may find [resource published by WHO](#) and [this other guide](#) useful. However, you might find [anonymous surveys](#), or [individual conversations](#) or even [online polls](#) make it easier for people to open up about this stigmatised area of sexual and reproductive health. Below we give some examples of methods and indicators used to measure the impact of Pleasure-based sexual health.

MyDEX: Online sex education to get the sex you want

This intervention created an app that looked like a dating app for men who have sex with men to explore what they wanted in relationships and measured the sexual health intentions of knowing more clearly what the users wanted. They also randomised users of the app 'My Dex' and those who didn't use it and asked them what their safer sex intentions were.

Read more here: [Acceptability and Preliminary Efficacy of an Online HIV Prevention Intervention for Single Young Men Who Have Sex with Men Seeking Partners Online: The myDEX Project](#)

Both of these studies looked at the sexual health impact of including Pleasure considerations in SRHR work, however others have developed indicators for personal sexual satisfaction. Here is an article explaining that and the short form of the scale with scoring. Remember to #BeFlexible because everyone's sexuality is different and these scales are very specific to certain experiences, and we express our sexual desires differently in different contexts. So see these are just inspirations and test and adapt them for your population and clients, if you want to use them.

The measures used in formal research

WHO and The Pleasure Project showed that [including Pleasure in sexual health interventions improved sexual health outcomes](#). We found a spectrum of the amount of Pleasure that was included in the interventions and [we show here](#) how much you might want to include. Some interventions [aim to improve client's sexual wellbeing as a core value](#), whereas others may [include an element of Pleasure, such as talking about how condoms can be sexy, as part of a large disease focused intervention](#). But we do know that any inclusion of Pleasure improves sexual health outcomes overall. The research studies we included in our systematic review and meta-analysis used all types of indicators of how sexual health was improved.

Here are a couple of examples of interventions that used a strong Pleasure-based approach to show how it improved health and enhanced people's sexual well-being. They measure Pleasure in the intervention and its impact on sexual health, but not the sexual satisfaction impact:

Sister Love: Reproductive Justice and the Healthy Love Experience

This intervention started with the aim of improving women's experiences of relationships and measured the condom use and HIV testing impact of that. They used questionnaires to ask women about their sexual behaviour, and randomised women into the intervention group that included discussions of Pleasure or another group that did not.

Read more here: [Efficacy of a Single-Session HIV Prevention Intervention for Black Women: A Group Randomized Controlled Trial](#)

See the more [detailed box at the end of this annex](#), by [Ariana Katz](#), a quantitative researcher. She adds measures of Pleasure and well-being into large research studies and experimental trials.

Measuring Pleasure: How you can add indicators into your sexual health programme or project

[AmplifyChange](#) and The Pleasure Project supported organisations to add Pleasure indicators to their existing projects funded by Amplify Change. These sexual and reproductive health and rights projects in India, Lesotho, DRC, Tanzania, Rwanda and Uganda, were very different ranging from training midwives to celebrating Trans love. We worked together to think of ways to measure the impact of introducing Pleasure into existing projects. The methods used included focus discussion groups, project reporting, and a range of community orientated and creative methods. We have evaluated this partnership and projects and will publish the results on [The Pleasure Project website](#) soon.

Here are some of the project indicators we used:

Impact for clients of projects and programmes

- Improved quality of services/information/products due to Pleasure-inclusive approaches
- Improved curricula on sexual health and sexuality inclusive of Pleasure and sex-positivity
- Improved social norms and beliefs around sexuality and Pleasure
- Pleasure-inclusive approaches create stronger support networks for young people to make decisions about their own Pleasure s, sexuality and bodily autonomy
- Improved media and communication (materials, strategies) about Pleasure-inclusive SRHR from a human and sexual rights perspective
- Number of individuals amongst marginalised groups reached by the program have increased awareness of their own sexual desires and Pleasure as a component of SRHR as a human right
- Number of individuals amongst marginalised groups reached by the program feel empowered to claim safe, consensual and pleasurable sexual lives
- Number of individuals from marginalised groups reached by the program become active in advocating for Pleasure inclusive SRHR and services

Impact on organisational delivery

- New evidence on Pleasure-inclusive SRHR generated and used for advocacy and policy engagement
- New advocacy campaigns centred on Pleasure inclusivity and sex positivity
- Strengthened organisational capacity to deliver Pleasure-inclusive SRHR
- Increased support to other CSOs to strengthen their organisational capacity to deliver Pleasure-inclusive SRHR
- Improved collaboration among activists and organisations at the grassroots level and through online platforms with focus on Pleasure-inclusive SRHR
- Organisation undertakes rigorous advocacy planning and/or regular advocacy plan reviews (including policy mapping, audience analysis, decision-making pathways in order to structure and target advocacy activities logically) for SRHR and Pleasure-inclusive sexual health policy change

You might have others you could add – let us know if you use these and if you develop your own!



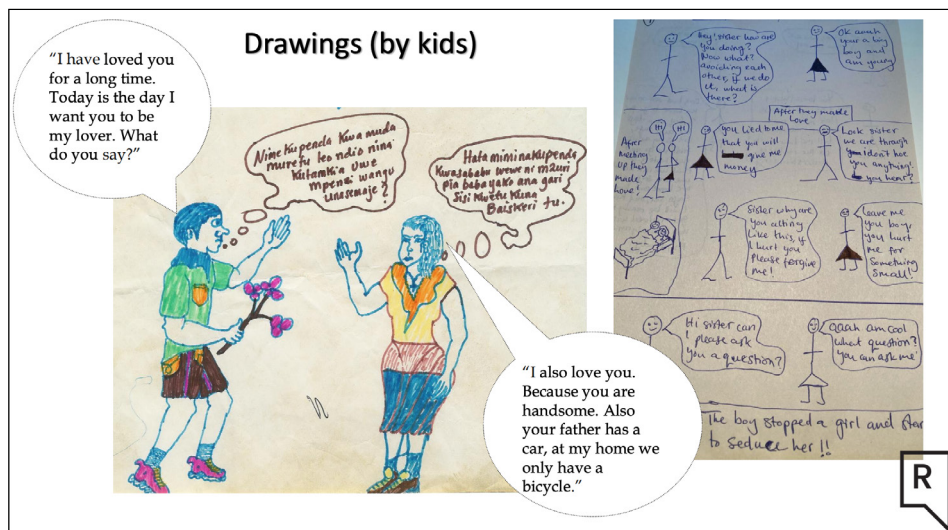
Image by Roberto Hund on Pexels

Ethnographic or 'Insiders' view methods of measuring Pleasure

You could consider the [Participatory Ethnographic Evaluation and Research](#), or the [PEER review model](#) method, which seeks to take an insider's view and train people from that community themselves to conduct the research. It can help participants in the research to feel more comfortable. The Pleasure Project did research in Ghana and Kenya in sexuality education settings to explore examples of sex positive sexual health work, and have explained the process and results [here](#), and the indicators used [here](#). We worked with experts at [Rutgers](#) to do this research and they have written about it [here](#).

[This presentation](#) by Miranda Van Reeuwijk is her explanation of what to consider when taking a PEER approach. She also highlights exciting methods to use like role play, drawing, using photos, debates or prioritisation exercises. Also read more about how she did this [here](#).

*Right: Drawings created by children as part of sexual health research.
Credit: Miranda Van Reeuwijk.*



How to measure Pleasure in sexual health services

Other methods to consider use predetermined tools, such as a [scale](#), to measure Pleasure. [The Pleasuremeter](#) developed by The Global Advisory Board for Sexual Health and Well-Being is a tool to use in interactions with clients when you are talking about their sexual relationships. The Pleasure Project adapted this to test to what extent sex education was Pleasure-inclusive in Ghana and Kenya [as mentioned previously] - and we published the results [here](#) which includes how we adapted the indicators and how we needed to adjust them to assess how Pleasure was integrated by sex educators and received by students.

Right: The Pleasure Meter a guide to helping clients explore their sexual relationships

Think about all your sexual relationships in the last 12 months and score the following questions:						
Physical and psychological satisfaction / enjoyment	Self-determination	Consent	Safety	Privacy	Confidence	Communication / negotiation
From 1 to 10, how much did you enjoy/ how satisfied were you with your sexual experiences in the last 12 months?	From 1 to 10, how many of these sexual relationships did you freely choose to have?	From 1 to 10, of all the things you did with your sexual partner(s), how many did you specifically agree to?	From 1 to 10, how safe did you feel in your sexual relationships?	From 1 to 10, how much privacy did you have in all your sexual encounters?	From 1 to 10, how confident did you feel to express yourself with your partner(s) while having sex?	From 1 to 10, how would you rate the quality of your communication and negotiation (of what you wanted and didn't want to do) with your partner(s)?

Another method you might want to try is [Outcome Harvesting](#), which has been used to evaluate complex solutions to complex challenges – when you want to stay focused on outcomes and results. ["The evaluator collects evidence of what has been achieved and works backward to determine whether and how the project or intervention contributed to the change"](#). Pleasure-based sexual health can be complex, and so this might work but we don't know anyone who has applied it yet. Let us know if you try it!

What does this mean for IPPF? ... And next steps

IPPF makes a clear commitment in their new strategy 'Come Together' of many areas they will change their approach to SRHR that are relevant to Pleasure-based SRHR - such as building up *"our person-centred care model"* and *"By 2028, an increased number of adolescents recognise Pleasure and the conditions necessary for clear, free, informed and meaningful consent as the foundation to safe, positive and equal relationships."* These might be useful indicators for your work - but also in the main body of this document, 'Talking Pleasure with Ease: A guide to the "Why" and "How" of Pleasure-Based Sexual Health in Youth Programming', there are ways you can link your work to the IPPF TOC for youth work, so also look there for ideas.

Measuring Pleasure in more formal research (by Ariana W. K. Katz)

<https://orcid.org/0000-0001-5742-4953>

How to include Pleasure in more 'formal' research

- Get creative with what methods you use
 - Quantitative (e.g., include sex-positive and Pleasure-based survey questions)
 - Qualitative (e.g., in-depth interviews to explore personal experiences with Pleasure; focus group discussion to explore social norms around Pleasure; ethnographic observation to observe relationship interactions or healthcare provider and patient interactions; couples or dyad interviews to explore relationship dynamics)
- Using qualitative methods at different times
 - Before the project/formative - to inform development of sex positive interventions;
 - During the project/exploratory - to explore aspects of participants' sexual lives;
 - After the project/explanatory - to explore reasons for lack of engagement in the sex-positive intervention
- Get creative with the tools you use to collect data about Pleasure or design interventions about Pleasure
 - Examples: vulva puppets and penis models^{1,2}; narrative storytelling or vignettes¹; Pleasuremeter^{1,3,4}
- Gather as credible of evidence as you can, think critically when analysing your data (e.g., consider biases and limitations to your data), and think about your audience and reporting needs⁵

What you need to watch for if you want to publish and how to do this in a practical way in small community work

- Think about where you want to publish (e.g., peer reviewed journal, report or brief). Consider ethics and your need for:
 - Institutional Review Board (IRB) approval (could partner with research or academic institute)
 - Capturing informed consent (verbal or written; information sheet versus formal process)

How to think about indicators and aims of research that are Pleasure focused

- Be strategic about the methods you use and why, and keep track of what each method is measuring
- Consider how you introduce Pleasure-based language in surveys and interviews (e.g., how to mitigate discomfort with answering sensitive questions and how to build rapport to increase participants' willingness to share sensitive information)
- Follow the Pleasure Principles and talk sexy (e.g., keep language simple), be positive (e.g., be non-judgmental, avoid stigmatising language), think universal (e.g., avoid assumptions about sexual preferences, gender identity or sexual orientation of participants or their partners, etc.), embrace learning (e.g., iterate on your process and findings, be flexible (e.g., stay curious throughout the process about what might need to be adapted or tailored for different populations and settings), keep the idea of rights first and love yourself in mind throughout the process!

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5. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention. Framework for program evaluation in public health. *MMWR* 1999;48 (No. RR-11)

Other helpful resources and reading

- [Embrace Learning](#) - the Pleasure Principle all about measuring Pleasure-based sexual health - v lots of tips and resources.
- [Kirsten Mitchell and Dennis Fortenberry published a new type of framework that includes indicators for sexual Pleasure, sexual justice and sexual wellbeing](#). It has useful indicators you might want to use.
- Always remember safer sex can be good for you! It can improve your health and mental well-being. [This article details the measures used](#) to show that.
- This is a [Positive Sexuality Scale for adolescents](#) for the USA, and the [indicators the USA used](#).
- The IPPF Africa region ran the successful digital [Treasure your Pleasure](#) campaign for young people in the region, working with The Pleasure Project and we used indicators of numbers of young people reached digitally, new followers of social media and amount of interactions. We also ran Focus Discussion Groups with youth peer educators and the people who implemented the project to discuss how we felt it had worked. We will also be publishing that work soon.
- The Pleasure Project is working with [TabuTabu](#) to measure new indicators of gender and pleasure empowerment in the pleasure-based sexuality education initiative [Ana Autoestima](#). We will be publishing updates [here](#) and [here](#).

Annex 2: Prompts for the Guided Discussion on the “Check Yourself” Tool

Pleasure

“Real” sex must include any type of penetration (ex. vaginal, anal, oral).

Sex has typically been defined as penis-in-vagina penetration due to popular religious beliefs, legal frameworks, and other systemic factors that revolve around the patriarchy. But penetrative sex is not the only way for people to have sex (even in sexual counters where at least one person has a penis). There are a range of ways to be sexual and there are several other acts of touch and play that are (or can be) considered to be “sex”

Safe sex is great because it reduces risks, but it’s less enjoyable than unprotected sex.

Through the often unrealistic and inaccurate depiction of sex in movies, the media and pornography, and also because of lack of access to pleasure-based CSE, people tend to consider unprotected sex to be more enjoyable (or pleasurable) than sex with a condom. There have traditionally been very few mainstream examples of “sexy safety”, but safe sex can definitely be integrated into sexual encounters in a stimulating way: You can enticingly communicate about safe sex before the encounter(s); and you can incorporate adequate/safe play with one of the many contraceptives you can use during the encounter (before genital touch) which can contribute to the arousal and sexual connection.

People with a penis can enjoy sex more than people with a vulva.

People’s bodies are not limited to feel more or less pleasure depending on their genitals, nor is sexual Pleasure more appropriate for people with penises than for people with vulvas (or intersex people). Unless there are underlying medical conditions, people of all bodies have the same (nearly infinite!) potential to enjoy sex... and everyone has the same right to feel pleasure if they want to!

People with vulvas should always naturally produce lubrication during sex.

A vagina may produce lubrication during sex, or it may not. This does not always depend on the age of the person (although lack of lubrication is one of the aspects of menopause) - it also has to do with stress levels, underlying (sexual) health conditions, side-effects of unrelated medication, or other factors. A person whose vagina produces lubrication may not necessarily be sexually aroused, and a person who is sexually aroused may not always produce vaginal secretions/lubrication. (This is called arousal non-concordance - see Emily Nagoski’s work for more details).

Sex toys can be amazing Pleasure accessories during sexual activity between consenting partners.

Sex toys are designed to stimulate bodies in different ways. They can be amazing accessories for some people, and they can turn other people off entirely... and that is okay! But if that is the case, it is an opportunity to explore why - are toys perceived as a threat? As a replacement? What would happen if instead they are perceived as an ally, as a tool, as an extension of one’s own body in giving someone else (or even oneself) pleasure?

It’s only sex if you’re doing it with at least one other person.

People’s definition of sex varies from person to person, but in most contexts, people are told that sex requires two (or more) people. But what about masturbation? Can one have sex with oneself? Can one give sexual pleasure to oneself? (In a pleasure-based lens, the answer is absolutely yes!) Potentially positive aspects of masturbation are that it is safe sex, and can play a very important role in learning about ourselves and our preferences as sexual beings.

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Sex is better when you love your partner.

For some people, sex is better with love. For others, sex can be great without love. Sex can help establish (or deepen) love for some, and only love can lead to sex for others. This prompt is very polarising, and it is interesting to explore where we picked up on queues that informed our rating. Also consider, what is your definition of "better sex" - is it more pleasurable, more connecting, more correct/appropriate?

Good sex should always end in orgasm.

Focusing on achieving orgasm can hinder people from reaching it - and equating orgasm to the end of a sexual encounter (or to pleasure) can also mean that once one person has reached orgasm, the sexual activity is assumed to be completed, because the goal has been achieved (at least for one person). Furthermore, some people may find it arousing to avoid reaching orgasm altogether... So orgasm is one of many ways that bodies feel pleasure. Ultimately, good sex is when all people involved are satisfied (whatever that entails) and/or are ready to conclude the encounter.

Achieving Pleasure is impossible for people who have been through (sexual) trauma.

Having sex after (sexual) trauma can be very triggering for people. People who have experienced trauma will ideally have adequate support mechanisms to process it, and to help them be ready to live their life to the fullest despite their histories. Seeking and owning one's pleasure after trauma can be a very empowering thing, and can even help in the process of accepting the trauma and not letting it interfere with the future. In some cases where the survivor assumes the blame for the incident(s), self-forgiveness is a very important part of the journey: sexual forgiveness interrupts patterns of self-blame (self-stigmatisation, shame, avoidance, aggression, and revenge).

Sex is better when it's spontaneous.

Spontaneous sex can happen with partners one had not previously considered, or in moments or locations that had not been linked to sex. For many people spontaneous sex is considered more typical at the beginning of relationships, or even in certain settings where people's expectations are to meet others (such as at a party or on a night out). Spontaneity is often linked to better sex because of how good sex is depicted in movies, songs, and even in mainstream pornography. But again, consider what is your definition of "better sex" – is it more pleasurable, more connecting, more correct/appropriate?

Relationships between people who have been together longer are more prone to be pleasurable.

It is often said that the flame dies down in long-term relationships... but it doesn't have to! There are benefits to knowing someone else's body longer term; with good communication and attention one can learn what "buttons" to push to give them Pleasure. But equally, newer relationships with good communication can also be very pleasurable. Rather than the length of time of a relationship, it is the intentionality of seeking and giving Pleasure that determines the potential for Pleasure.

Your own Pleasure is more important than that of your partner(s).

Many people feel more Pleasure when they know their partner(s) is/are enjoying the experience, too. And many people feel Pleasure just by seeing their partner(s) explore their own. So in a mutually caring relationship, it is difficult to tell whose Pleasure is more important, because it may be that they are interdependent!

After a certain age, people stop seeking Pleasure or wanting sex.

Sexuality is an aspect of our lives and our identities that accompanies us from the very beginning, to the very end. The perception that people lose interest in sex or feeling pleasure when they become older adults is ageist – it is a form of (unintended) discrimination that has been normalised in many cultures around the world... but just as there are young people who are not particularly interested in being sexually active, there are older people who very much are!

Youth CSE

Youth are going to have more sex if they learn about it.

Research shows that this is not the case: In fact, talking to youth about sex in the context of comprehensive sexuality education makes them more informed about how to make responsible decisions – but if they want to have sex, they will – even if they receive abstinence-only sexuality education, or no sexuality education at all.

Youth that engage in sexual activity are irresponsible youth.

People (not only youth) that engage in irresponsible sexual activity are being irresponsible (and often, they are doing so because they have not had access to information). Engaging in sexual activity in an informed, considered, and conscious manner is not irresponsible - it is a personal and empowered choice. Our role as SRHR professionals is to normalise access to information so that the experience of sexual activities involves safety, consent and wellbeing for all involved.

Youth are exposed to many sources of informal sexuality education that they don't need access to more formal CSE.

The internet has made it a lot easier for people to access information about sexuality – and also to produce and share more information. Because of this, not all information that people are sharing and accessing is accurate (this is why media literacy is such an important aspect of CSE!). Youth may access more information about sexuality education online (than adults nowadays, or than adults did when they were younger), but they must always consume it mindfully, aware that they must select reliable sources of information. Formal CSE can support in offering accurate information, and being a separate space to learn about sexuality in a social setting, rather than behind a screen.

Youth believe they need to learn about sex and sexuality by having sex.

This is a generalisation, and not always applicable. It is human nature to be curious about specific topics, and for many youth who are going through changes in their body, sex and sexuality are topics that inspire curiosity. One way of exploring is by reading and talking about the topics, and other ways are by more practical approaches to learning. Also, note that the definition of “having sex” can vary from one person to another. A safe way of exploring one's sexuality and pleasure is through masturbation, which not everyone may consider to be “sex”.

Youth are exposed to many sources of informal sexuality education so they often know more than adult CSE teachers.

See above related note on informal sexuality education vs. formal CSE. Also consider: Adult CSE teachers likely have a different perspective, and can help you consider areas of sexuality education from a different angle. Even if your attitudes do not align, it is always helpful to hear someone else's thoughts on a matter so you can better reflect on your own views.

Talking about sex with Youth is uncomfortable.

Talking about sex with anyone can be uncomfortable... but it doesn't have to be! It takes practice for anyone to get comfortable speaking to any group of people (or individuals) about taboo subjects such as sex. But whether you are a young person or not, speaking to youth about sex doesn't have to be awkward.

Sex is something only responsible people should do, and youth are not responsible until they are legally adults, therefore they don't need to know about it until they are of legal age.

Laws around age of consent are established in alignment with (political views on) local/national cultures, and the view to protect children and youth from sexual exploitation. But it is very important to give children and youth age-appropriate information that will allow them to learn about sex and sexuality so that when they are legally allowed to engage in sexual activity (and they choose to), they are able to make informed decisions. Withholding information about sex until they are legally allowed to engage in it is counterproductive to sexual health and wellbeing.

Youth are still learning about healthy boundaries, therefore my role as a facilitator is particularly challenging because I am at risk of having to navigate personal questions.

(This prompt may be less relevant to participants of the general public, but very relevant to other peer educators). As CSE facilitators or advocates, we always carry the responsibility of enforcing healthy boundaries... but if you think about it, everyone does! It is a great opportunity for us to lead by example, and if necessary, model consent by explaining why we choose not to answer certain questions.

The youth CSE programming developed for one context is likely transferable to another audience provided they are the same age-range.

CSE programming does not have to be reinvented every time we work in new settings, groups or communities, but it is very important that we are mindful that it will need to be adapted. Depending on who is in the group, where the program is being held, etc., it is important to make cultural and logistical adjustments to make it most suitable and for participants to be most receptive. This does not mean changing the messaging or facts, but it does mean presenting it in a way that will allow participants to face and work through any possible or likely barriers successfully.

There are things that youth CSE in non-formal settings can discuss which are outside of the scope of youth CSE in formal school settings.

CSE in formal school settings operates within the structures of school policy and curriculum, and in most cases, also the public education policies dictated by governments. Whilst advocacy on local and national levels can influence these guidelines, they impose certain limitations. Non-formal education such as through social centres, or even individual educators acting online or as independent consultants, often have less restrictions because they aren't necessarily regulated in the same way. This allows more freedom to discuss certain topics which are excluded in more formal systems. (This freedom, however, can also come with the challenge of facing more resistance, as most people will not be used to discussing topics which are avoided in formal settings).

Youth Pleasure

Youth's bodies are still developing; they only start to physically desire sex once they are legal adults.

Legal frameworks are developed to keep children and youth from being sexually exploited, but they do not necessarily align with the stages of human sexual development. Sexuality is not a switch that turns on when young people reach legal age; it is an aspect of our lives that exists throughout the full lifecycle, since birth. When puberty begins, adolescents go through a series of changes that may awaken an interest in exploring their sexuality. Even before puberty, children may be interested in exploring their bodies and what feels good (without it necessarily being linked to sharing this experience with others).

Young people deserve to extend their innocence as long as possible before delving into the complicated world of sex.

See notes on above prompt. Also consider that "protecting" children and youth from sex is not necessarily aligned with their personal development journey, and it can be very counterproductive to suppress them by creating a taboo around sex until they are older. Adults may unfairly project their anticipation of "complications" around sex on younger children by doing so. The key is giving young people the age-appropriate (and comprehensive) knowledge that they can explore sex and sexuality safely through being well informed.

The only way youth can realistically feel sexual Pleasure safely is through masturbation.

Masturbation is undoubtedly a safe way to feel sexual Pleasure (for people of any age). For youth to experience partnered Pleasure safely, they must be well-informed, and able to communicate effectively with their partners about what they want (to explore), how, and what safety measures (both in terms of contraception as well as communication) they will follow.

Pleasure is an integral part of sexual experience, and it should therefore be included in youth CSE programming.

That is what this document is all about: Pleasure-based sexual health promotes sexual wellbeing, and it makes sexual health interventions more effective. That is why it is an important part of youth CSE programming!

Youth are generally too young at heart to develop a deep connection with another person that will provide them enough intimacy for true sexual pleasure.

Children and youth are very capable of making deep connections with other people (think about the connection children can have with their parents and siblings, for example).

Moreover, this prompt correlates connection to intimacy, and intimacy to sexual pleasure. This is often true, but can intimacy exist without sexual pleasure? And inversely, can sexual pleasure exist without deep (long-standing) connection? Can there be intimacy in a fleeting moment with a stranger?

Talking about Pleasure with youth is going to make them more experimentative and risk-takers in their sexual behaviour.

Studies show that curriculum-based CSE contributes to delayed sexual initiation, and more responsible and informed decision-making when sexually active. In short, CSE inspires (youth) sexual wellbeing – empowering them to make conscious decisions around their sexual activity.

More recent generations of youth have shown earlier signs of development (i.e. reaching puberty sooner than before), so it is normal that older generations are resistant to talking to children and youth about sex and pleasure.

It may well be that older generations are reluctant to talk to children and youth about sex and Pleasure (although we cannot generalise to all people in older generations!), but this is not necessarily because of earlier signs of development. It could also be because older generations have had less opportunity to learn about sex and pleasure, and therefore don't know how to do it, or because they learned at a later stage in life, or learned without having spoken to guardians/reliable adults, and therefore wish to avoid the conversations they imagine will be uncomfortable.

Young people are likely to think they have learned about Pleasure in pornography, so they have it all wrong.

Some youth learn about sex in pornography, and some do not. Some pornography depicts pleasure, and some does not. Some pornography is accurate (or more realistic, or less staged), and some is not. Again, this is why media literacy is a very important aspect of CSE – we cannot generalise and say all pornography is bad (or incorrect/wrong), instead the focus should be on helping young people think critically about what they have learned or “learned”, what they have been watching, and what conclusions they have drawn from what they have seen.

Youth tend to be healthier and more flexible, so their potential for Pleasure is greater than that of adults.

Youth is not always synonymous with able-bodiedness. Nor is adulthood synonymous with lack of health or flexibility. And Pleasure, like sexuality, is not static. The way a young person feels Pleasure will be likely different to how that same person experiences it as an adult. Pleasure is interlinked with many other aspects of our lives such as health conditions, moods/mindsets, family dynamics, and other related factors, which will inevitably change how we feel in our bodies and our relationships. Perceiving these factors as limitations to our ability to enjoy Pleasure can reduce sexual empowerment. If, instead, we frame them as an invitation to explore different ways that Pleasure works for us in these moments/conditions, we won't associate Pleasure to age, and instead focus on maximising the potential for pleasure in all moments and ages of life.

Every person, regardless of their age, has the right to enjoy the highest attainable standard of sexual well-being and sexual pleasure.

Sexual health and sexual pleasure are part of sexual rights, which are human rights. For this reason, every person has the right to enjoy sexual well-being, so long as they are not harming anyone by doing so. Sexual consent laws determine the age at which youth are able to make decisions about their own sexual wellbeing, which may or may not align with how young people individually feel about their ability to make choices around their sexuality.

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