

## Being self-aware

As girls and boys grow, we help them navigate and engage with their world. We teach them self-management, such as how to dress and keep an orderly room. We teach them about avoiding dangers, such as how to use a stove without burning themselves. We teach them skills related to their expanding independence, such as how to buy something from the local grocery store and come back home with the right change. And we teach them how to manage social relationships, such as how to build supportive friendships and respect adults while recognising inappropriate actions.

### Case for sex education in schools

Similarly, we need to provide adolescents with information and skills so they can thrive in the new opportunities and challenges they will face as teenagers and adults. As their bodies and minds mature, they need and have a right to information about puberty so that they are prepared for the changes they will experience. As their social networks and the influence of peer groups and the media expand, they need and have a right to develop confidence, competence, and communication skills. And as they move through adolescence, which we know is a period during which inequitable gender norms become further entrenched, they need and have a right to programming about respect, tolerance, and equitable attitudes.

We know that this is not happening; studies from around the world show that children are not getting the information and education they need. First, many adolescents are poorly informed about the changes taking place in their bodies and minds at puberty, and unprepared to deal with them. Second, many adolescents are unaware and unprepared to protect themselves from sexually transmitted infections and unwanted pregnancies, or lack the skills to refuse unwanted sex from peers or adults who use coercive physical or emotional pressure. Third, they are immersed in widespread inequitable gender norms and attitudes, with almost half of adolescents agreeing that wife-beating is justified in some situations. Finally, they do not know where and how to seek help from adults or health and social services when problems occur. As a result, adolescents in our lives are facing health, psychological and social problems because we adults are shying away from sexuality education.

Contrary to common misconceptions, sexuality education is not about how to have sex. Instead, sexuality education aims to improve knowledge and understanding, and to correct misconceptions by providing age appropriate, scientifically accurate, and culturally relevant information. It aspires to promote self-awareness and norms that are equitable and respectful of others, by providing opportunities to discuss and reflect on thoughts and feelings, attitudes and values. At the same time, it works to build social skills needed to make responsible choices and to carry them out, by providing structured opportunities to practise those skills.

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The new U.S. Fed Chairman is unlikely to opt for policies that might upset the President's plan

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