

# Staying Safe

## Comprehensive Sexuality Education

According to UNESCO, comprehensive sexuality education is a curriculum-based process of teaching and learning about the cognitive, emotional, physical, and social dimensions of human sexuality. Its goal is to provide children and young people with knowledge, skills, attitudes, and values that empower them to uphold their health, well-being, and dignity, cultivate respectful social and sexual relationships, consider the impact of their choices on their own and others' well-being, and safeguard their rights throughout their lives.

Comprehensive sexuality education adopts a positive approach to addressing sexuality, emphasising values such as respect, inclusion, non-discrimination, equality, empathy, responsibility, and reciprocity. It reinforces healthy and positive perspectives regarding bodies, puberty, relationships, sexual matters, and family life.

By adopting a learner-centred approach, comprehensive sexuality education is customised to suit the learner's age and developmental level. Younger students are introduced to fundamental concepts like family, respect, and kindness, while older learners engage with more intricate topics such as gender-based violence, sexual consent, HIV testing, and pregnancy.

When effectively provided alongside access to essential sexual and reproductive health services, comprehensive sexuality education equips young individuals to make informed choices regarding relationships and sexuality while guiding them in navigating life's complexities. It also serves to protect children from abuse by educating them about their bodies. Conversely, the absence of high-quality, age-appropriate education on sexuality and relationships may expose children and young people to harmful sexual behaviours and exploitation.

Evidence consistently endorses the value of comprehensive sexuality education and the effectiveness of approaches that address a wide definition of sexual health and well-being, while embracing positive, affirming, and inclusive attitudes toward human sexuality.

In summary, a holistic approach that covers diverse sexual health topics, progressively integrated throughout grades, fostered within supportive school environments and across subject areas, has the potential to promote an understanding of sexual diversity, prevent dating and intimate partner violence, nurture the development of healthy relationships, protect against child sexual abuse, enhance social and emotional learning, and boost media literacy.



Sexual rights are human rights pertaining to sexuality:

- 1) The right to equality and non-discrimination
- 2) The right to life, liberty, and security of the person
- 3) The right to autonomy and bodily integrity
- 4) The right to be free from torture and cruel, inhuman, or degrading treatment or punishment
- 5) The right to be free from all forms of violence and coercion.
- 6) The right to privacy
- 7) The right to the highest attainable standard of health, including sexual health; with the possibility of pleasurable, satisfying, and safe sexual experiences.
- 8) The right to enjoy the benefits of scientific progress and its application.
- 9) The right to information
- 10) The right to education and the right to comprehensive sexuality education
- 11) The right to enter, form, and dissolve marriage and other similar types of relationships based on equality and full and free consent.
- 12) The right to decide whether to have children, the number and spacing of children, and to have the information and the means to do so.
- 13) The right to the freedom of thought, opinion, and expression
- 14) The right to freedom of association and peaceful assembly
- 15) The right to participation in public and political life
- 16) The right to access to justice, remedies, and redress.

*E. Goldfarg, L.D. Lieberman: Three Decades of Research: The Case for Comprehensive Sex Education: [LINK](#)*  
*World association of Sexual Health: Declaration of sexual rights: [LINK](#)*

## Digital Spaces and Pornography

As young people increasingly immerse themselves in digital spaces, it is unsurprising that many are now turning to digital sources for information on topics related to bodies, sex, and relationships. This evolving landscape presents both opportunities and challenges. Digital spaces provide a burgeoning platform where certain aspects of sexuality education can become more accessible, engaging, and interactive for young people. However, ensuring content quality poses a challenge. When exploring digital spaces for information, young people will encounter a range of content, some of which may be incomplete, inaccurately informed, or potentially harmful. This scenario places educators in a delicate balance, requiring them to harness the potential of digital spaces for delivering high-quality content to a diverse youth population while also assuming the responsibility of equipping young people with the critical skills to assess the content they encounter.

One major pornography website (Pornhub) reported 42 billion visits to their site in 2019, with an average of 115 million visits per day worldwide. People aged 18 to 34 will remain 61% of Pornhub's traffic in 2019 (data for consumers under the age of 18 is not provided).



It is crucial to acknowledge that explicit content seldom depicts safe sex practices and operates within a broader sociocultural framework where gender stereotypes, sexism, sexual objectification, and violence-supportive attitudes are prevalent. Given that many children and young individuals are either inadvertently exposed to pornography or actively seek it out, this content undeniably plays a role in shaping attitudes, norms and expectations about sex, bodies, and relationships. Additionally, it influences sexual behaviours.

Digital spaces present a significant opportunity for young people to acquire knowledge about sexuality, encompassing both educational and entertainment content. Nevertheless, similar to offline environments, stigmatisation, bullying, and coercion, including sexual and gender-based violence, can occur. In the pursuit of maximising the potential of digital spaces for delivering comprehensive sexual and reproductive health education to young people, here are some recommendations to steer future efforts:

**Provide young people with empowering, evidence-based, gender-transformative, and positive digital sexuality education** that aligns with their digital preferences. Research indicates that many young individuals seek information about various aspects, including pleasure.

**Enable young people, including marginalised communities, to take the lead, provide advice, and influence content and services related to digital spaces.** Young people, who generally utilise digital platforms more frequently than older demographics, possess the aptitude and proficiency to leverage the social and technical opportunities presented by these spaces for innovative knowledge creation and sharing.

**Digital and non-digital approaches can work together to enhance sexuality education initiatives.** Digital sexuality education, even when integrated into school-based programs, is often perceived as enjoyable. Young people tend to seamlessly navigate between the physical and virtual realms, living out their relationships in both spheres. Therefore, education in both settings can effectively address this integration.

**Address cyberbullying, sexual and gender-based violence in digital spaces.** It requires understanding inequalities and risks among young people of various genders and contexts, challenging gender stereotypes in sexuality education and promoting inclusivity for LGBTI individuals and marginalised groups online. Thus, it is possible to enhance online safety and utilise digital platforms to mobilise against violence.

*Pornhub Insights: The year 2019 in review:* [LINK](#)

*C. Hesse, C.L. Pedersen: Porn Sex Versus Real Sex: How Sexually Explicit Material Shapes Our Understanding of Sexual Anatomy, Physiology, and Behaviour:* [LINK](#)

*UNESCO Digital Library: Comprehensive sexuality education country profiles:* [LINK](#)



## Promoting Healthy Relationships

In **healthy relationships**, mutual respect prevails and each person trusts and offers support while also respecting each other's independence. Individuals within these relationships communicate openly and honestly, sharing decision-making power and control.

In contrast, an **unhealthy relationship** is characterised by an imbalance of power where one partner seeks to exert control over the other. Physical violence between dating partners (intimate partner violence) and sexual dating violence (sexual assault and reproductive and sexual coercion) are frequently observed in adolescent relationships. Additionally, adolescents and young adults often encounter widespread issues related to misogyny and sexual harassment, such as "catcalling", touching without permission and insulting with sexualized words.

### Healthy Relationships

**Equality** – Partners share decisions and responsibilities. They discuss roles to make sure they are fair and equal.

**Honesty** – Partners share their dreams, fears, and concerns with each other. They tell each other how they feel and share important information.

**Physical safety** – Partners feel physically safe in the relationship and respect each other's space.

**Respect** – Partners treat each other like they want to be treated and accept each other's opinions, friends, and interests. They listen to each other.

**Comfort** – Partners feel safe with each other and respect each other's differences. They realise when they are wrong and are not afraid to say, "I am sorry." Partners can be themselves with each other.

**Sexual respectfulness** – Partners never force sexual activity or insist on doing something that the other is not comfortable with.

**Independence** – Neither partner is dependent upon the other for an identity. Partners maintain friendships outside of the relationship. Either partner has the right to end the relationship.

**Humour** – The relationship is enjoyable for both partners. Partners laugh and have fun.

*S. Jolly, P. Oosterhoff, B. Faith, D. Braeken, K. Shephard: Sexuality education for young people in digital spaces: [LINK](#)*



## Unhealthy Relationships

**Control** – One partner makes all the decisions and tells the other what to do or tells the other person what to wear or who to spend time with.

**Dishonesty** – One partner lies to or keeps information from the other. One partner steal from the other.

**Physical abuse** – One partner uses force to get his or her way (for example, hitting, slapping, grabbing, shoving).

**Disrespect** – One partner makes fun of the opinions and interests of the other partner. He or she may destroy something that belongs to the other partner.

**Intimidation** – One partner tries to control every aspect of the other’s life. One partner may attempt to keep the other from friends and family or threaten violence or a break-up.

**Sexual abuse** – One partner pressure or forces the other into sexual activity against his or her will without his or her consent.

**Dependence** – One partner feels that he or she “cannot live without” the other. He or she may threaten to do something drastic if the relationship ends.

**Hostility** – One partner may “walk on eggshells” to avoid upsetting the other. Teasing is mean-spirited.

If you suspect that someone is involved in an abusive relationship, consider taking the following steps:

**Express Concern:** Talk to the young people about your worry for their safety. Emphasise that what’s happening is not “normal,” and point out that everyone deserves a safe and healthy relationship. After consulting with the young people’s parents, offer to connect them with a professional, such as a counsellor or attorney, who can provide confidential assistance.

**Be Supportive:** Show your support and understanding, making it clear that you are on their side. Offer information and non-judgmental support and convey that the situation is not their fault – no one “deserves” to be abused. Make it explicit that you do not blame them and respect their choices.

**Believe and Validate:** It is important to believe and take the experiences seriously. Young people may be hesitant to share their situation out of fear that no one will believe them. By validating their feelings and demonstrating support, they may become more comfortable and trust you with additional information. Avoid minimising their situation based on their age, inexperience, or the duration of their relationship.



**Safety Planning:** Recognize that one of the most perilous times in an abusive relationship is when the victim decides to leave – help them to develop a safety plan. Offer strong support during this period and attempt to connect the young people with support groups or professionals who can assist in keeping them safe.

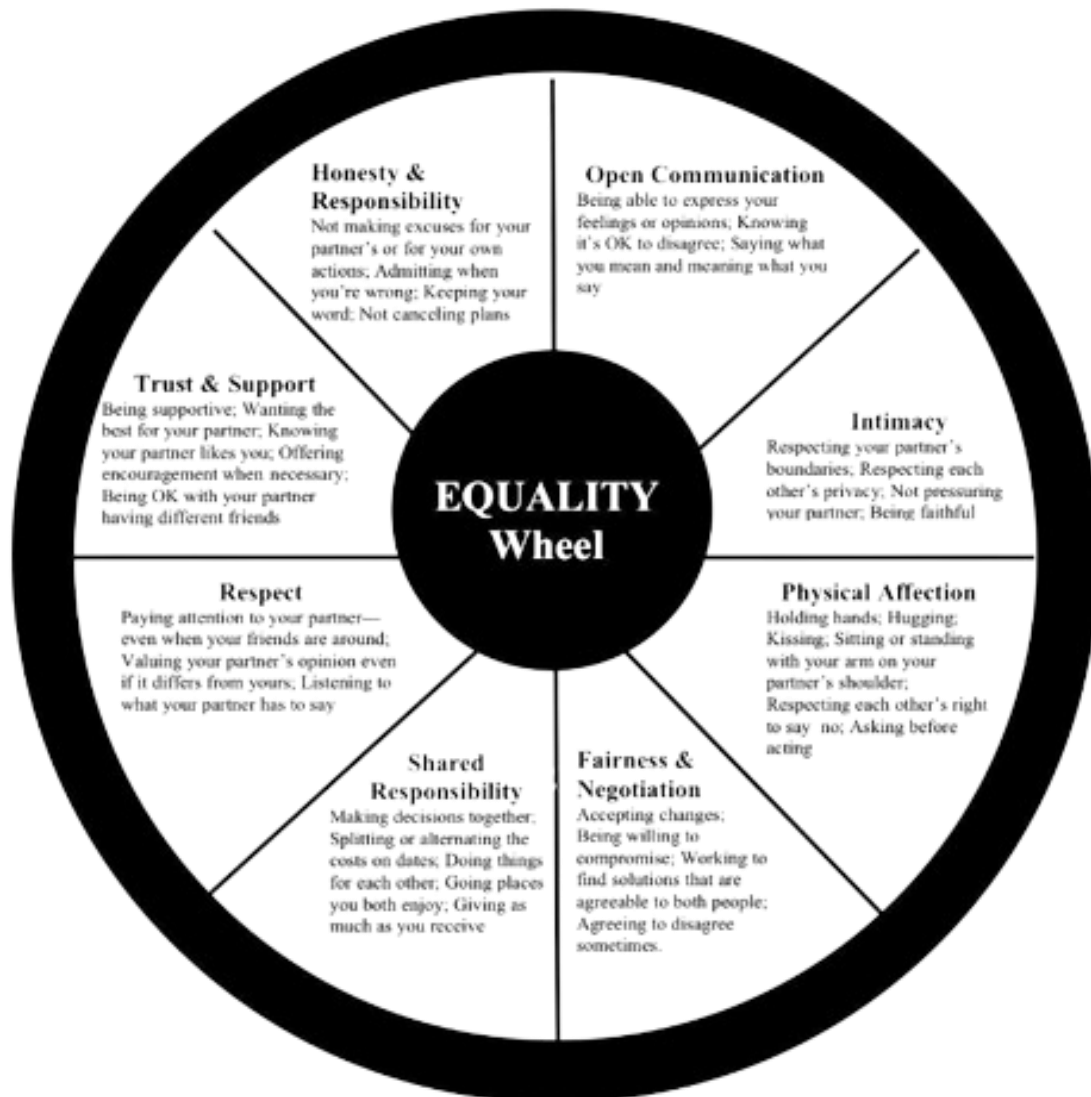
**Empower their Decision:** Keep in mind that young people must ultimately make the choice to leave the relationship. There are various complex reasons why victims remain in unhealthy relationships. Your support can play a pivotal role in helping the young people find their own path to end the unhealthy relationship.

The Power and Control Wheel was created in the early 1980s in Duluth, Minnesota, by the staff of the Domestic Abuse Intervention Project (DAIP). This tool visually illustrates patterns of power and control within violent relationships. It is important to highlight that both men and women can assume the role of aggressors in an intimate relationship.

*Healthy Relationship Educators Toolkit:* [LINK](#)

*RAFT: Trading the Power and Control Wheel for Equality Wheel:* [LINK](#)

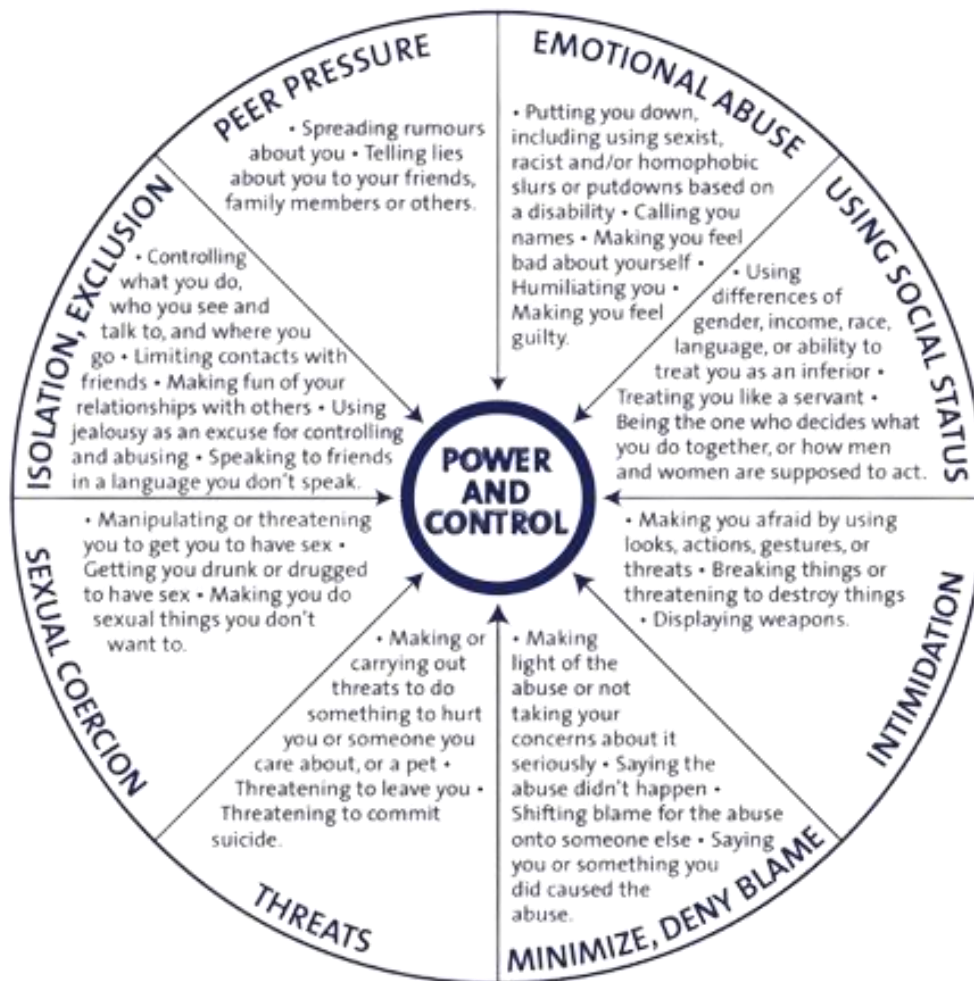




Shortly afterward, the same group devised the Equality Wheel, enabling both women and men to discern the distinctions between a violent relationship and one characterized by healthy and supportive dynamics. The Equality Wheel was specifically crafted to illustrate the necessary transformations for shifting a relationship from an abusive dynamic to a non-violent and healthy one.









## References

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