

FAITH-FRAMED MESSAGING GUIDE



FAITH-FRAMED MESSAGING GUIDE

Religious and faith leaders are uniquely positioned to offer support for comprehensive sexuality education based on the privileged position that they hold within communities. This position should not be taken lightly and can make a difference in whether a community accepts or rejects CSE implementation.

This is because of the advantaged positions and social status within communities that religious leaders hold. These platforms should be used to provide accurate and informed CSE information that is guided by their values and beliefs which will in turn mainstream the right teachings in various sexual health topics for adolescents and youth.

This guide gives religious and faith leaders and faith-based communicators short, ready counter-messages that respond to the most common objections without importing language that feels foreign to their own traditions and culture. It draws its authority from values that faith communities already hold such as protection of the young, the dignity of every person, and shared responsibility between parents, congregations, schools, and the state.

The aim is to support relevant initiatives that empower adolescents to live healthy lives and have respectful relationships.

Remember the core narrative used throughout the Stakeholder Engagement Toolkit:

 CSE **protects** young people so that they can grow up **healthy, safe** and **equipped** to build strong families and communities **reflecting the very values** of care, protection and responsibility that families, faiths and traditions already hold.

This guide is a companion to two related documents produced alongside it:

- 01 A Theological Response Brief, which sets out fuller, claim-by-claim theological responses; and**
- 02 A set of Talking Points for Faith Leaders for public advocacy.**

When engaging in faith framed messaging, the following strategies or considerations are useful:

PART ONE

Always focus on ensuring that you clearly communicate the **three shared values of protection, dignity and shared responsibility** in response to any counter messaging that may arise.

UNESCO's International Technical Guidance on Sexuality Education states that CSE aims to:

Help learners “realise their health, well-being and **dignity**

Develop **respectful** social and sexual relationships

Consider how their choices **affect** their own well-being and that of others

Understand and ensure the **protection** of their rights throughout their lives

The three values below map directly onto that aim, and onto language already used within existing briefing materials.

PROTECTION

CSE's own framing is protective

It exists to help children recognise abuse, coercion and exploitation, and to know what to do when they encounter them.

Faith-anchored counter-message

When children are given the right information by trusted teachers and leaders, they are able to **protect themselves** and learn how to make **informed decisions**.

Age-appropriate CSE teachings gives a child the words to **name abuse, refuse coercion, and report it**.

Protection is an **active duty** shared by every adult in a child's life. Guiding and teaching children as they grow is how they learn to recognise harm and stay safe. CSE supports adults in carrying out that duty, rather than taking it from them.

Scriptural anchor

Christianity: Proverbs 22:6 requires us to train up a child in the way they should go. This frames raising a child as active guidance, not passivity. Protecting a child means preparing them and giving them the understanding to recognise harm and respond safely. CSE supports that preparation.

Islam: Qur'an 6:151 (Surah Al-An'am) affirms the sacredness of a child's life and the duty of adults to honour and protect those in their care. Protection of this kind is active, not passive. It means guiding and teaching children as they grow so they can recognise harm and stay safe. CSE supports adults in carrying out that duty.

DIGNITY

Dignity is foundational to many faiths, which teach that every person's worth is inherent, not earned. CSE is, at its core, about that same dignity. It affirms that young people are worthy of respect and equips them to extend respect for others dignity.

A faith leader can support age-appropriate CSE, including its content on consent, non-violence and non-discrimination, while continuing to teach their own tradition's position on marriage and sexual ethics.

Faith-anchored counter-message

Every young person **carries inherent worth** from the moment they are created, a conviction that many faiths share.

Dignity is not protected by silence; it is **protected by knowledge**. That knowledge lets a young person treat others with respect and enables them to recognise when their dignity is being violated.

Faith leaders do not need to resolve theological debates in order to support a **child's right to safety, information, and respect**. The Faith to Action Network's own position affirms that "the dignity and psychological and physical integrity of each person should be protected," while being explicit that theological views on sexual diversity remain genuinely contested within and across our traditions.

Scriptural anchor

Christianity: Psalm 139:14 affirms that every person carries inherent, sacred worth. If that worth is inherent, protecting it means ensuring young people can recognise when it is being violated. CSE serves that dignity rather than diminishing it.

Islam: Qur'an 17:70 (Surah Al-Isra) teaches that human beings have been honoured and given inherent dignity. If that dignity is inherent, protecting it means ensuring young people can recognise when it is being violated, through abuse, coercion or exploitation, and respond. CSE serves that dignity rather than diminishing it.



LEARNING AND KNOWLEDGE

Knowledge itself is honoured in faith traditions. CSE offers access to knowledge and information to enable accurate understandings so young people can make wise and responsible choices.

Faith-anchored counter-message

Faith traditions call believers to **actively seek knowledge and understanding**. Equipping young people with accurate information is part of that calling. It is a lack of knowledge, not knowledge itself, that leaves young people vulnerable. CSE offers understanding that helps them make wise and responsible choices.

Knowledge is honoured, not feared. Giving young people accurate understanding equips them to make safe, informed decisions and to protect themselves.

Scriptural anchor

Christianity: Proverbs 4:7 calls believers to seek wisdom and understanding. If we are called to pursue understanding, then equipping young people with accurate knowledge is part of that calling. CSE offers knowledge that helps them make wise and responsible choices, rather than leaving them unprepared.

Islam: Qur'an 96:1–5 (Surah Al-'Alaq), teaches the value of reading and humanity being taught what it did not yet know. Knowledge here is therefore honoured, not feared. CSE extends that same principle, giving young people accurate understanding so they can make safe and informed decisions, rather than leaving them in ignorance.

RESPONSIBILITY

CSE should not seek to replace or challenge the role of parents or faith communities as they are an integral part of ensuring its consistent enforcement and uptake. CSE is designed to reinforce the roles and responsibilities of adults.

Faith-anchored counter-message

Both tradition and culture places **parents** first in the role of guiding their children. CSE's own design reinforces, rather than replaces, that responsibility, and asks faith leaders, who are already among the first moral leaders of children and adolescents, to reinforce it further, not to step aside.

Faith leaders are key stakeholders in every credible CSE framework, including the UNESCO technical guidance and national frameworks in all three countries. Where consultation has been thin, that is a legitimate gap to raise; it is a reason to ask for a seat at the table, not a reason to reject the content itself.

Scriptural anchor

Christianity: Proverbs 4:7 frames raising children as an active, ongoing responsibility. CSE supports parents and faith leaders in carrying out this responsibility, rather than taking it over.

Islam: Qur'an 66:6 frames the responsibility to protect, care, and guide one's family as a serious duty. That duty is exercised, not surrendered, when adults guide young people toward safety. CSE works alongside parents and faith leaders in carrying it out.

PART TWO

Ensure that your messaging includes **country specific references and information**, including the **correct use of terminology and language**. Religious and faith-based leaders should understand where the implementation and roll out of CSE within schools and other spaces currently stands and ensure that they are part of policy formulation where possible.

Uganda

Uganda's National Sexuality Education Framework was launched in 2018 into an environment already shaped by a 2016 national controversy over claims that foreign-linked curricula were teaching children concepts foreign to Ugandan values and culture. The then Minister of Education explicitly rejected the term "Comprehensive Sexuality Education" in favour of a more familiar term, "sexuality education," and a coalition of Catholic, Anglican, and Muslim leaders, whose institutions oversee the majority of primary and secondary schools, rejected the National Sexuality Education Framework outright. Therefore, in this context, avoid leading with the words "comprehensive sexuality education" in public messaging, rather use "age-appropriate sexuality education" or the Framework's own language, and anchor every message in the shared commitment to "God-fearing" values that the Framework itself claims to uphold. The Framework starts off by acknowledging the "significant sexual and reproductive health challenges" such as high cases of teenage pregnancy, early marriages, HIV and gender based violence in schools. Therefore, religious leaders may also lead with these issues that Ugandan society can attempt to solve together with age appropriate and culturally sensitive CSE.

Malawi

CSE is delivered in Malawi mainly through Life Skills Education (LSE) in primary schools. The Ministry of Education, Science and Technology (MoEST) in Malawi introduced the LSE programme in 2002 and by 2004 it was made a compulsory subject in primary schools. UNESCO's situational analysis of LSE delivery found that content varies significantly from classroom to classroom, with some teachers omitting topics to align with their personal religious beliefs, and recommends stronger partnership with religious and community leaders as the main route to more consistent delivery. In Malawi, the practical entry point for faith leaders is therefore less about contesting the curriculum's existence and more about ensuring their own congregations, and the teachers who are members of their congregations, receive accurate briefing on what LSE actually contains. It can be useful for Religious Leaders to first have a solid understanding of what CSE entails and how it is implemented in their specific country.



Ethiopia

CSE is referred to as “Sexual education” “AIDS education” or “life-skills education” in Ethiopia. Ethiopia has the least established formal legal landscape governing the implementation of CSE of the three countries even though it faces steep challenges with stigma and misinformation surrounding CSE. Therefore, CSE messaging within Ethiopia should be grounded in fact and religious leaders should ensure that they are part of policy formulation at an early stage.

Module 1 and 2 of the Stakeholder Engagement Toolkit has some useful information and additional resources for this purpose. In addition to the [Digital Platform](#) developed for this specific purpose.

PART THREE

Make use of existing resources mentioned at the outset of this guide for specific content and activities related to CSE discussion groups and dialogues.

These include:

(click on the image to access)

- The Faith to Action Network’s [Religious Values, Beliefs and Teachings on Comprehensive Sexuality Education](#) (2023/2024) and [Interfaith Dialogue Guide on Adolescence Sexual and Reproductive Health and Rights \(ASRHR\)](#)
- The UNESCO Regional Office for Southern Africa and INERELA Religious Leaders’ [Toolkit on Sexual and Reproductive Health and Rights](#) (2021)

