Creating Connections

Sexual and reproductive health & gender rights education

Joint session for parents and adolescents

Creating Connections is a parent and adolescent education program. This version of the program brings together activities that have been developed for a range of countries in the Asia Pacific region.
Creating Connections: Sexual and reproductive health and gender rights education for adolescents and parents. Joint session for adolescents and parents

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Welcome to Creating Connections

Education programs can help to promote sexual health, reduce violence, and build resilience in adolescents and young people. However, social and cultural conditions can work against open dialogue about sensitive issues. Creating Connections aims to address this challenge by using an evidence-based and theoretically-informed approach to provide participants with the confidence, knowledge and skills that they need to talk about social, mental, physical and sexual health issues.

Creating Connections is a comprehensive life-skills based education program targeted at adolescents and parents of adolescents. In the adolescent program, learning activities are designed to build knowledge and skills that enable adolescents to make well-informed, healthy and respectful choices about sexuality and relationships. It includes a focus on building personal resilience and also on providing support to peers. The adult program, aims to ensure that parents are well-informed about sexual and reproductive health, and rights. It includes activities designed to build parents’ skills and confidence to talk to partners and children about gender and sexual and reproductive health.

Areas of focus include sexual and reproductive health, understanding gender and gender rights, respectful relationships, help-seeking, peer support, violence prevention, positive coping, and self-care. Each session builds on the next and all sessions involve a combination of knowledge building, critical thinking and skills practice. The theme of friendship and peer support is reinforced throughout.

The session outline provided in this manual is designed to bring parents and adolescents together to build connections and intergenerational dialogue following their earlier experiences in the adult or adolescent program. The activities in this session explore pressures, choices and strategies in relation to gender, sex and relationships. They aim to build comfort and confidence in talking about sex, relationships and gender rights. The session is designed to be delivered following the delivery of the parent and adolescent core programs, and may be co-facilitated by the participants as a way of sharing their previous learning.

Creating Connections materials available for download:

- Creating Connections Introduction & Facilitator Tips
- Creating Connections for Adolescents (Core Sessions)
- Creating Connections for Adolescents (Optional Sessions)
- Creating Connections for Parents
- Creating Connections Joint Adolescent & Parent Session
Running the joint parent-adolescent session

This ‘talking together’ session outline is provided to bring parents and young people together. It can also be used to bring single sex groups together. You may prefer to design your own agenda for this session, selecting from suitable activities in either of the programs. If you select your agenda, consider the advice below:

- Ensure that the event provides opportunities for people to interact. Choose a range of activities such as knowledge-based and skills-based activities. Select interactive activities from the range provided in this resource. Avoid lecture-based formats.

- A common temptation is to put too much in the agenda. This leaves little time for interaction amongst the participants and can end up working against your aims. Restrict yourself to a smaller number of activities.

- Some of the activities can be led by the group participants. For example, you may have one activity led by the facilitator, one led by a pair from the parent group and one led by a pair from the adolescent group.
Talking together

Objectives

• To build friendship and support between participants
• To build connections between adolescents and parents
• To build comfort and confidence in talking about gender rights, sex and relationships

Equipment

• Flip chart and markers
• Talk about it cards (copy and cut up one set for each group of 5 or 6) ✂
• Balloons (enough for one balloon per pair)

1. Welcoming participants

1. 5+ minutes

a. Welcome everyone and outline the purpose of the session. Young people and parents have come together to discuss some important issues related to gender, sex and relationships.

b. This session will help to build comfort and confidence to talk about sex, relationships and gender rights. It is also a chance for adolescents and parents to have fun together.

2. Anyone who… game

1. 5+ minutes

c. Explain that the first game will help to highlight the similarities and differences among participants in the group.

d. Seat participants on chairs arranged in a circle (or mark their spots with shoes or paper).

e. The facilitator stands in the centre of the circle. They do not have a chair. They call out ‘Anyone who…’ and add some information (for example: ‘Anyone who likes ice-cream’). When they call the category, all players who fit that category must move to a different chair (all those who like ice-cream must leave their chairs and find a different chair). At this time the leader will rush to a chair and the last person left without a chair will make the next call in the game.

f. The next person will then make a new call. For example, they might say ‘Anyone who rides a bicycle’. Then all those who can ride a bicycle must swap to new seats.

The scissor symbol ✂ indicates that there is a resource that needs to be copied and cut up prior to the session. You will find the resource at the end of the session’s instructions.

A friendly welcome builds a positive group atmosphere. Smile and greet participants so that they feel welcome and comfortable.
g. Play a few rounds of the game. By this time participants will be seated in a mixed arrangement.

h. Ask participants for key messages from the game. Ask: Where in life do we need to be able to recognise and accept that people are different?

*Possible messages:* This game reminds us that we have some things in common, but also there are differences between us. We can treat it as a good thing to have differences. This can encourage the practice of showing respect for difference and protecting the rights of all.

3. **What do we worry about?**

   15+ minutes

a. Group participants into adolescent and parent groups.

b. Provide each group with a flipchart and markers.

c. Ask them to complete a brainstorm which has them thinking about the worries of the opposite group:
   - What do adolescents worry about? (completed by parents)
   - What do parents worry about? (completed by the adolescents)

d. Ask one adolescent group to report back on what they think parents worry about. Invite parents to both add to this list and to point out the suggestions they agree with. Ask a parent group then name the things they think adolescents worry about. Invite the adolescents to comment and add.

e. Point out that the groups may have some good understanding of each other’s worries, but still it can be challenging to talk about them openly. The next activity is designed to mix groups and give a chance to practice talking about some of these things across the generations.

4. **Talk about it**

   20+ minutes

a. Explain that this activity is designed to bring parents and adolescents together to talk about how problems can be addressed.

b. Organise participants into groups of 5 or 6 with a mix of adolescents and parents in each group. Give each group a set of *Talk about it* cards.

c. Ask a volunteer to choose one card from the selection and read it aloud to the group, and then discuss the questions provided. When they have finished one scenario, they should choose another.

d. Ask each group to share one of the scenarios they worked on and the advice they come up with.
5. Practicing communication

20+ minutes

a. Tell the group that they are going to practice communicating by doing some role plays. Everyone will be role playing at once, so there is no need to be shy.

b. Ask participants make parent-adolescent pairs and then sit in two circles, one partner facing in and the other one facing out. Have the younger participants sit on the outside circle and the parents sit on the inside circle.

c. Read out the following scenario:

*An 11 year old son/daughter has heard only a little about puberty but s/he does not know what to expect. One afternoon, the young person decides to ask one of their parents: What happens at puberty?*


d. To start with, ask the younger participants to play the parent and the parents to play the son/daughter. This will give the adolescents a chance to show their knowledge. The person playing the adolescent could start by saying: *I have heard people whispering about changes of growing up – what is going to happen to me when I get to that age of my body changing?*

e. All groups should role play simultaneously. Give one minute and then ask them to swap roles (so that the older participants are now playing the parent and the younger participants are playing the son/daughter).

f. Ask one pair to volunteer to show their role play.

g. Ask other participants to give advice to the son/daughter or to the parent which will assist them to provide a clear and truthful explanation of changes that happen at puberty.

h. Ask the parent what it was like to play the character of the child. (Acknowledge answers which explain that shyness or embarrassment can already make this conversation a challenge.)

i. Ask the younger participants what it was like to play the parent.

j. Before role playing the next scenario, ask all of the people sitting on the outer circle to move one chair to their left (this means they will be working with a new partner).

k. Repeat the process for another scenario:

*A parent is worried about their 17 year old son/daughter. They have been returning from school or work later than usual and the parent is worried they might have started a romantic relationship.*

l. The person playing the father or mother could start by saying: *‘There is something I want to talk to you about…’*

Additional optional role play scenarios:
A parent is worried about their adolescent son/daughter. They have been returning from school or work later than usual and the parent is worried they might have started mixing with the wrong sort of friends.

The person playing the parent could start by saying: ‘There’s something I want to talk to you about…’

A marriage has been arranged for an 18 year old daughter to a man eight years older. The daughter has recently met and fallen in love with a young man who is closer to her age. She does not want to marry the older man.

The person playing the daughter could start by saying: Mother, there’s something I want to talk to you about…’

A son is 20 and he has a girlfriend. He will be marrying soon. He has not had any information about sexual and reproductive health. The father thinks it is important to share some information with him.

The person playing the father could start by saying: ‘Son, there’s something I want to talk to you about…’

A father is worried. His 19 year old son was married six months ago. Recently, when the son and daughter-in-law visited the family, the daughter-in-law looked tired, thin and stressed and had bruises on her face. The father is worried there are problems in the marriage and wants to talk to his son.

The person playing the father could start by saying: ‘Son, there’s something I want to talk to you about…’

A son is to marry soon. He knows his young wife would like to wait for a while before they try to get pregnant. He doesn’t know about family planning or contraception. He decides to ask his father for advice.

The person playing the son could start by saying: ‘Father, there’s something I want to talk to you about…’

A mother is worried. Her 19 year old daughter was married six months ago. Recently, when the daughter visited her mother, she looked tired, thin and stressed and had bruises on her face. The mother is worried there are problems in the marriage.

The person playing the mother could start by saying: ‘Daughter, there’s something I want to talk to you about…’

A 15 year old son is being bullied by older boys at school. Usually they tease and laugh but yesterday they threatened that they wanted to fight him. He doesn’t know what to do.

The person playing the son could start by saying: ‘Father, there’s something I want to talk to you about…’

6. The partners balloon game
a. Organise people into parent-adolescent pairs.
b. Give each pair a balloon and ask them to inflate and knot it.
c. The partners take hold of each other’s hands and stand facing each other. Without letting go of either of their hands they must work together to keep the inflated balloon in the air. They may bat it with their hands, elbows, heads (but may not release their hands).
d. Play for about 5 minutes.
e. Ask for key messages from the game.

Possible messages: Many of the skills needed in this game (e.g. staying close to your partner, communicating with them, staying focussed on the task rather than worrying too much about your own comfort level) are those that are needed if we are to talk together about sensitive or serious issues.
Talk about it cards

Originally developed for Bangladesh
(copy and cut up one set for each group of 5 or 6)

Khan (17) has fallen in love with a girl who is the sister of his best friend. He wants to tell his parents but is afraid they will be angry.

**Should he tell anyone about this? What could he say?**

A mother is worried because she sometimes finds her 17 year old daughter talking and laughing with the nineteen year old boy who lives next door. She is worried that others are noticing and that her daughter will become involved with him.

**Should the mother talk to her daughter about this? What could she say? What else could she do?**

A boy aged 18 has found out that his older cousin is in a group of friends who have talked about visiting sex workers. He does not think that they have been educated about sexually transmitted infections or condoms.

**Should he tell anyone in his family about this? Should he talk with his cousin?**

A young woman is soon to be married. She does not have much knowledge about contraception and is worried that she won’t know what to do. She believes she is not yet ready to have a baby. Her mother has not given her any information.

**Should the daughter talk to her mother about this? What could she say?**
A young man is to be married soon. He has not learnt much about sexual health. He is scared that he won’t know what to do on his marriage night. His friends tell him he should practice with a sex worker. His father has not given him any information.

*Should he talk with his father about this? What could he say?*

Ishita (18) has fallen in love with the older brother of her best friend. She wants to tell her mother but is afraid her mother will be angry.

*Should Ishita talk to her mother about this? What could she say?*

A father is worried about his daughter Lichu who is now 16 and wants to spend time at a girls club with her friends. He is worried that his daughter will be picking up too many modern ideas from the other girls and will lose respect for her parents.

*Should he talk about this? What could he say? Should he stop his daughter from attending the girls club?*

A young girl (14) has just experienced her first menstruation. She does not know what has happened. She wants to ask her mother for advice as she is afraid that there is something wrong with her.

*Should the daughter talk to her mother about this? What could she say?*
The Creating Connections Story

The first Creating Connections curriculum was developed for the Viet Nam Women’s Union in 2006. It was funded by Ford Foundation and developed in partnership with staff from the WARC centre within the Women’s Union. The original proposal for Creating Connections was developed with support from WHO Viet Nam and UNAIDS Viet Nam with the objective to improve the dialogue on sexuality, gender rights and HIV prevention for mothers and adolescent girls in the context of a changing social environment. The Viet Nam version of the program was subsequently expanded to include adolescent boys. The lead author of the Viet Nam materials is Associate Professor Helen Cahill, with contributions from Michelle Pose and Ian Seal and Dr Tu Anh Hoang, Director of the Centre for Creative Initiatives in Population and Health, Viet Nam.

Following promising evaluation results in Viet Nam, in 2010-2011 regional UNICEF and UNFPA offices invested in a refinement of the girls’, boys’ and mothers’ program materials and expansion of the program into several countries. The materials were revised and updated by Associate Professor Helen Cahill and Sally Beadle. Technical advice was provided by Dr. Josephine Sauvarin (UNFPA Asia Pacific Regional Office), Justine Sass (UNESCO Bangkok) and Margaret Sheehan (UNICEF East Asia Pacific Regional Office). Input from Bangladesh, Cambodia, Laos, Myanmar, Nepal and Indonesia has further enriched the programs for girls, boys and women, via country-based versions of the curriculum. The program was translated into Cambodian, Laotian, Nepalese, Bengali and Myanmar languages.

In 2012, with support from UNICEF Indonesia, Creating Connections was adapted by Helen Cahill and Sally Beadle for implementation in Papua Province as part of the Joint UN initiative Combating violence against women and girls in Papua Province, Indonesia. Programs were developed for adolescent girls, adolescent boys, mothers and fathers. The program was renamed Membangun Masyarakat Tangguh (Building Strong Communities) for this context. Technical advice for this adaptation was provided by Dwirutari Tamanbali (UNICEF), Adolfine Krisifu (UNICEF), Gracia Augusta (UNICEF), Nancy Wompere (Cenderawasih University) and Andy Wally (Cenderawasih University).

In 2012, UNESCO supported the adaptation and implementation of Creating Connections in Myanmar and Cambodia.

In 2013, together with members of the Adolescent Cluster, UNICEF Bangladesh and partners supported a program adaptation, train the trainer and dissemination of the program in Bangladesh. Program adaptation and implementation support was provided by Helen Cahill and Sally Beadle. In 2014, UNICEF Bangladesh supported a similar adaptation for the boys’ and fathers’ programs. Revisions were made by Helen Cahill and Sally Beadle, with assistance from Sarah Natali Soysa and Rosie Yasmin. Technical advice and feedback on this adaptation was provided by Luna Shaila (UNICEF), Parveen Rashida (BRAC), the Ministry of Women and Children Affairs and members of the Adolescent Cluster.

In 2014, UNESCO China commissioned Helen Cahill to adapt and implement the Creating Connections for parents of adolescents. As of 2016, the program has been implemented in 12 provinces and cities across China. Technical advice on this adaptation was provided by Hongyan Li (UNESCO).

In 2014, UNICEF Philippines supported an adaptation of the program for adolescents (mixed groups). Rewriting, extension and implementation support was provided by Helen Cahill and Sally Beadle. Technical advice and feedback on this adaptation was provided by Emma Brathwaite (UNICEF), Ced Apilado (UNICEF), Jordan Chaffin (UNICEF), Aladin Borja (UNICEF), Arlene Aragones (UNICEF), Scheree Herrera (UNICEF) and representatives from the Department of Social Welfare and Development, the Department of Health and the Commission on Population.