

# BREAKING THE SILENCE

## Making Comprehensive Sexuality Education accessible to Adolescents and Young People with Disabilities

### Introduction

The Breaking the Silence (BtS) approach to Comprehensive Sexuality Education (CSE) aims to make CSE accessible to learners with disabilities in and out of schools. Developed in South Africa, [19, 20] Breaking the Silence (BtS) draws on group-based, interactive learning methods alongside a whole school approach to empower educators with the confidence, skills and tools to deliver comprehensive sexuality education to all learners.

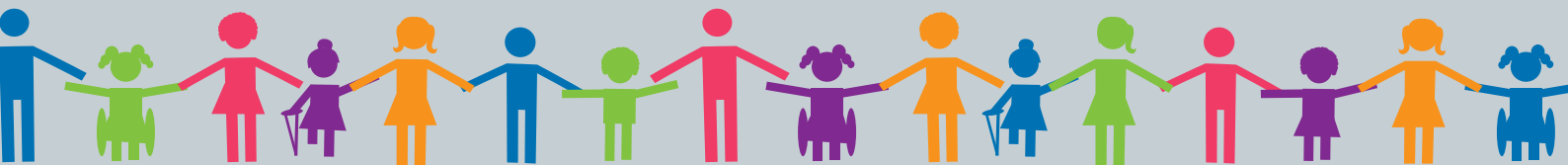


Figure 1: Example of pictures resource identifying relationships and types of touch

### Background

Adolescents and young people with disabilities have the same sexual and reproductive health and rights (SRHR) needs as their peers without disabilities [1, 24, 25]. While all adolescents and young people may experience attitudinal and structural barriers to comprehensive sexuality education (CSE), those with disabilities experience additional exclusion [2-8]. As a result young people with disabilities lack knowledge about sexuality, sexual transmitted diseases such as HIV and safer sexual practices and the skills to enjoy their sexual reproductive rights on an equal basis with others [3, 9-11, 24, 25].

It is well recognised that people with disabilities are at increased risk of violence (sexual, physical, emotional, psychological) [12-14]. In low and middle income countries women and girls with disabilities are even more vulnerable, especially to intimate partner violence (IPV) as they are 2-4 times more likely to experience IPV than their peers without disabilities [15]. The low knowledge and skills and high prevalence of violence against women and girls with disabilities emphasise the acute need for prevention interventions for this group [14, 16, 17].



## Background (continued)

Research has shown that educators are likely to take a risk-focused approach to sexuality education of learners with disabilities aiming to prevent all sexual activity and exposure to sexual violence or exploitation, but fail to acknowledge positive aspects of sexuality and relationships. Restrictive cultural norms, lack of materials,

skills, knowledge and self-confidence hinder educators to implement comprehensive sexuality education with learners with disabilities [5, 17, 18]. Hence, educators in and out of schools need support and training to address these barriers [24, 25].

## What is the Breaking the Silence approach?

The BtS approach to CSE is ideally implemented as a whole school or whole community intervention that integrates a number of supportive programmes (such as educator training and support, parent-support groups and peer-supported education and links to sexual and reproductive health and gender based violence services). The central pillar is a three-day educator training programme that aims to:

1. Engage educators to **understand how negative attitudes and social norms [17, 18, 20, 21] negatively impact the sexual health** of learners with disabilities.

2. Advance educators **facilitation skills and confidence** to use participatory and interactive learning methods essential to comprehensive sexuality education.
3. Offer a **structured curriculum aligned to the UN Technical Guidelines on Comprehensive Sexuality Education [22]** and its eight key concepts of comprehensive sexuality education.<sup>1</sup>
4. Provide structured lesson plan, visual resources and disability adaptations to support the implementation in the classroom and beyond (e.g. parents, peer education).



Figure 2: Picture story explaining menstruation management to learners with intellectual disabilities or those who are deaf (Johns 2020)

## What is included in Breaking the Silence approach to CSE for young people with disabilities?

The **Comprehensive Guide** provides background information about the intersection between disability and sexual and reproductive health and rights and builds a framework for CSE implementation.

The **Lesson Plans** provide the recipe for classroom or community based implementation of core CSE content with step by step instructions and resources to support each lesson, ending with key messages to be reinforced.

The practical activities contained in the lesson plans support participatory learning as a foundational tool for CSE. Learning objectives for these activities target **knowledge, attitudes and skills** so that learners:

- Gain accurate, **evidence-based information about sexuality** and sexual health.
- Explore **how values and attitudes can impact sexual decision making** and sexual health rights.
- **Identify their rights** and particularly their right to information and sexual and reproductive health.

<sup>1</sup> UNESCO (2018) Key concepts for comprehensive sexuality education: Relationships; Values, Rights, Culture and Sexuality; Understanding Gender; Violence and Staying Safe; Skills for Health and Well-being; The Human Body and Development; Sexuality and Sexual Behaviors; Sexual and Reproductive Health).



- **Practice the communication, problem solving and other life skills** essential to putting knowledge into practice.
- Highlight when related SRH or other support services are available per thematic topic to support health and wellbeing

The BtS lesson plans include **visual resources** to communicate about; body parts, sexual development, body changes, emotions, and consenting and non-

consenting touch. The pictures and stories help to depersonalize sensitive themes and allow educators to assess the learners' understanding through their engagement with the pictures. The Comprehensive Guide and Lesson Plans also include instructions on **how to develop and adapt activities and resources for various disabilities, including for the blind, (based on tactile and verbal information)** and consider how resources can be sourced from low cost materials.

## Which age and disability groups are targeted?

The BtS approach can be used in inclusive and special settings and provides adaptations to accommodate learners with different disability types. The educator manual identifies these adaptations for visual, hearing, emotional, behavioural, physical and intellectual disabilities. Content is also adapted to developmental stages of the learners. However, it is up to the educator to match lessons content to their learners age, stage of development and cognitive ability. In general:

- **Lessons 1-6** are suitable for all age learners and focus on understanding emotions, relationships, body parts and rights.
- **Lessons 7-9** are intended for prepubescent learners but is also relevant to older learners in learning about sexual development and sexual feelings.
- **Lessons 10-15** focus on equal relationships and safer sexual behaviour, STI and HIV prevention and are suitable for teenage learners and young adults.

## How is Breaking the Silence experienced by educators?

In a formative evaluation of BtS educators indicated that the training and materials increased their skills and confidence to provide sexuality education to learners with disabilities. It also shifted educators' perspectives on sexuality and disability by demonstrating the importance of teaching assertiveness, choices and values as well as sexual development to learners with disabilities.

Teachers felt empowered to provide sexuality education in accessible and appropriate formats as well as to address sexual abuse and engage with community stakeholders, colleagues and parents.

*"I will be able to change the mind set of educators and parents about sexuality education toward learners with disabilities."*

Participant in Breaking the Silence workshop

*"The games and teaching aids will help me to implement sexuality education in learners with intellectual disability."*

Participant in Breaking the Silence workshop

## How can you access Breaking the Silence training and tools?

BtS can only be implemented by trained educators. Hence, you will have to organize a BtS training at your school or organisation. In this training participants will be provided with the comprehensive guide and lesson plans. For further information you can contact:

**Jill Hanass-Hancock:** [Jillhanass@gmail.com](mailto:Jillhanass@gmail.com) .

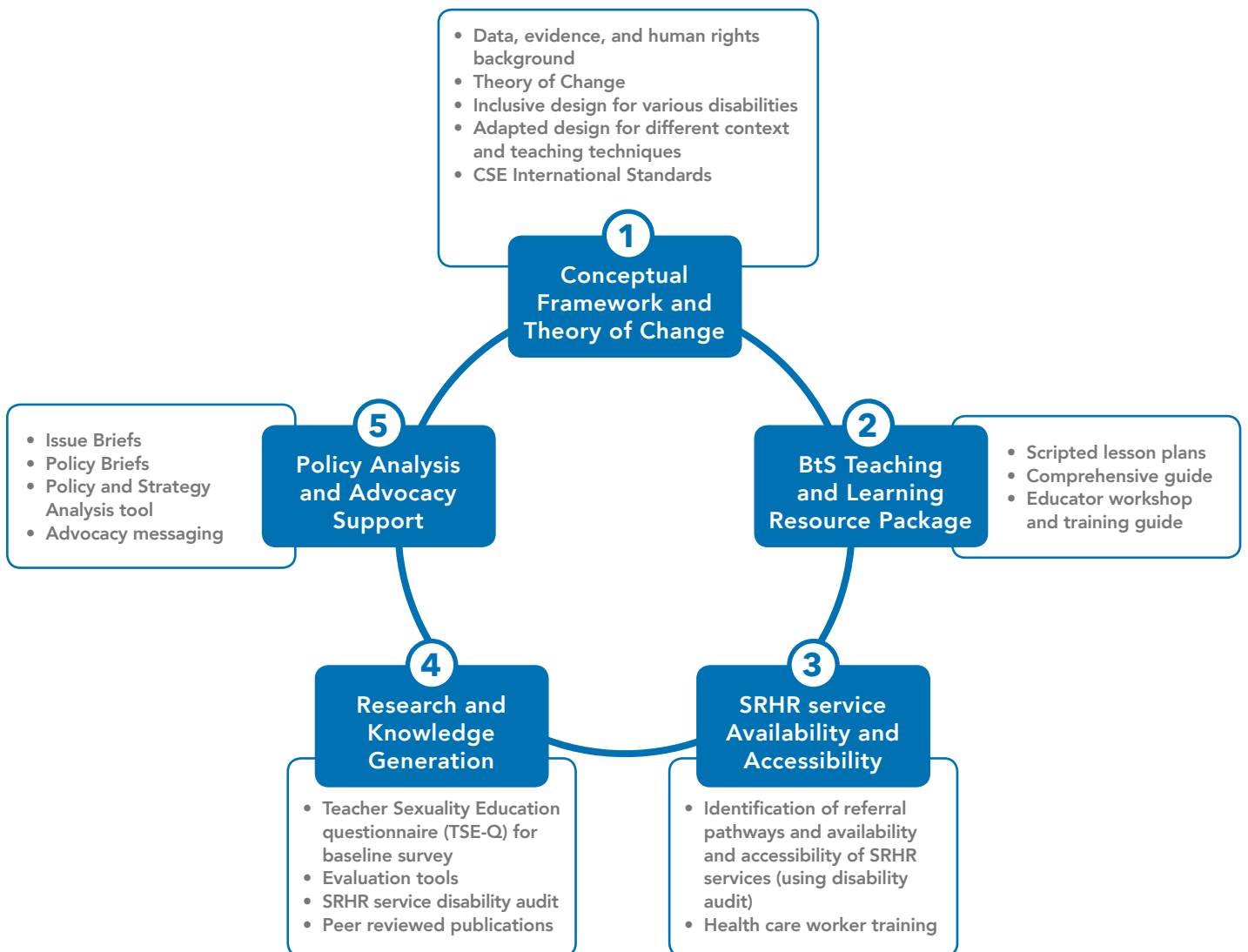
**Maria Bakaroudis:** Comprehensive Sexuality Education Specialist & Disability Focal Point, UNFPA East and Southern Africa Regional Office (ESARO), [bakaroudis@unfpa.org](mailto:bakaroudis@unfpa.org)



# Breaking the Silence (BtS) Comprehensive Sexuality Education approach for young people with disabilities

The 'Breaking the Silence' (BtS) approach Comprehensive Sexuality Education (CSE) component is an evidence-based curriculum-implementation approach targeting the delivery of CSE, parenting support, and community engagement for learners with disabilities in and out of schools. It draws on social learning theory utilizing group-based learning through participatory methods and a whole school and community view to capacity building of educators, inclusive of parent, peer and community support. The BtS CSE approach implements the principals of universal design and reasonable accommodation and its tools and material suggestions are suitable for well-resourced and resource poor settings.

Recognizing that the training and resource materials for educators is not enough to ensure quality implementation, other inter-related pillars and strategies form essential components of the overall BtS approach. These 5 components together aim to create the conducive policy and learning environment for CSE implementation in and out of schools and comprise of: 1) conceptual framework and theory of change 2) the BtS teaching and learning resources package (a. scripted lesson plans, b. comprehensive resource guide with teaching tools, and c. educator workshop & training guide) 3) referrals to SRHR, GBV, and other psycho-social services and support for YPWD and their parents and carers 4) research and knowledge generation 5) policy and advocacy.



# BtS Teaching and Learning Resource Package

## Comprehensive Guide

### Guide includes

- **evidence** on the needs and barriers to CSE for learners with disabilities
- **full guide** on CSE including legal, conceptual and practical guidance
- description of **facilitation skills** and participatory methods
- descriptions of **disability adaptations** (universal access to learning and disability accomodation)
- **instructions** for development of tools from low cost materials
- support to develop **school policies, regulations, parent** invovlement etc

## Scripted Lesson Plans

### Lesson plans include:

- **summary** of comprehensive guide
- **essential scripted lesson plans** using games, activities and worksheets
- **lessons activities** with related visual tools, translations for Braille and description of tactile and low cost adaptations

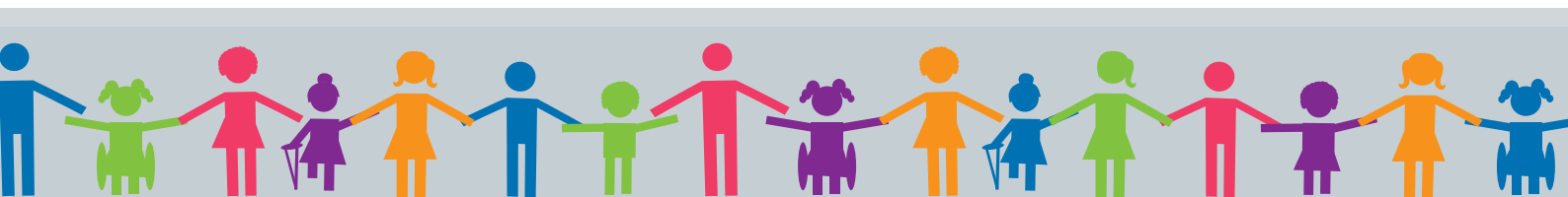
## Educator Workshop and Train the Trainer Guide

### Educator training includes:

- 3-4 day workshop
- provison of guide, toolkit and lesson plans
- upcoming online training videos

### Train the trainer approach includes:

- facilitator manual
- facilitator training
- mentoring support



## Acknowledgements

The development of Breaking the Silence would not have been possible without the input from key stakeholders, organizations and individuals.

### We would like to thank the following organizations:

The Quadpara Association KZN (QAK) and the KZN Department of Education in South African for raising the issue of sexuality education for adolescents and young people with disabilities and supporting us during the development of the Breaking the Silence approach.

The Western Cape Forum for Intellectual Disability (WCFID) for their work around sexuality education for children and adults with intellectual disability, which informed the development of the Breaking the Silence comprehensive guide. Many of the visual resources used in Breaking the Silence were made available from WCFID.

Swedish SIDA and HEARD for funding the pilot study that informed the development of the BtS Comprehensive Resource Guide.

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Finally, we acknowledge the contributions of all the teachers, members of school management, community based facilitators, parents and carers, and most importantly young people with disabilities that underwent piloting, provided recommendations, and courageously shared their realities to make the BtS approach as relevant and helpful as possible.

## Dedication

### Breaking the Silence is dedicated to the late Dr Paul Chappell.



Dr Paul Chappell

Paul was an inspiration during the development of the Breaking the Silence approach. He was an experienced facilitator and developed many innovative ideas captured in the BtS approach and co-authored the BtS Comprehensive Guide.

Being a pioneer of disability and sexuality research in Africa, and as a person with disability he always reminded us that the provision of comprehensive sexuality education to young people with disabilities should not be driven by a risk-reduction model.

He promoted a vision of enabling people with disabilities to enjoy their sexual and reproductive health rights on an equal basis with others and claim the pleasurable and self-fulfilling aspects of sexuality no matter their disability, sexual orientation or gender identity. Paul championed the self-determination and active involvement of young people with disabilities as peer-support educators.

We hope that facilitators of Breaking the Silence will keep Paul's spirit alive, and ensure that young people with disabilities are taught about their bodies and rights, given opportunities to be leaders, are enabled to protect themselves and enjoy positive sexual experiences.



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[www.samrc.ac.za/intramural-research-units/breaking-silence](http://www.samrc.ac.za/intramural-research-units/breaking-silence)



'Sexuality is often the source of our deepest oppression; it is also often the source of our deepest pain. It's easier for us to talk about – and formulate strategies for changing – discrimination in employment, education, and housing than to talk about our exclusion from sexuality and reproduction'.

- Ann Finger "Forbidden Fruit" (New Internationalist, 1992)

# BREAKING THE SILENCE

An evidence-based approach to Life skills based Comprehensive Sexuality Education for young people with disabilities.

The South African Curriculum tells us what needs to be covered in Comprehensive Sexuality Education. Breaking the Silence tells us how to make this accessible to learners with disabilities. Breaking the Silence provides educators with the skills, approaches and tools to deliver Comprehensive Sexuality Education in the classroom or out of school settings.

**Breaking the Silence focuses on making learning accessible through:**

- A structured curriculum that supports learning areas in the Life Orientation curriculum and covers the core learning concepts in the UN Technical Guidance on Comprehensive Sexuality Education
- Visual resources and adaptations for different disability types
- Group-based active learning
- A whole school approach

For more information, please visit:

[www.samrc.ac.za/intramural-research-units/breaking-silence](http://www.samrc.ac.za/intramural-research-units/breaking-silence)

“CSE IS HERE TO STAY. It is important for teachers to be informed about sexuality education & to engage with all topics. It is also important to get parents involved as a supportive structure as well & to change attitudes towards CSE.”

Participant in Breaking the Silence workshop

“I learned it's ok to teach my learners sexuality education and give them a chance to express themselves. My lesson plans need to be well prepared and include everyone.”

Participant in Breaking the Silence workshop

