

Pleasure 101

***A SHORT GUIDE
TO PLEASURE
AND SEX-
POSITIVE
COMPREHENSIVE
SEXUALITY
EDUCATION***







Comprehensive Sexuality Education (CSE) is a rights-based, culturally responsive approach to equipping young people across Africa with knowledge about their bodies, relationships, and sexual well-being. It moves beyond the traditional focus on risk prevention, fostering critical thinking, self-awareness, and decision-making skills that enable young people to navigate relationships safely and confidently. In many African communities, discussions around sexuality are often shaped by cultural and religious values, sometimes limiting access to accurate, non-judgmental information. CSE provides a transformative space where young people can learn about their rights, bodily autonomy, consent, and pleasure in ways that are relevant to their lived realities. By integrating local perspectives and fostering open, inclusive conversations, CSE not only promotes health and safety but also affirms the dignity and agency of young people across the continent.

One often overlooked aspect of Comprehensive Sexuality Education (CSE) in Africa is pleasure. Integrating discussions on pleasure alongside safety and respect helps destigmatize sexuality, particularly for girls and women, whose experiences and desires are often ignored or suppressed. Addressing pleasure within CSE shifts the focus from fear and risk to a more holistic understanding of sexuality as a natural and fulfilling part of life. This is especially crucial in many African societies, where conservative norms around sex dominate, leaving young people with limited knowledge about their bodies, desires, and sexual rights. By embracing pleasure as an essential component of sexual well-being, CSE empowers young people to develop healthier relationships with their bodies, communicate their needs, and engage in informed, consensual experiences that prioritize mutual respect and enjoyment.



CSE CONTEXT

AGE-APPROPRIATE APPROACHES TO PLEASURE IN CSE

GROWTH IS THE CONTINUOUS PROCESS OF LEARNING, UNLEARNING, AND RELEARNING, EMBRACING EACH STEP AS AN OPPORTUNITY TO BECOME A BETTER VERSION OF OURSELVES.



Sex education is not a one-size-fits-all approach. For it to be effective, it must be age-appropriate, catering to the developmental stages of the learners. For younger children, discussions can center around understanding their bodies, teaching consent in simple terms, and nurturing self-respect. As they grow older, topics should expand to cover relationships, personal boundaries, and eventually, sexual pleasure.

For adolescents and young adults, talking about sexual pleasure is essential. It counters harmful myths and narratives that lead to shame and fear. In Africa, this is even more important, as many young people face cultural and social pressures to conform to traditional gender roles, which may ignore their individual needs and desires. Teaching about sexual pleasure, within the framework of respect, rights, and consent, allows young people to have healthier, more fulfilling experiences.

Every human has the capacity to experience sexual pleasure if they wish. A pleasure-inclusive world supports people in safely having and expressing sexual pleasure while recognizing that sexual pleasure is different for everyone.





Incorporating pleasure learning and sex positivity into Comprehensive Sexuality Education (CSE) in Africa means helping young people understand how their bodies work, affirming that pleasure is a natural and valid part of sexuality, and equipping them with skills to communicate their needs and boundaries confidently. This is particularly crucial for girls and young women, who often face deeply ingrained cultural stigma surrounding their sexuality.

Across many African societies, taboos around female pleasure persist, with harmful myths reinforcing the idea that sex is primarily for reproduction or male satisfaction. Practices such as female genital mutilation (FGM)—which affects over 200 million girls and women globally, with high prevalence in Africa—are rooted in controlling female sexuality and erasing pleasure from the sexual experience. Additionally, restrictive gender norms discourage open discussions about desire, consent, and sexual agency, leaving many young women uninformed about their rights and unable to advocate for their own pleasure and well-being.

By integrating pleasure and sex positivity into CSE, young people—especially girls—can develop a healthier relationship with their bodies, challenge harmful narratives, and make informed choices about their sexual health. This approach also fosters mutual respect and consent, empowering young people to engage in relationships that prioritize not only safety but also fulfillment, autonomy, and well-being.

The Pleasure Principles

Pleasure-based Sexual Health



**LOVE
YOURSELF**



**EMBRACE
LEARNING**



**TALK
SEXY**



**BE
FLEXIBLE**



**THINK
UNIVERSAL**



**RIGHTS
FIRST**



**BE
POSITIVE**

The 7 Pleasure Principles in the Kenyan Setup

The Pleasure Project developed 7 Pleasure Principles to guide individuals and educators in having positive discussions around pleasure. These principles are crucial in shaping how sexuality is taught within the African context, including Kenya, where traditional values are strong, yet there is room for progressive growth.

Love Yourself

In many African societies, young people, especially women, are taught to suppress their desires or feel shame about their bodies. Loving yourself within a pleasure-centered framework means embracing self-worth, body confidence, and the right to experience joy. Many harmful practices, from unrealistic beauty standards to gendered expectations, undermine self-esteem and sexual autonomy. By teaching self-love as part of CSE, we encourage young people to value themselves beyond societal pressures. When individuals feel confident in their sexuality, they communicate better, set clearer boundaries, and engage in relationships that prioritize mutual respect and fulfillment, creating a healthier, pleasure-inclusive world. This principle reinforces cultural pride while rejecting toxic narratives.

Talk Sexy

Open, informed conversations about sexuality are rare in many African communities, where discussing pleasure is often seen as taboo. Yet, the language we use shapes how young people understand and experience their sexuality. Using pleasure-positive, evidence-based messaging ensures that youth receive empowering information rather than fear-based narratives. Whether through social media, youth forums, or community dialogues, talking about sex in an open, respectful way normalizes these discussions and reduces stigma. Encouraging young people to articulate their desires, boundaries, and needs strengthens their ability to engage in healthy relationships, making pleasure and consent central to their sexual experiences.

Think Universal

Sexual pleasure is a fundamental part of human experience, yet many African societies exclude certain groups—LGBTQ+ individuals, people with disabilities, and unmarried youth—from discussions on sexuality. A universal approach ensures that CSE acknowledges diverse identities and experiences, making space for everyone in pleasure-centered conversations. Many young people are taught that sexuality only exists within marriage or for reproduction, which erases the legitimacy of different sexual expressions. By recognizing pleasure as a right for all, we challenge exclusionary narratives and build a more inclusive sexual health framework that respects diversity while ensuring everyone has access to essential knowledge.

Rights First

Sexuality is not just about personal experiences; it is deeply tied to human rights. In Africa, where issues like child marriage, gender-based violence, and lack of access to contraception persist, prioritizing rights within CSE is crucial. When young people understand that sexual rights are human rights, they are better equipped to advocate for themselves and others. This principle ensures that consent, bodily autonomy, and freedom from coercion are at the heart of sexual education. By framing pleasure within a rights-based approach, we move beyond risk reduction and empower young people to demand safe, consensual, and fulfilling experiences.

Embrace Learning

Sexuality education must evolve with new research, and Africa cannot afford to ignore the growing evidence on the benefits of pleasure-based CSE. Studies show that acknowledging pleasure improves sexual health outcomes, increases condom use, and fosters healthier relationships. Yet, misinformation and cultural resistance continue to dominate public discourse. Embracing learning means staying informed, using scientific evidence to shape policy, and challenging outdated beliefs. Advocates, educators, and policymakers must be willing to engage with new knowledge and adapt strategies accordingly. When we prioritize learning, we create an environment where youth can make informed, empowered choices about their sexual well-being.

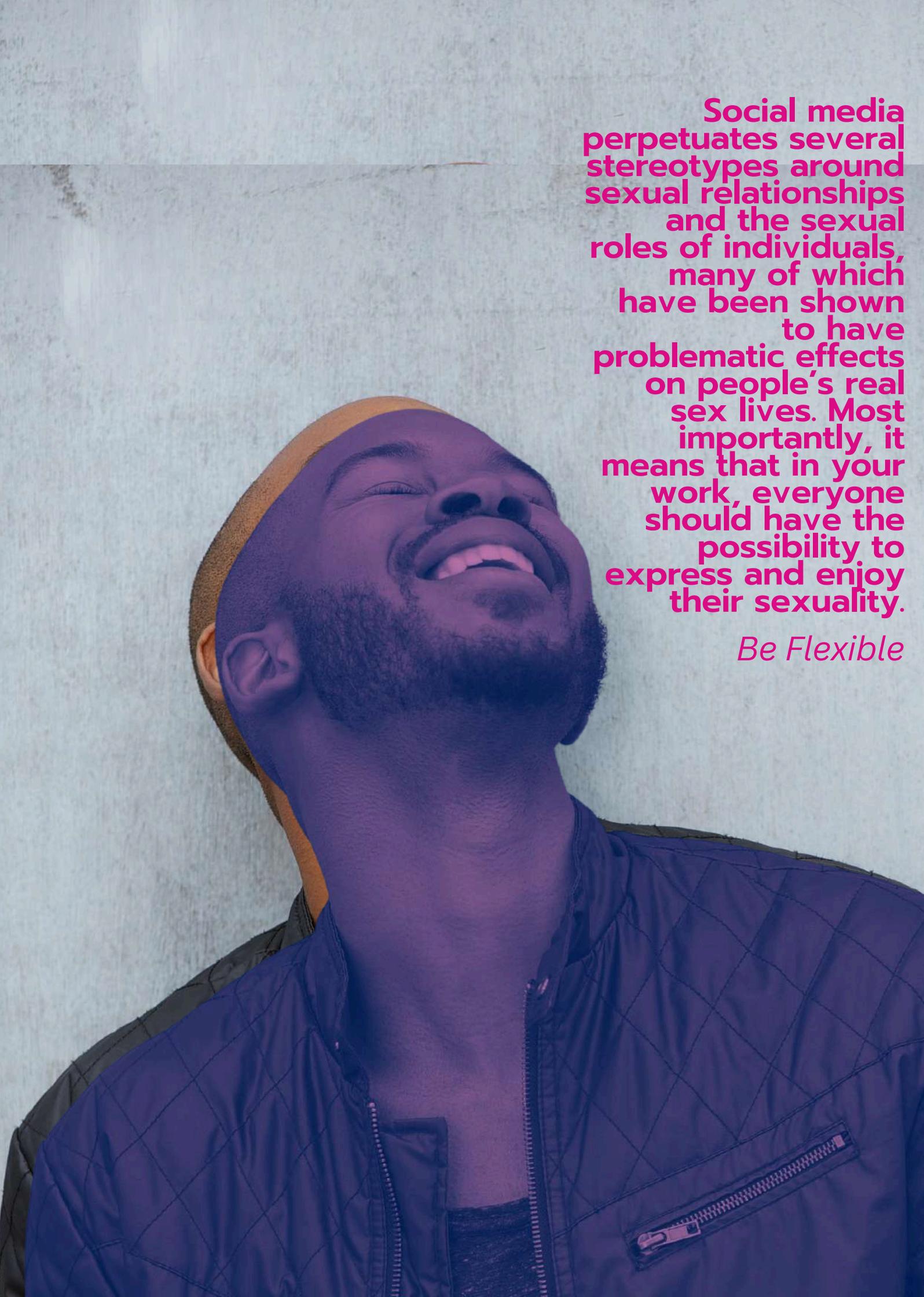
Be Flexible

Cultural and religious beliefs shape attitudes toward sexuality in Africa, making it essential for CSE to adapt while maintaining a rights-based approach. Being flexible means acknowledging these diverse perspectives while ensuring that all young people receive accurate, stigma-free information. Some communities may resist open discussions about pleasure, requiring tailored approaches that align with local values without compromising essential messages. Whether through storytelling, peer education, or engaging religious leaders in discussions about sexual well-being, a flexible approach ensures that CSE reaches more people in meaningful ways. Pleasure is for everyone, but how we talk about it must respect different contexts.

Be Positive

Sexuality education in Africa often focuses on fear, risks, and shame rather than empowerment and joy. A sex-positive approach shifts this narrative, affirming that sexuality is natural and pleasure is an essential part of well-being. Many young people grow up believing sex is dangerous or immoral, especially women, whose desires are frequently policed. Teaching sex-positivity within CSE allows youth to embrace their sexuality confidently, fostering self-awareness and informed decision-making. When people feel safe and respected, sex becomes a healthier, more fulfilling experience. By normalizing pleasure, we create a culture where young people value consent, communication, and mutual satisfaction.

ALMOST THERE



Social media perpetuates several stereotypes around sexual relationships and the sexual roles of individuals, many of which have been shown to have problematic effects on people's real sex lives. Most importantly, it means that in your work, everyone should have the possibility to express and enjoy their sexuality.

Be Flexible

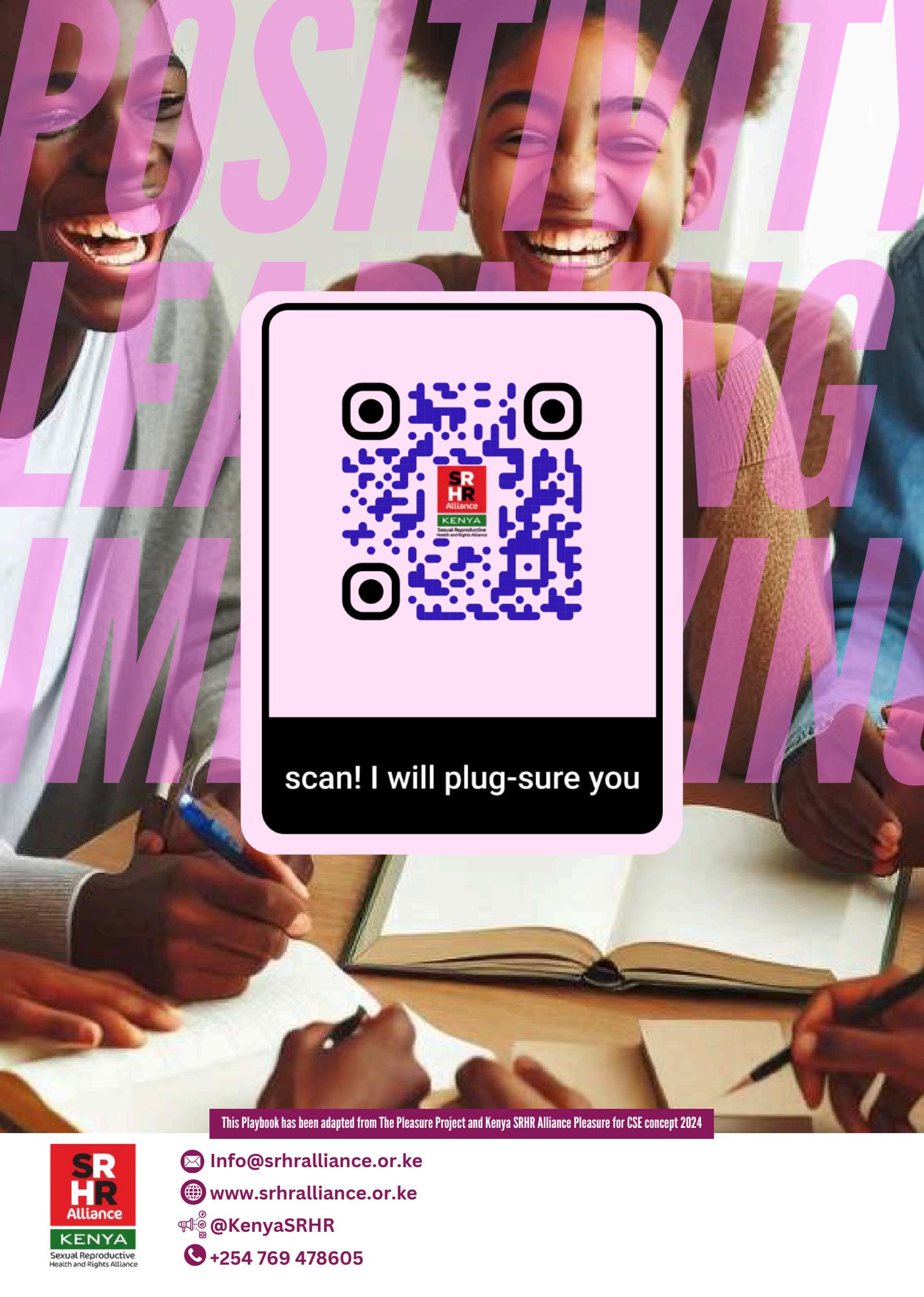
Integrating the **7 Pleasure Principles** into CSE offers a transformative way to teach sexual and reproductive health in Kenya. Educators can introduce these principles in both formal and informal educational settings, adapting them to be culturally sensitive while still addressing the need for open, honest discussions about pleasure and sexuality.

For educators, it's essential to:

- Use inclusive language that respects all identities and sexual orientations.
- Create safe spaces where young people can ask questions without judgment.
- Provide age-appropriate information that evolves as young people mature.

Challenges will always exist, particularly in regions where cultural norms around sex remain conservative. However, through advocacy, education, and community involvement, we can break down the taboos surrounding pleasure. This approach can lead to healthier, more empowered youth who are better equipped to make informed choices about their bodies and relationships.

The future of CSE in Africa is bright if we continue to center pleasure, rights, and respect in our work and interventions. By normalizing discussions around pleasure and teaching young people that sex is not just about avoiding harm, but also about enjoying life, we open the door to more positive, fulfilling sexual and reproductive health experiences for all.




scan! I will plug-sure you

This Playbook has been adapted from The Pleasure Project and Kenya SRHR Alliance Pleasure for CSE concept 2024



✉ Info@srhralliance.or.ke

🌐 www.srhralliance.or.ke

📢 @KenyaSRHR

☎ +254 769 478605

GOOD READS ON SEXUAL AND REPRODUCTIVE HEALTH AND PLEASURE

1. <https://www.tandfonline.com/doi/full/10.1080/26410397.2024.2398939#d1e101>
2. <https://www.srhm.org/call-for-papers/>
3. <https://www.srhm.org/sexual-pleasure/>
4. <https://drive.google.com/file/d/1-DLlvru9rziFsJ-pEx3RSfi6sw1qMo6I/view?usp=drivesdk>