



ཐོན་པོ་ལྷན་ཁག་གི་
ཤེས་རིག་

Standard Key Health Messages for **ADOLESCENTS**

2nd Edition March 2025

*Adolescent and School Health Program
Non Communicable Diseases Division
Department of Public Health
Ministry of Health
And
Health and Wellbeing Division
Department of Education Programme
Ministry of Education and Skills Development*



□□□□□
ཤེས་རིག

Standard Key Health Messages *for* **ADOLESCENTS**

2nd Edition March 2025

*Adolescent and School Health Program
Non Communicable Diseases Division
Department of Public Health
Ministry of Health
And
Health and Wellbeing Division
Department of Education Programme
Ministry of Education and Skills Development*

CONTENTS

ACRONYMS	I
INTRODUCTION	1
DEFINITION	3
1. HEALTH AND HYGIENE	4
1.1 Puberty	4
1.2 Personal Hygiene	7
1.3 Oral Health	7
1.4 Menstrual Health and Hygiene	8
1.5 Vaccination	10
2. HEALTHY LIFESTYLE	11
2.1 Nutrition	11
2.2 Physical Activity: Stay Active, Stay Fit	14
3. DIGITAL LITERACY AND SAFETY	16
3.1 Online Safety	16
3.2 Social Media Risks	17
3.3 Cyber bullying	18
3.4 Screen time	19
4. VIOLENCE PREVENTION AND PROTECTION	21
4.1 Violence	21
4.2 Bullying:	23
4.3 Good Touch, Bad Touch and Consent	25
4.4 Consent	26

5. SEXUAL AND REPRODUCTIVE HEALTH (SRH)	27
5.1 Sexual Health	27
5.2 SOGIESC (Sexual Orientation, Gender Identity and Expression, Sex Characteristics)	28
5.3 Adolescent Pregnancy	32
5.4 Unsafe abortion	34
5.5 STIs and HIV/AIDS	34
5.6 Contraception	36
5.7 Cervical Cancer	36
6. MENTAL HEALTH AND WELLBEING	38
6.1 Mental health	38
6.2 Common Mental Health Conditions	39
6.3 Self-harm and Suicide	41
6.4 Substance Use	43
7. YOUR RIGHTS AND RESPONSIBILITIES	44
8. COMMON MYTHS & FAQs	45
8.1 Myths & Facts	45
8.2 FAQs	50
ANNEXURES	52
Annexure 1: List of Helplines & Services	52
Annexure 2: Servings for Food Groups	53
REFERENCES	57

ACRONYMS

AFHS	: Adolescent Friendly Health Services
AHB	: Annual Health Bulletin
ASHP	: Adolescent and School Health Program
AI	: Artificial Intelligence
ANC	: Antenatal Care
AIDS	: Acquired Immunodeficiency Syndrome
ART	: Antiretroviral Therapy
EC	: Emergency Contraception
ECP	: Emergency Contraceptive Pills
GSHS	: Global School Based Student Health Survey
HCT	: HIV Counseling and Testing
HISC	: Health Information and Service Centers
HIV	: Human Immunodeficiency Virus
HPV	: Human Papillomavirus
HHC	: Health Help Center
LBW	: Low Birth Weight
NCWC	: National Commission for Women and Children
NSB	: National Statistics Bureau
PLHIV	: People Living with HIV
PNC	: Postnatal Care
PPH	: Postpartum Hemorrhage
PIH	: Pregnancy Induced Hypertension
RBP	: Royal Bhutan Police

RENEW	: Respect, Educate, Nurture, and Empower Women
STI	: Sexually Transmitted Infection
STH	: Soil Transmitted Helminths
SRH	: Sexual & Reproductive Health
SOGIESC	: Sexual Orientation, Gender Identity and Expression, Sex Characteristics
TD	: Tetanus and Diphtheria
WHO	: World Health Organization

INTRODUCTION

Adolescence, the phase between childhood and adulthood aged 10 to 19 years (WHO), is a critical stage of human development. During this period, adolescents experience rapid physical, cognitive, and psychosocial growth, shaping how they feel, think, make decisions, and interact with the world. It is also a time when they establish behaviors—such as dietary habits, physical activity, substance use, and sexual activity that can either protect or put their health at risk, both in the present and the future.

Although adolescence is often considered a healthy stage of life, there is a significant burden of disease, injury, and mortality, much of which is preventable or treatable. Adolescents face various health risks, including drug use, sexually transmitted infections (STIs) such as HIV, early pregnancy, violence, and injury. Mental health is also a growing concern, with one in seven adolescents globally experiencing mental health disorders, including depression, anxiety, and behavioral issues. Suicide is the third leading cause of death among those aged 15 to 29 years worldwide.

To grow and develop in good health, adolescents need access to age-appropriate information, including comprehensive sexuality education, opportunities to develop life skills and health services that are acceptable, equitable, appropriate, and effective. They also require safe and supportive environments, as well as opportunities to participate meaningfully in the design and delivery of health interventions tailored to their needs and rights. Expanding these opportunities is key to ensuring their well-being and long-term health outcomes.

The adolescent population in Bhutan is projected to be 16.4% (127,247) of the country's total population in 2024 (NSB, 2017). Challenges faced by adolescents, particularly adolescent girls, include early pregnancy, physical violence, nutritional anemia, alcohol and substance use, and tobacco consumption. Without well-planned policies, programs, and strategies to address these issues, negative health consequences could impact not only adolescents themselves but also their families, communities, and the country as a whole.

Health workers play a crucial role in providing information and services to adolescents. Beyond offering direct support, they are also responsible for sensitizing parents and guardians on adolescent-related issues, helping them better understand the challenges faced by adolescents and equipping them to provide the necessary support and guidance.

To ensure consistent and accurate information delivery, the Adolescent and School Health Program (ASHP) has developed standard key health messages for adolescent health focal persons and other health care professionals across the country. These messages aim to enhance awareness, promote positive health behaviors, and empower adolescents to make informed decisions about their well-being.

DEFINITION

WHO defines an adolescent as an individual between 10 to 19 years, Early adolescents 10 to 13 years, Middle adolescents 14 to 16 years, late adolescents 17 to 19 years. Adolescence is the right time to provide the opportunity to prevent the adoption of health damaging behaviours. Providing appropriate services, the right information, and skills to adolescents is important to reduce risks and vulnerabilities for a healthy lifestyle.

Objectives: To educate and empower adolescents with essential knowledge and life skills to make informed decisions about their health, well-being, and future.

Target Population: Adolescents and Youths (15-24 years and their family)

Expected Outcomes:

1. Increased awareness of adolescent health and well-being
2. Better hygiene and self-care practices
3. Reduced risk-taking behaviours (substance abuse, unprotected sex etc.)
4. Improved mental health and coping skills
5. Enhanced digital safety and responsible internet use

1. HEALTH AND HYGIENE

1.1 Puberty

Puberty is the time when the body begins to develop and transition from childhood to adulthood. This period involves both physical and emotional changes.

- **In boys:** Testosterone, the male hormone, causes changes such as facial hair growth and a deeper voice.
- **In girls:** Estrogen and progesterone, the female hormones, lead to breast development and the start of menstruation.

Physical Changes: What to Expect (Boys & Girls)

Physical Changes in Girls	Physical Changes in Boys
Rapid growth spurt (height & weight).	Rapid growth spurt (height & weight).
Broadening of hips and growth of breasts.	Broadening of shoulders and deepening of voice.
Growth of hair in the pubic area and armpits.	Growth of facial hair, along with the appearance of hair in the pubic area and armpits.
Onset of menstruation	Growth of penis, testicles, and production of sperm cells.

Emotional Changes & Mental Well-being

- Emotions might become more stronger and intense with frequent, quick and random mood changes making adolescents more vulnerable and sensitive.
- May feel invincible and start to engage in risky behaviors out of curiosity.

- Physical development in adolescence is very rapid compared to mental development.
- Sometimes, adolescents distance themselves from their parents and tend to resort to their peer group for answers. At this point, the parent/guardian needs to step forward and be a friend and guide the child

Emotional Changes in Girls:	Emotional Changes in Boys:
<p>Expression of Emotions: Girls are generally more likely to express emotions like sadness, anxiety, or fear.</p> <p>They may also be more open to discussing their feelings with peers or adults.</p>	<p>Expression of Emotions: Boys may be less likely to openly express emotions like sadness or vulnerability due to societal expectations and gender norms.</p> <p>They might internalize stress or emotions, which can lead to externalizing behaviors (e.g., aggression, substance use, or reckless activities) as a way to cope with emotional turmoil.</p>
<p>Body Image: Girls often face intense societal pressures related to body image, leading to higher levels of body dissatisfaction and a greater risk of developing eating disorders compared to boys.</p>	<p>Risk-Taking Behaviors: Boys are more likely to engage in risky behaviors, such as dangerous driving, substance use, or physical confrontations, partly due to biological factors (e.g. testosterone).</p>

Emotional Changes in Girls:	Emotional Changes in Boys:
Mental Health: Girls are more likely to experience depression and anxiety during adolescence. Hormonal changes, such as those related to puberty, can exacerbate these feelings.	Mental Health: Boys may be less likely to seek help for mental health issues due to stigma.

What to do?

- Your body is going through natural changes, accept them as part of growing up.
- It's okay to discuss your feelings and questions about puberty with trusted adults, friends or health professionals.
- Onset and changes of puberty may be different for individuals. It's normal to feel different from your peers.
- Hormonal changes can cause emotional shifts. Mood swings and mixed emotions are normal, so take time to manage them.
- Take care of your body with healthy eating, regular exercise, and good hygiene.
- Focus on what your body can do, not just how it looks. Practice self-love and acceptance.
- Don't hesitate to ask questions, learning and understanding these changes helps you feel more comfortable.

1.2 Personal Hygiene

General Daily Hygiene:

What to do?

1. Clean your body a few times a week to remove sweat, dirt, and oils. This helps with skin health and body odor.
2. Wash your face daily in the morning and before bedtime, to keep your skin clear by removing dirt and oils.
3. Wash your hands regularly with soap and water - after using the restroom, before eating or drinking, after playing with pets, after working, and after touching surfaces in public places.
4. Trim your nails regularly to keep them clean and avoid infections.
5. Clothing:
 - » Change inner wears at least once a day, or more if active or during menstruation. Always use dry clothes to prevent skin diseases and bad odors.
 - » Opt for cotton to prevent moisture buildup and irritation.
 - » Change immediately to avoid bacteria and fungal growth.
 - » Use detergent/ soap for washing and sun dry your inner wears.

1.3 Oral Health

- Oral health is essential for overall well-being, affecting not just the mouth but also the body.
- Good oral hygiene prevents cavities, gum disease, and bad breath.

- Poor oral health issues cause discomfort, pain, possible tooth loss, and reduced quality of life.
- It contributes to a lack of concentration and school absenteeism.
- The common oral health issues are tooth decay, mouth ulcers, and mouth cancer.
- Tooth decay is more common in children.

What to do?

- Brush your teeth at least twice a day (morning and before bedtime) for 2 minutes using fluoride toothpaste to remove plaque and food particles.
- Floss once a day to remove food between teeth and reduce the risk of cavities.
- Use mouthwash to freshen your breath and reduce bacteria in the mouth.
- Avoid chewing tobacco, doma and eating hard food.
- Reduce the amount and frequency of sugar and sweetened beverages consumption.
- Regular dental check-ups are necessary for maintaining healthy teeth and gums.

1.4 Menstrual Health and Hygiene

Menstruation, commonly known as a period or menses is a natural process and not an illness. It indicates that the reproductive system is functioning properly. It can start as early as nine years or it can be late for some. The duration of menstruation is 2-7 days. Every month, the ovaries release an egg (ovulation) in preparation for

potential pregnancy. The uterus builds up a lining filled with blood and nutrients to support a fertilized egg. If fertilization doesn't occur, this lining is shed as menstrual blood through the vagina, and the cycle repeats.

Common Menstrual Symptoms

- **Cramps:** Pain in the lower abdomen or back.
- **Bloating:** A feeling of fullness in the stomach.
- **Tender breasts:** Mild pain and feeling of discomfort in the breast
- **Mood swings:** Feeling emotional or irritable.
- **Fatigue:** Feeling tired or sleepy.
- **Acne:** Hormonal changes may cause pimples.

What to do?

- Use sanitary pads, tampons, menstrual cups, or homemade clean cloth to manage menstrual flow in a hygienic manner.
- Change sanitary pads/ tampons every 4-6 hours to reduce the risk of infections. If homemade pads are being used, wash and dry under the sunlight.
- Maintain cleanliness by washing the genital area with clean water. Do not use soap or any commercially available cleaning products.
- Wrap and throw used sanitary products in a trash bin or safe and designated area.
- Wash your hands thoroughly before and after handling menstrual products.
- Opt for loose-fitting, and comfortable clothing.

- Drink plenty of water to stay hydrated.
- Follow the instructions for reusable menstrual products.
- If you experience unusual pain, discomfort, irregular periods, and very light or heavy flow, consult a health professional.
- Keeping track of your menstrual cycle helps you anticipate your needs and identify any irregularities.
- Be prepared for your period each month by keeping sanitary products in advance.

1.5 Vaccination

Vaccination is a process where a person receives a vaccine (usually by injection) to protect against specific infections and strengthen their immune system.

In Bhutan, two key vaccines for adolescents are the **Human Papillomavirus (HPV)** and **Tetanus and Diphtheria (Td) vaccines**.

1. HPV Vaccine:

- » The HPV vaccine can help prevent cervical cancer, genital warts, anal cancer and throat cancer.
- » **Who should get it:** Students in Class VI (both boys and girls)
- » Out of school girls and boys at 12-15 years of age.
- » The vaccine will be administered in two doses as per the national immunization schedule.

- **Td Vaccine:**
 - » Protects against Tetanus and Diphtheria.
 - » A booster dose is given to students in Class PP and Class VII irrespective of their age.
 - » Out of school:
 - ◆ **Td 1:** Given at 6 years old.
 - ◆ **Td 2:** Given at 13 years old.

2. HEALTHY LIFESTYLE

2.1 Nutrition

Nutrition is crucial for growth and development of adolescents. The period of adolescence is associated with rapid physical growth and metabolism, reproductive maturation, and cognitive transformations. Diet and exercise patterns during this period have a life-long effect on adolescent health status.

Poor dietary habits including inadequate food intake and consumption of junk foods pose an increased risk of malnutrition and poor health. The nutrition situation generally remains poor with limited dietary diversity with limited consumption of fruits and vegetables in the population. Anemia among adolescent girls was reported at 36.5% (NHS 2023).

What to do?

- **Eat a balanced diet**
 - » Mix of cereals, vegetables, fruits, eggs and dairy products.
 - » Get enough protein for strength and muscles - eggs, meat, fish, dairy, lentils, nuts, and seeds.

- **Vitamins and minerals**

- » Calcium and Vitamin D are required for strong bones. You can get it from milk, cheese, yogurt, and sunlight.
- » Vitamin A is required for good eyesight. Eat carrots, eggs, fish, and nuts.
- » WHO recommends 5 servings of fruits and vegetables everyday. (Annexure II)

- **Eat regular meals and healthy snacks**

- » To stay alert and focused, never skip breakfast.
- » If you feel hungry between the meals, opt for fruits, nuts, yogurt, or boiled eggs instead of chips/ junk foods.
- » Processed foods can slow you down and cause weight gain. Instead, choose home-cooked meals.
- » Always use iodized salt. Reduce salt intake to less than 5 gm/day (1 teaspoon or 1/3 tablespoon)

- **Stay Hydrated**

- » Drink plenty of water to keep your brain sharp and clear skin.
- » Avoid too much tea, coffee, and soft drinks/ energy drinks.

I. Micronutrient Supplements

Micronutrient supplements provide essential vitamins and minerals in small amounts to maintain optimal health. Schools provide supplements such as **Iron-Folic acid (FeFa) tablets and Vitamin A.**

1. Iron Tablet:

- Take one tablet weekly (every Thursday) to prevent iron deficiency anemia.
- Take the tablet after a meal (wait 30 minutes) to reduce the risk of gastric irritation, nausea, or vomiting.
- Dairy products, tea and coffee hamper iron absorption. A 30 minute gap before and after taking an iron tablet is recommended.

2. Vitamin A Capsules:

- Take one capsule of vitamin A every six months to prevent its deficiency.
- A deficiency of vitamin A can lead to vision problem including night blindness.

II. Deworming (albendazole tablet):

- Deworming is the process of eliminating parasitic worms (helminths) from the body using medications.
- It is essential for maintaining good health, particularly in children and people living in areas with poor sanitation.
- Among children 6 to 12 years of age, 0.4% had Soil Transmitted Helminths (STH) and 3.1% had other intestinal protozoan parasites. The overall prevalence of either STH or intestinal protozoan parasites was 3.5% (NHS, 2023).
- If left untreated, worms will cause anemia, malnutrition, mal-absorption and other severe complications.

What to do?

- Wash hands regularly
- Wash fruits properly with clean water before eating
- Drink clean, safe water
- Cook meat properly
- Wear shoes in contaminated areas
- Maintain good hygiene and sanitation (Do not urinate or defecate in open areas).
- All children **MUST** take one tablet annually to prevent worm infestation.
- Continue this until it is no longer needed or recommended by relevant authorities.

2.2 Physical Activity: Stay Active, Stay Fit

- Physical activity is key to maintaining overall health, boosting fitness, and improving mental health and well-being.
- Regular exercise helps:
 - » Feel more energized throughout the day.
 - » Build muscle and improve endurance.
 - » Reduce the risk of non communicable disease like diabetes, high blood pressure, obesity.
 - » Release endorphins, improves mood and reduces stress.
 - » Sleep better and feel more rested.

What to do?

- Exercise regularly for at least 60 minutes of moderate exercise everyday. Activities like walking, jogging, or cycling can be easy to fit into your daily routine.
- Include strength exercises (e.g., push-ups, squats, weightlifting) thrice a week to build muscle and improve overall strength.
- Incorporate stretching or yoga to improve flexibility and reduce the risk of injury. This also helps with posture and can be a relaxing activity for your mind.
- Look for opportunities to move throughout the day:
 - » Take the **stairs** instead of the elevator.
 - » **Walk** or **cycle** instead of driving short distances.
 - » Do some **light stretching** or walking breaks if you're sitting for long periods, between study sessions or screen time.
- Start with achievable goals that are realistic for your fitness level (e.g., walking 10,000 steps a day or doing 10 push-ups). Gradually increase the intensity or duration as you improve.
- Don't push yourself too hard. Rest when necessary to avoid overtraining or injury. Pay attention to how your body feels and adjust your activity accordingly.
- Choose activities you enjoy such as dancing, playing sports, or swimming. This will help keep you motivated and make exercise feel less like a chore.
- Make physical activity a regular part of your routine. Consistency is key for both fitness and mental health. It doesn't have to be intense; small changes add up over time.
- Drink plenty of water before, during, and after exercise to stay hydrated.

3. DIGITAL LITERACY AND SAFETY

Online Safety, Cyberbullying and Social Media Risks

Adolescents today are more connected than ever before, spending a significant amount of time online through social media, gaming platforms, and other digital spaces. While the internet offers many benefits, it also exposes youths to various risks, particularly in relation to online safety, cyberbullying, and social media.

3.1 Online Safety

Adolescents often lack the experience and awareness to fully comprehend the potential dangers online, which lead to risky behaviors. Some of these dangers includes :

- **Privacy Risks:** Adolescents may share personal information (location, phone number, etc.) without considering the consequences. This can lead to identity theft, predatory behavior, or harassment.
- **Exposure to inappropriate content:** Adolescents may accidentally or intentionally come across harmful content, including violence, explicit material, or misinformation.
- **Phishing and scams:** Adolescents may be vulnerable to scams or phishing attacks, where cybercriminals try to steal personal information or money by impersonating trusted sources like email and text messages.
- **Human trafficking:** When individuals are tricked, forced, or taken from their homes and made to work or do things against their will it is called trafficking. It can involve threats, lies, or abuse of power.
- **Pornography:** pornography is any photo, video, or digital content that shows individuals in sexual or inappropriate situations. It can stay online forever, making victims suffer for years and is a serious crime.

What to do?

- Keep personal information private and set up privacy settings on social media platforms.
- Accept parental control tools and engage in open conversations with parents and trusted adults.
- Think critically about the information you encounter online, including distinguishing between trustworthy and questionable sources.

3.2 Social Media Risks

While social media can be a fun and engaging way to connect with others, it also presents risks that can affect adolescents' mental health and well-being.

The primary concerns include:

- **Peer Pressure and Comparison:** Social media can create unrealistic standards of beauty, success, and popularity. Adolescents may feel pressured to present an idealized version of themselves or compare their lives with others, leading to dissatisfaction or low self-esteem.
- **Addiction and Overuse:** Excessive time spent on social media can interfere with schoolwork, physical activity, and face-to-face relationships. Social media addiction is also linked to increased feelings of loneliness and depression.
- **Exposure to Harmful Behavior:** Adolescents may be exposed to cyberbullying, explicit content, or toxic online communities that encourage harmful behaviors (e.g., self-harm, eating disorders, etc.)

What to do?

- Set time limits on their social media usage to avoid overuse and the potential for addiction.
- Guide adolescents to engage in positive, respectful interactions and encourage them to follow accounts that promote healthy, inclusive messages.
- Help adolescents understand the difference between online personas and real-life identities. Encourage them to appreciate and build their unique qualities and not to compare themselves to others.
- Adults should model responsible social media use to set an example for adolescents. It is very important to empower them to use technology in healthy and productive ways.

3.3 Cyberbullying

Cyberbullying refers to the use of technology to harass, intimidate, or harm others. This can include sending hurtful messages, spreading rumors, or sharing embarrassing photos or videos without consent. Cyberbullying can have severe emotional and psychological effects on adolescents, including depression, anxiety, and, in extreme cases, suicidal behavior.

Forms of Cyberbullying:

- **Harassment:** Repeatedly sending offensive, threatening, or hurtful messages.
- **Impersonation:** Pretending to be someone else to damage their reputation or relationships.
- **Outing:** Sharing private or embarrassing information, photos or videos online without consent.

What to do?

- **Open Communication:** Encourage adolescents to talk openly with trusted adults if they encounter bullying or harmful behavior online.
- **Report and Block:** Report cyberbullying incidents on social media platforms and block the offenders.
- **Support Systems:** Foster a supportive network of friends, family, and peers who can help individuals deal with bullying and its effects.

3.4 Screen time

Screen time refers to the amount of time spent using devices such as smartphones, computers, tablets, and televisions. It includes activities like social media browsing, gaming, work-related tasks, or watching shows and movies.

I. Physical Effects:

- Staring at screens for long periods can lead to dry eyes, blurry vision, and discomfort.
- Prolonged screen use, especially while slouching, can lead to back and neck pain.
- Extended screen time can trigger headaches, especially if you're looking at a screen in poor lighting.

II. Mental and Emotional Effects:

- Excessive use of social media and constant online comparison can lead to heightened anxiety.
- Spending too much time on screens can lead to feelings of isolation and a reduced sense of well-being.

- Constant switching between apps and activities can make it harder to focus for longer periods, which may affect schoolwork and personal goals.
- Blue light emitted from screens can interfere with the production of melatonin, the hormone that helps you sleep, leading to difficulties falling asleep and altered sleep patterns.

III. Poor Social-Emotional Skills

- Excessive screen time reduces face-to-face interactions, hindering the development of communication, problem-solving, and socialization skills.
- Studies have linked high screen use to increased emotional reactivity, aggression, and externalizing behaviors.

What to do?

- **Set daily time limits:** Establish specific time limits for screen use each day (e.g., not more than 2 hours of recreational screen time) to ensure a healthy balance.
- **Create screen-free zones and times:** Designate certain times or places (like during meals or before bed) as screen-free to enhance face-to-face connections and improve sleep.
- **Take regular breaks:** Follow the 20-20-20 rule: every 20 minutes, look at something 20 feet (6 meters) away for at least 20 seconds to reduce eye strain.
- **Engage in non-screen activities:** Take part in offline activities, such as reading, exercising, or spending time with family and friends, to give your mind and body a break.
- **Mind your mental health:** Be mindful of how social media affects your emotions. Unfollow accounts that make you feel bad about yourself and take digital detoxes when needed.

- **Prioritize physical activity:** Balance screen time with outdoor activities, like playing sports or going for walks, to stay active and healthy.
- **Set a bedtime for devices:** Turn off screens at least an hour before bed to allow your mind to unwind and improve sleep quality.

4. VIOLENCE PREVENTION AND PROTECTION

4.1 Violence

Violence is the use of physical force or power, threat or act, against others which results in or has a high likelihood of causing harm, injury, or psychological damage.

Type of violence

- **Physical violence:** Use of force to harm or injure someone physically.
- **Psychological/emotional violence:** Infliction of mental harm through threats, manipulation, or verbal abuse.
- **Sexual violence:** Any non-consensual sexual act, including harassment, assault and exploitation.
- **Economic/Financial violence:** Controlling or denying access to financial resources to exploit or oppress someone.
- **Intimate partner violence (IPV):** Abuse within relationships or households, including physical, emotional, or financial control.
- **Technology-facilitated violence (TFV):** It is broader term that includes cyber violence but also covers offline harms enabled by technology like GPS tracking for stalking and deepfake videos used for blackmail, AI-generated misinformation, and the use of spyware to control or monitor victims.

- **Gender-Based Violence (GBV):** Violence targeted at individuals based on their gender, often affecting women and girls.
- **Bullying:** Bullying is intentional, harmful behavior that involves a power imbalance and is often repeated. It can happen in person or online and affects everyone involved—the target, the bully, bystanders, and even parents. Bullying is a form of violence that can lead to emotional distress, low self-esteem, mental health struggles, self-harm, and, in severe cases, suicide.

What to do?

- Talk to parents or other trusted adults on the ways to avoid violence and threatening situations.
- Avoid being in places where one may experience violence and bullying.
- Walk away from a situation where one feels threatened, forced or coerced and call for help whenever necessary.
- Go to safe place (home, school etc)
- Try to stay calm and deal disputes in a non-violent manner
- If physically assaulted, inform parents, police or other trusted adults for care, support, and to prevent it from happening again.
- If you fear for your own or someone else's safety, you can call the police
- Call Helpline 1098 for help and psychosocial support

4.2 Bullying:

- **Physical Bullying:** Hitting, pushing, or damaging someone's belongings.
- **Verbal Bullying:** Name-calling, teasing, or making hurtful comments.
- **Social Bullying:** Spreading rumors, excluding someone, or embarrassing them in public.
- **Cyberbullying:** Sending hurtful messages, sharing private information, or posting harmful content online.

What to Do:

- **If You're Being Bullied:**
 - » Talk to someone you trust, like a parent, teacher, or friend.
 - » Avoid responding to the bully, as it may escalate the situation.
 - » Save evidence (e.g., screenshots for cyberbullying) to report the incident.
 - » Report bullying to school management or authorities if it happens at school.
- **If You Witness Bullying:**
 - » Stand up for the person being bullied or report it to a trusted adult.
 - » Offer support to the target and let them know they're not alone.

- **Prevent Bullying:**

- » Treat everyone with kindness and respect.
- » Be mindful of what you post or share online to avoid unintentional harm.
- » Create a safe and inclusive environment by speaking out against bullying.

What to do?

- Try to get away from the situation safely.
- Tell a trusted adult (parent, teacher, counselor) or a support organization
- If someone is hurt, call for medical help.
- Report to authorities (police, school, or community leaders)
- Recognize that it's not your fault.
- Set boundaries, tell the person to stop.
- Avoid toxic environments that make you feel unsafe.
- Say NO loudly and try to leave immediately.
- If someone harms you, report it, you have the right to be safe.
- Avoid staying silent, telling someone can help stop it.
- Know that love should never involve fear or control.
- If in danger, call a helpline or authorities.
- Speak up, your gender does not justify mistreatment.
- Support friends who are experiencing GBV.
- Challenge harmful gender stereotypes.
- Report cases of violence or discrimination.

- Know your rights, no one should control your finances unfairly.
- If someone is limiting your access to money or education, seek help.
- Report financial abuse to a responsible adult or authority.
- If you face technology facilitated violence, block, mute, or ignore the attacker.
- Report to the platform (Facebook, Instagram, TikTok, etc.).
- Tell a trusted adult if you feel unsafe.
- Never share private info (like passwords, home address, etc.)

4.3 Good Touch, Bad Touch and Consent

During adolescence, understanding good touch and bad touch is crucial for personal safety, setting boundaries, and fostering healthy relationships.

I. Good Touch

A good touch is where one feels safe, comfortable, and respectful. It is meant to show care, affection, or support without making the person feel uneasy.

Examples:

- Hug from parents, family members, or close friends when appropriate.
- A handshake, high-five, or pat on the back in a friendly manner.
- A doctor's touch during a medical examination (with consent and in presence of a guardian, if needed).

II. Bad Touch

A bad touch is one that makes a person feel uncomfortable, scared, or violated.

Examples:

- Unwanted or forceful touching of private parts.
- Someone touching in a way that makes you feel uneasy or scared.
- Being forced or tricked into keeping the touch a secret.
- Inappropriate touching disguised as affection or play.

What to do?

- Say NO loudly, express discomfort clearly.
- Move away immediately, distance yourself from the situation.
- Tell a trusted adult, parents, teachers, or a counselor.
- Never keep it a secret, if something feels wrong, seek help.
- Get help from relevant agencies (HHC, RBP, Nazhoen Lamten, RENEW, The Pema Secretariat)

4.4 Consent

Consent is the principle where individuals must give their permission before receiving a medical intervention or procedure.

- Consent means saying YES to touch and having your choice respected.
- Consent can be withdrawn anytime – Even if someone agreed before, they have the right to change their mind.
- Legal age of consent – 18 years in Bhutan

- Consent must be voluntary, it should never be forced, pressured, or manipulated.
- Consent must be clear. A verbal “yes” or a clear action showing agreement is necessary.
- Silence or hesitation is not consent.

5. SEXUAL AND REPRODUCTIVE HEALTH (SRH)

It is the ability for adolescents to have access to comprehensive sexuality education, essential sexual and reproductive health services, and autonomous decision-making power to protect their health.

5.1 Sexual Health

- Sexual health is fundamental to the overall health and well-being of individuals, and to the social and economic development of communities and the country.
- The purpose of reproductive health education is to inform about sexual health and to encourage responsible decision-making but not to encourage sexual activity.
- Sex education at an earlier age helps individual delay initiation of sexual activity and prevent the following consequences of unsafe sex:
 - » Unintended pregnancy and abortion
 - » Infections with HIV, STIs, and their adverse outcomes (such as cancer and infertility)
 - » Sexual violence
- Children and young people are usually victims of molestation and sexual abuse.

- They are not mature enough to make decisions or negotiate on sexual activities.
- Molestation, sexual abuse, and harassment can occur anywhere at home, at school, or in public places.
- The legal age for marriage in Bhutan is 18 years and above, making sexual advances on those below 18 years is illegal regardless of consent.

What to do?

- Wait until one feels ready (biologically and physically) to have sexual intercourse. Do not start just because other people want one to do so.
- Even if one has had sexual intercourse in the past, one could decide to stop until one truly feels ready for it.
- Avoid being with people or in places where one could be forced to have sex against one's will.

5.2 SOGIESC (Sexual Orientation, Gender Identity and Expression, Sex Characteristics)

- Sex refers to the biological characteristics that define person as female or male. It is primarily associated with physical and physiological features including chromosomes, gene expression, hormone levels and function, and reproductive/sexual anatomy.
- Gender refers to the socially constructed characteristics of women, men, girls, and boys. This includes the behaviors, roles, and norms associated with each gender, as well as relationships between genders.

- ***Sexual Orientation***

- » It refers to a person's emotional, romantic, and sexual attraction to people of a particular gender.
- » It can be classified as heterosexual (attraction to different sex), homosexual (attraction to same sex), bisexual (attraction to both males & females), pansexual (attraction to all genders), queer (attraction to different gender identities), asexual (no sexual attraction to anyone).
- » An individual does not have to be sexually active to know about their sexual orientation.

- ***Gender Identity***

- » It is defined as an individual's personal conception of oneself as a man, woman, both, neither or in between.
- » An individual's gender identity can correlate to the sex assigned to them at birth or differ from it.
- » They can identify themselves as gender binary (man/woman), as transgender (gender identity is different from assigned sex at birth), or as gender queer/non-binary (identities that are outside the gender binary).
- » Transgenders (trans-men and trans-women) are people who make a conscious decision to identify with an alternate gender of their choice. It is important to ensure that the transgender community is not excluded from their access to quality healthcare, education, and livelihood opportunities. Discrimination and violence push them to the margins. It is important to build a society that upholds their right to equality.

- **Gender Expression**

- » It relates to how a person chooses to communicate their gender identity to others through clothing, hair, styles, mannerisms and so on.
- » Some people express their gender in ways that match societal expectations (e.g. a woman wearing kira), others may express their gender in ways that challenge traditional norms (e.g., a man wearing makeup).
- » Gender expression can be influenced by culture, society, and personal choice, and it may or may not align with a person's gender identity or the sex they were assigned at birth.
- » These expressions may be conscious or unconscious.
- » Everyone has the right to express their gender in a way that feels comfortable to them without fear of judgment or discrimination.

- **Sex Characteristics**

- » It refers to the physical attributes that distinguish males from females. It includes biological traits like chromosomes, hormones, and reproductive anatomy (e.g. ovaries and uterus in females; testes and penis in males) which can vary from person to person, including intersex individuals.
- » Intersex are people born with variations in sex characteristics that do not fit typical definitions of male or female. This can include differences in chromosomes, hormone levels, or reproductive organs.

- Gender pronouns are words used to refer to a person without using their name and often reflect their gender identity. Some common pronouns are:
 - » She/Her/Hers – used by individuals who identify as female.
 - » He/Him/His – used by individuals who identify as male.
 - » They/Them/Theirs – used by individuals who identify as non-binary, genderqueer, or when gender is unknown.
- SOGIESC is a natural part of human diversity, and everyone experiences it uniquely.
- There is no “right” or “wrong” SOGIESC- everyone deserves respect and acceptance.

What to do?

- One’s sexual orientation and gender identity can remain the same throughout life or change, it is completely normal.
- Every individual is sexually different and DOES NOT HAVE to fit into the socially accepted sex and gender norms.
- Talk about personal experiences and seek support from trusted adults and relevant agencies (Pride Bhutan, Queer Voices of Bhutan, Rainbow Help Desk-RENEW).
- It is not okay to discriminate against others/self-based on SOGIESC, every individual is different and has the right to live free of stigma and prejudice.
- Avoid assumptions- if unsure, ask people how they would like to be addressed.

5.3 Adolescent Pregnancy

- Adolescent pregnancy refers to a pregnancy that occurs in a person between the age of 10 and 19. In Bhutan, as per NHS 2023, 4.5% of adolescents were pregnant.
- **Common Risk factors for adolescent pregnancy:**
 - » A lack of access to sexual and reproductive health education and services
 - » Limited access to contraception or misinformation/ stigma
 - » Peer pressure
 - » Sexual violence and coercion, which can result in unintended pregnancies
 - » Early marriage
 - » Under the influence of substance
 - » Poor socioeconomic conditions
- **Consequences of adolescent pregnancy:** Individuals are not mature enough to take up the responsibilities of parenthood.
 - » Alcohol and substance abuse
 - » School dropout
 - » Single parenthood
 - » Unemployment
 - » Poverty
 - » Emotional and mental health challenges due to stigma, stress, and responsibilities of parenthood at a young age
 - » Medical complications for both women and child (miscarriage, PPH, PIH, prematurity, etc)

What to do?

- Having sexual feelings are normal but having sex should be a carefully considered decision.
- Talk to parents or other trusted adults about how to make decisions about sexual activity, and how to resist pressure from others to have sex.
- Respect for both oneself and others is a key to healthy relationships.
- Always negotiate to delay the initiation of sexual intercourse and for safe sex to protect yourself and your partner, regardless of the situation.
- Correct and consistent use of condom during sexual intercourse can prevent both unwanted pregnancies and STIs, including HIV.
- Sexually active individuals and missed menstruation should consult health professionals for contraception.
- Seek help from health workers without delay if one has had unsafe sex.
- Emergency Contraception Pills (ECP)- to be used during contraceptive failure, sexual abuse, rape, as soon as possible and no later than 3 days (72 hours) of the event/unprotected sex.
- ECP should be used only in case of emergency as regular use can cause fertility issues and other medical complications.
- If pregnant, seek medical help for regular ANC (Antenatal Care), PNC (Postnatal Care), institutional delivery and immunization.

5.4 Unsafe abortion

Unsafe abortion is the termination of an unwanted or unintended pregnancy by unskilled persons, or in an environment lacking minimal medical standards. In Bhutan, there is a legal restriction on abortion. It is life threatening to the mother and contributes to maternal morbidity and mortality worldwide.

- **Complications of unsafe abortion:**
 - » Infection/sepsis
 - » Perforation of uterus
 - » Injury to bladder
 - » Excessive vaginal bleeding resulting in shock and death
 - » Long term complications include chronic pelvic pain, infertility and menstrual irregularities

What to do?

- Equip individuals with knowledge about sexual and reproductive health, promoting informed decisions and reducing unintended pregnancies.
- Always consult qualified medical personnel/visit nearby health centers for any complications after abortion.

5.5 STIs and HIV/AIDS

- Sexually transmitted infections (STIs) are infections primarily spread through sexual contact such as unprotected vaginal, anal or oral sex, with a person who has STI.
- These infections can also be transmitted through non-sexual means, such as from mother to child during childbirth or breastfeeding, through shared needles and unscreened blood products (Hepatitis B, C and HIV).

- STIs can be treated, therefore get tested and avail treatment.
- **Risk factors of STI:**
 - » Early sexual activity
 - » Multiple sexual partners
 - » Rape
 - » Peer pressure
 - » Substance abuse
 - » Economic hardships which may lead to sexual favors for financial support
 - » Lack of information, education and life skills
 - » Poor health seeking behavior

What to do?

- Practice ABCD as far as possible:
 - A: Abstinence from unsafe sex
 - B: Being faithful to your spouse or the regular partner
 - C: Correct and consistent use of condom
 - D: Do not use drugs/alcohol
- If one has the following symptoms, please visit the nearest health facility/ HISC:
 - » Females: unusual vaginal discharge or bleeding, burning during urination, lower abdomen pain, pain during sexual intercourse, genital sores or blister, rectal discharge.
 - » Males: discharge from penis, burning pain during urination, genital sores or blister, swollen testicles or rectal discharge.

- If one has STIs, help trace the sexual partner(s) for testing and treatment.
- Practice safe sex by using condoms correctly and consistently every time one has sexual intercourse.
- Always check the expiry date of condoms before use.
- It is not safe to add any oil/cream to a condom.

5.6 Contraception

- Contraception refers to the methods used to prevent pregnancy by stopping sperm from fertilizing an egg.
- Condoms, oral contraceptive pills, Copper T, DMPA injection and implant are the choices of contraceptives available in the health centers.

What to do?

- Visit the nearest health center for guidance and contraception
- Use contraceptive methods correctly
- Visit health clinics, pharmacies, or hospitals to avail safe and approved contraceptives.
- Dispose condom properly
- Avoid myths and misinformation about birth control.

5.7 Cervical Cancer

- Cervical cancer is caused by persistent infection with the human papillomavirus (HPV)
- Cervical cancer is a type of cancer that occurs in the cells of the cervix, the lower part of the uterus that connects to the vagina.

- Cervical cancer is the fourth most common cancer among women globally.
- Cervical cancer is the second highest cause of death due to cancer in Bhutan.
- Current estimates indicate that every year 47 women are diagnosed with cervical cancer and 27 die from the disease (Factsheet 2023).
- Human papillomavirus vaccines are among the most effective vaccines available worldwide
- **Risk factors of Cervical cancer:**
 - » Childbirth at early age
 - » Sexually active at early age/ early marriage
 - » Multiple childbirth
 - » Multiple sexual partners/ exposure to STI
 - » Smoking
 - » Weak immune system/ immunocompromised
 - » Unvaccinated against Human Papilloma Virus (HPV)
 - » Non compliance to screening and follow-ups.
- **Signs and Symptoms of Cervical Cancer:**
 - » Irregular bleeding
 - » Postmenopausal bleeding
 - » Abnormal vaginal discharge (increased, foul smelling)

What to do?

- Get HPV vaccination on time (refer HPV vaccination section)
- Avoiding high-risk behaviors (multiple sex partners, unsafe sex, smoking)
- Compliance to HPV screening protocol (30 to 65 years)

6. MENTAL HEALTH AND WELLBEING

6.1 Mental health

- Mental health is a state of well-being in which we ***realize our abilities, cope with normal stresses of life, work productively, and contribute to our community.***
- Good mental health does not necessarily mean experiencing positive emotions at all times.
- It encompasses emotional, psychological, and social well-being.
- It influences how a person feels, thinks, and behaves.

What is mental illness or mental health condition?

- Mental health challenges can affect anyone, regardless of age, race, status, culture, or qualifications.
- They often arise from adverse life experiences, environmental factors, chronic illness, biological factors, or substance use, including alcohol and drugs.
- When individuals struggle to cope with everyday stress and experience abnormal thoughts, emotions, and behaviors, as a result, their feelings, thoughts, and actions may be significantly altered.
- Common signs include changes in sleep patterns, eating habits, mood swings, irritability, social withdrawal, and feelings of self-harm.

- Like any other condition, treatment is available to manage symptoms of mental illness.

What to do?

- Stay connected with loved ones, engage in physical activities, learn new skills, practice kindness and mindfulness, and avoid psychoactive substances.
- Seek professional help and talk to trusted adults without delay.
- Offer support to those facing mental health challenges by guiding them to appropriate services.
- Immediate mental health support is also available through the Helpline at 1010.

6.2 Common Mental Health Conditions

I. Stress

- Stress is the feeling of worry or discomfort that affects how we think and act.
- It is a normal part of life, and in some cases, it can help improve performance at work, school, or daily activities. However, prolonged stress can negatively impact mental, physical, and social well-being.
- Common signs of stress include chest pain, headaches, weight loss, low energy, muscle pain, excessive worrying, difficulty concentrating, forgetfulness, and irritability.
- If not managed, stress can lead to negative thoughts, unhelpful emotions, and harmful behaviors.

II. Anxiety

- Feeling anxious at times is a normal part of life.
- Stressful events or past trauma can trigger feelings of fear, nervousness, or worry.
- These reactions are natural and help us respond to challenges. However, when anxiety lasts for a long time and starts affecting daily life, it can become a concern.
- Common signs include restlessness, nervousness, a fast heartbeat, irritability, sweating, trembling, fear, trouble concentrating, and difficulty sleeping. Panic attacks, a type of anxiety, are also a common anxiety disorder among adolescents.

III. Depression

- Everyone feels sad or low sometimes, but these feelings usually pass with time.
- In depression, these symptoms last for a longer duration (more than two weeks) affecting how you feel, think, and handle daily activities, such as sleeping, eating, or working.
- Other signs include losing interest in once-enjoyed activities, increased irritability, withdrawal from loved ones, and changes in sleep and eating habits.
- In extreme cases it often leads to feelings of harming oneself or ending life.

What to do:

- People cope with stress in different ways, but one of the most effective methods is practicing mindfulness to stay present in the moment.

- Stay active through regular exercise, sports and games.
- Stick to a consistent sleep routine with set bedtimes and wake-up times.
- Eat balanced meals consistently throughout the day and prioritize essential tasks.
- Connect with trusted people like school guidance counselors, teachers and health professionals to share your emotions, and delay major decisions until you're in a clearer mental state.
- Avoid harmful substances like alcohol, nicotine, and drugs.
- For mental health support and counseling services, reach out to the helpline at **1010, Sherig e-counseling and consultation service.**

6.3 Self-harm and Suicide

- Self-harm is intentionally harming one's own body, without intent to die, is a serious issue that can deeply affect a person's well-being.
- It is commonly used as a coping mechanism for overwhelming emotions like sadness, anger, or shame and should not be mistaken as attention-seeking behavior.
- Self-harm can take different forms, including cutting, hitting, punching, and burning.
- It may also be manifested as social withdrawal, sudden behavioral changes, and feelings of hopelessness.
- Suicide is the intentional act of taking one's own life.

Common warning signs of suicide:

- **Verbal Indicators:**
 - » Threatening to hurt oneself.
 - » Talking or writing about wanting to end life or death.
- **Behavioral Indicators:**
 - » Harming oneself or seeking access to means of suicide (e.g., pills, weapons).
 - » Giving away possessions or parting messages.
 - » Sudden changes in mood or behavior, such as withdrawing from loved ones.
- **Emotional Indicators:**
 - » Expressing feelings of hopelessness, worthlessness, or being a burden to others.

What to do:

- **If you are experiencing self-harm or suicidal thoughts:**
 - » Reach out to a trusted adult, friend, or family member.
 - » Seek professional help immediately.
 - » Contact a mental health helpline, such as 1010, for support and counseling.
- **If you notice warning signs in someone else:**
 - » Take all signs seriously, respond immediately and activate social support.

- » Ask directly about suicidal thoughts—research shows this does not increase the risk and can save lives.
- » Offer support and encourage them to seek professional help.
- » In schools and institutes, inform relevant authorities for interventions.
- » Immediately remove or securely store items that could be used for self-harm, such as sharp objects, medications, ropes, or other potentially dangerous tools.
- » Stay connected and ensure they are **not left alone**.

6.4 Substance Use

- It is the use of selected substances, including illicit drugs, alcohol, tobacco products, inhalants, and other substances that can be consumed, inhaled, injected, or otherwise absorbed into the body. It will alter physiological functions with possible dependence and other detrimental effects.
- Among adolescents, the most commonly used substances include alcohol, tobacco, vaping products, doma, inhalants and cannabis.
- Adolescents are more vulnerable to using these substances for various reasons such as curiosity, social influence, mental health issues, fear of missing out (FOMO), peer pressure, accessibility and availability, and tradition.
- Substance use can impact multiple areas of life including growth and development, relationships with others, mental wellbeing, academic performance or career opportunities, financial stability and legal issues.

What to do?

- Understand the risks and consequences of substance use to make informed decisions.
- Build healthy coping skills to tackle any issues. This can include physical activities, practicing mindfulness, journaling, engaging in hobbies to manage any distressing emotions and situations while also enhancing emotional wellbeing and resilience without harming oneself or others.
- Learn to say "NO" when you are pressured into doing something that feels wrong and unhealthy. It's important and okay to set boundaries in such situations.
- If you need help, don't hesitate to seek support from trusted adults.
- Seek help through helpline number 1010 (**refer annexure 1**)
- Respecting the law helps ensure your safety and well-being.

7. YOUR RIGHTS AND RESPONSIBILITIES

- » Your Right to Information, Health, and Confidentiality
- » Respecting Others' Rights
- » Accessing Health Services
- » Having a voice in decision-making
- » Right to live a life without discrimination

8. COMMON MYTHS & FAQs

8.1 Myths & Facts

Myth	Fact
MENSTRUATION	
You should not exercise during your period	Light exercise can help reduce cramps
Menstrual blood is dirty	It is a natural body function and not impure. However, personal hygiene should be maintained
A female who uses a tampon loses her virginity	Tampons do not affect virginity
Menstrual cups can only be used by a sexually active females	Menstrual cups are available in different sizes and can be used by all menstruating females
You should not eat sour or cold foods during menstruation	There is no scientific reason to avoid certain foods

Myth	Fact
You can't get pregnant during your period	Yes, it's possible to get pregnant during menstruation, though the risk is low. This can happen if you have unprotected sex. Sexual intercourse is not recommended to reduce the risk of infections
Puberty	
Puberty happens at the same time for everyone	Puberty is a gradual process that varies greatly from person to person, with girls generally starting puberty earlier than boys
Puberty changes happen overnight	Puberty is a gradual process, and body changes occur over time, not overnight
Development of pubic hair signals the onset of puberty	Without breast or testicular enlargement, pubic hair growth and body odor simply indicate increased adrenal secretion of weak androgens (adrenarche) rather than true puberty

Myth	Fact
Something is wrong if kids don't grow taller soon after puberty hits	Growth spurts vary in timing and intensity, and not everyone experiences a dramatic height increase immediately after puberty starts
Contraception	
Birth control makes you infertile	Most methods are reversible , and fertility returns after stopping them
Condoms always break	Condoms rarely break if stored properly and used correctly
Wearing double condoms gives better protection against STIs and pregnancy	Correct and consistent usage is the most effective way of protecting from STIs and pregnancy. Wearing a double condom increases the risk of breakage due to friction
SOGIESC	

Myth	Fact
Being LGBT+ is a choice	People do not choose their sexual orientation or gender identity; it is an inherent part of who they are
LGBT+ is a recent western influence	It has been prevailing since ancient times
Gender identity is the same as biological sex	Gender identity is how a person feels and identifies, which may be different from their assigned sex at birth
Mental Health	
All people with mental health disorders show bizarre behavior and are dangerous	All people with mental health disorders do not necessarily show bizarre behavior and may not be dangerous
Mental health is not related to physical health	Although the mind and body are often seen as separate, they are deeply connected. Good mental health can enhance physical well-being and vice versa

Myth	Fact
Mental health disorders once acquired are lifelong	There are different types of mental health disorders. Most such illnesses are short-term and treatable
Mental health disorders are something to be ashamed of	Mental health disorders are like any other illness that can be treated. With effective modern treatments and therapy, the prognosis for mental illnesses can be very good
Mental health disorders are caused by supernatural power, disturbances in local deities, or generational curses	Mental illness is caused by a variety of factors such as changes in brain function, genetic factors, adverse childhood experiences, and life stressors
Cyberbullying is not as serious as physical bullying	Cyberbullying is even worse; it can happen 24/7 and reach a wide audience

8.2 FAQs

Q1. Is HIV transmitted to babies while breastfeeding?

- Yes, babies should be fed with infant formula instead of mothers milk.

Q2. Can HIV be cured?

- Currently there is no definite cure. However, treatment with ART improves the quality of life.

Q3. Can emergency contraceptives terminate an established pregnancy?

- Emergency contraception will not terminate an established pregnancy.

Q4. Where can I get emergency contraception?

- Emergency contraception can be availed by anybody from CHU, PHC, HISC and Pharmacy outlets.

Q5. Is masturbation a healthy activity for adolescents?

- Yes, masturbation is a healthy and safe way for adolescents to explore their sexuality and experience pleasure. It is a normal part of human development.

Q6. Can masturbation have negative effects?

- Masturbation is generally safe as long as it does not interfere with daily life, responsibilities, or relationships. If it causes distress or becomes compulsive, seeking support may be helpful.

Q7. Does masturbation replace healthier ways of managing stress?

- While masturbation can provide temporary relief, it does not replace other healthy coping mechanisms such as exercise, meditation, talking to a trusted person, or engaging in hobbies.

Q8. Does masturbation affect eyesight and fertility?

- Masturbation is not associated with loss of eyesight and infertility.

Q9. Do condoms reduce pleasure?

- Condoms do not reduce pleasure. In fact, they can enhance the experience by reducing anxiety about unintended pregnancy and sexually transmitted infections (STIs).

Q10. Can condoms be reused?

- Condoms are designed for single use only. Reusing a condom increases the risk of breakage and infection. Always use a new condom for each sexual encounter.

Q11. Do all contraceptives protect against HIV and STIs?

- No, only condoms provide protection against both unintended pregnancy and sexually transmitted infections, including HIV. Other contraceptive methods, such as birth control pills or intrauterine devices (IUDs), do not protect against STIs.

ANNEXURES

Annexure 1: List of Helplines & Services

SI No.	Agency	Toll Free/ Contact Number	Purpose
1	Health Help Center	112	Health information, counseling and ambulance services
2	RBP	113	Safety and security
3	The PEMA Secretariat	1098	For Protection and Psychosocial Services
4	National Helpline	1010	Crime, traffic, and psychosocial services

Annexure 2: Servings for Food Groups

Starch Group	One Serving	Fats, Oil and Sweet Group	One Serving
Bread	1 slice/30G	Oil	1 tbsp
Crackers	4-6 pieces	Mayonnaise	1 tsp
Cooked cereals	½ cup	Cream cheese	1 tbsp
Dry cereals, unsweetened	¾ cup	Salad dressing	1 tbsp
Dry cereals, sweetened	½ cup	Peanuts	10
Dry flour/grain	3 tbsp	Butter or margarine	1 tsp
Pasta	½ cup	Ice cream	½ cup
Rice	½ cup	Cookies	2 small
Corn	½ cup	Syrup	1 tbsp
Popcorn	3 cups	Jam/jelly	1 tbsp
Potato (small)	1 (85g)	Sugar	2 tsp
Potato, mashed	½ cup	Pudding	¼ cup
Sweet potato	½ cup	Muffin/cupcake	½ small
Vegetable Group	One Serving	Fruit Group	One Serving
Squash	1 cup	Fresh fruit	1 small
Cooked beans, peas, lentils	½ cup	Water melon (cubes)	360g (1 cup)
Raw vegetables	1 cup	Canned fruit	½ cup
Cooked vegetables	½ cup	Dried fruit	¼ cup
Tomato or vegetable juice	½ cup	Fruit juice	½ cup

Meat, Poultry and Dairy Group	One Serving
Meat, poultry, fish	75g
Cheese	50g
Cottage cheese	50g
Egg	1
Peanut butter	1.5 tbsp
Cooked beans, peas, lentils	½ cup
Milk	1 cup
Yogurt	1 cup

Note: 1 tablespoon = 15 grams

1 teaspoon = 5 grams

1 cup = 240 grams

½ cup = 120 grams

List of Contributors:

1. Dr. Thinley Yangzom, HoD, CHD, JDWNRH
2. Dr. Suresh C Mothey, CMO, Trongsa Hospital
3. Dr. Namsa Dorji, CMO, Haa Hospital
4. Ms. Pema Choden, Lecturer, FNPH
5. Mr. Dawa Gyeltshen, DPHO, Gasu Dzongkhag
6. Mr. Namgay Dawa, DPHO, Punakha Dzongkhag
7. Ms. Tshering Denkar, ADPHO, Sarpang Dzongkhag
8. Ms. Thinlay Choden, Program Analyst, ASHP, DoPH
9. Mr. Hari Prasad Pokhrel, DCPO, DoPH
10. Mr. Dil Kumar Subba, Sr.PO, The PEMA secretariat, Thimphu
11. Mr. Choening Sherab, DCPO, MoESD
12. Ms. Dechen Tshomo, APO, MoESD
13. Mr. Dendup, Clinical Counsellor, Paro Hospital
14. Ms. Jamyang Choden, Clinical Counsellor, Gelephu CRRH
15. Mr. Chorten Tshering, AH focal, JDWNRH
16. Mr. Pema Dendup, AH focal, Mongar ERRH
17. Mr. Kezang Dawa, Admin Assistant, Khuruthnag Youth Centre
18. Ms. Tenzin Choden, Y-PEER Bhutan
19. Mr. Ninda Prasad Khatiwara, Y-PEER Bhutan
20. Ms. Pem Chiki, Youth Representative, Thimphu Youth Friendly Integrated Service Centre

Design & Layout:

Mr. Chana Singye, HPRCD, DoPH

Produced by:

Non-Communicable Disease Division (NCDD)
Department of Public Health
Ministry of Health, Thimphu

Financial Support:

UNICEF Country Office

REFERENCES

1. Ministry of Health (2023). National Health Survey.
2. Ministry of Health (2021). Training Manual on Adolescent Friendly Health Services.
3. National Statistics Bureau (2017). Population Projections Bhutan 2017-2047.
4. World Health Organization (2017). Global Accelerated Action for the Health of Adolescents (AA-HA)
5. World Health Organization (2018). Advocating for Change for Adolescents.

