Unit 10: Safe Abortion and Post-Abortion Care for Adolescents
REASONS THAT ADOLESCENTS SEEK UNSAFE OR LATE ABORTION

• They deny the pregnancy.
• They are unaware they are pregnant.
• They fear the reactions of their parents, in-laws, partners, peers, and/or communities.
• They are unaware of where to seek safe abortion services.
• There are no legal, safe abortion options.
• Their access to abortion services is restricted due to age, marital status, disability or dependent on a parent’s or partner’s consent.
• They lack financial resources.
• They lack transportation (or cannot afford it) /services are far away.
REASONS THAT ADOLESCENTS SEEK UNSAFE OR LATE ABORTION

• They lack accessible transportation (for young persons with disabilities) and services are far away.
• Services are inaccessible or unwelcoming due to physical, attitudinal, or communication barriers (for young persons with disabilities) and accommodation is not provided.
• They are misinformed about safe abortion and seek out “home” or traditional approaches.
• They do not know whom or how to ask for help.

(Source: PAC Consortium YFPAC Training Module)
SUMMARY OF BARRIERS

- Adolescents often seek late and unsafe abortion services. As a result, adolescents may end up with more serious complications (including death) than adults.
- Many adolescents also present late at health facilities when they are pregnant or because of complications of either a spontaneous or unsafe abortion.

(Source: PAC Consortium YFPAC Training Module)
ADDRESSING SOCIAL BARRIERS

• Provide information to community leaders.
• Engage religious leaders.
• Provide education to parents/guardians/caregivers.
• Set up informal or formal social support networks.
• Organize values clarification workshops for health-care providers and staff.

(Source: PAC Consortium/IPAS)
ADDRESSING ECONOMIC AND LOGISTICAL BARRIERS

• Lower the cost of abortion care or establish sliding cost scales for adolescents.
• Request accessible and affordable public transport routes or establish facility transport service (e.g. with local taxi services).
• Create a community-run transportation network.
• Use a community fund to assist in covering costs for services or transportation.
ADDRESSING LEGAL AND POLICY BARRIERS

• Ensure that facilities provide abortion services to the fullest extent of the law to all clients, including women and girls with disabilities.

• Create and/or adopt good clinical standards and guidelines if they do not exist, and remove language barriers in those that do exist. Ensure that those standards and guidelines are disability-inclusive.

• Understand the parameters of the law and the legal indications of what is permissible for any client who seeks abortion care.

• See Pathfinder International’s Abortion Policy Scan for Advocacy.
ADDRESSING HEALTH SYSTEM BARRIERS

- Provide abortion care for young women in easily accessible locations.
- Support clinics to keep an extensive schedule/remain open as late as possible.
- Ensure that misoprostol medical abortions are available locally and provide them.
- Ensure the entire facility (including the waiting room, the counselling rooms, the examination and procedure rooms, the recovery rooms and the bathrooms) is accessible to persons with disabilities and provides both visual and auditory privacy. Where possible, provide private rooms and separate toilets for abortion clients.
- Ensure effective communication between the client and the provider by providing accommodations as needed by young persons with different types of disabilities.
- Ensure confidentiality for all clients, including young people and clients with disabilities.
ADDRESSING HEALTH SYSTEM BARRIERS

• Use data collection forms that are neutral and non-judgmental, disability-sensitive, and do not require clients to complete excessive or unnecessary paperwork. If possible, make data collection forms available in an accessible format (i.e., braille, large print, easy to read etc.). Ensure the reception staff is trained and available to support persons with disabilities to complete data collection forms if necessary.

• Do not require unnecessary return visits as recommended by international protocols.

• Frame counseling about sexual and reproductive health using positive, respectful, and disability inclusive language and terms.

• Interpret legal indications broadly.

• Avoid any actions that might traumatize the client and ensure that providers assess and address the needs of all clients.
Considerations for Counseling Adolescent Clients
BEFORE THE FACILITY

When a young woman comes to a facility for treatment of an incomplete abortion, she has already had contact with, and will have contact with, more than just the health provider. These may include:

- Parents/guardians/caregivers
- Traditional Healers
- “Quacks”
- Friends/Peers
- Partners
- Community
- Faith Leaders
- Other clinic staff

She may have gotten conflicting information and had a range of experiences – likely negative -- with any of these people. She may be feeling defensive, frightened, anxious, and/or frustrated.
It is essential that the provider demonstrate supportive attitudes. This is essential not just for the quality of the clinical care provided, but to allow the young woman to relax, communicate effectively, and relay her fears. Adolescent clients who are afraid or have experienced judgmental attitudes from service providers, service facility staff, or others, will be reluctant to share information, and in particular, may be afraid to talk about what kinds of unsafe abortion strategies they’ve attempted. This can be particularly true for adolescent clients with disabilities who often face additional attitudinal barriers in accessing care.

Counseling during safe abortion and post-abortion care is essential: it is key to positive physical and emotional health outcomes. Ensuring that counseling is available and accessible to all adolescent clients, including young persons with disabilities, is therefore a priority.

(Source: Adapted from PAC Consortium YF PAC Training)
SAFE ABORTION AND PAC COUNSELING

- Safe abortion and post-abortion care counseling can:
- Provide adequate, clear and accessible information to help the adolescent make an informed decision.
- Help the adolescent evaluate her feelings and opinions.
- Act as an emotional support for the adolescent.
- Help the adolescent anticipate consequences.
- Support the adolescent in making informed and conscious health decisions, including the adoption of contraception to avoid future unintended pregnancy.
SAFE ABORTION AND PAC COUNSELING

Safe abortion and post-abortion care counseling does not:

• Enforce a pre-determined solution to the adolescent’s problems.
• Make decisions for the adolescent.
• Promote a life plan that has been successful in the past or with other clients.
• Express the counselor’s judgment about the adolescent’s behavior.

It is important to keep in mind that all the above mentioned “do and don’ts” apply for all clients accessing safe abortion and post-abortion care counseling without any restriction on the basis of education level, disability, or financial status.

(Source: PAC Consortium YF PAC Training)