

PATHFINDER

# Adapting and Implementing the Act With Her Program: **A How-To Guide**

APRIL 2023



ACT  
WITH

HER

# PATHFINDER

Pathfinder International is driven by the conviction that all people, regardless of where they live, have the right to decide whether and when to have children, to exist free from fear and stigma, and to lead the lives they choose.

Since 1957, we have partnered with local governments, communities, and health systems in developing countries to remove barriers to critical sexual and reproductive health services. Together, we expand access to contraception, promote healthy pregnancies, save women's lives, and stop the spread of new HIV infections, wherever the need is most urgent. Our work ensures millions of women, men, and young people are able to choose their own paths forward.

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Act With Her is led by Pathfinder International, in collaboration with the Government of Ethiopia, in partnership with CARE International, and with funding from the Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation. Evidence of impact is being assessed by the UK Aid-funded Gender & Adolescence: Global Evidence (GAGE) research consortium.

## What is Act With Her?

Act With Her (AWH) is a panoramic program model that partners with adolescent girls in laying the health, education, economic, and social foundations that they need to thrive during the transition to adulthood. This upstream approach provides girls with support during one of the most crucial life stages, reaching them before or during some of the most common disruptors of their future well-being (such as forced marriage, pregnancy, or school dropout). Although it's a girl-centered program, AWH also directly engages adolescent boys and connects with parents/caregivers and local communities, to ensure that adolescent girls have support now and in the future from their peers, partners, families, and influential allies. First launched in 2017 in Ethiopia, in 2021 the project expanded into Jordan.



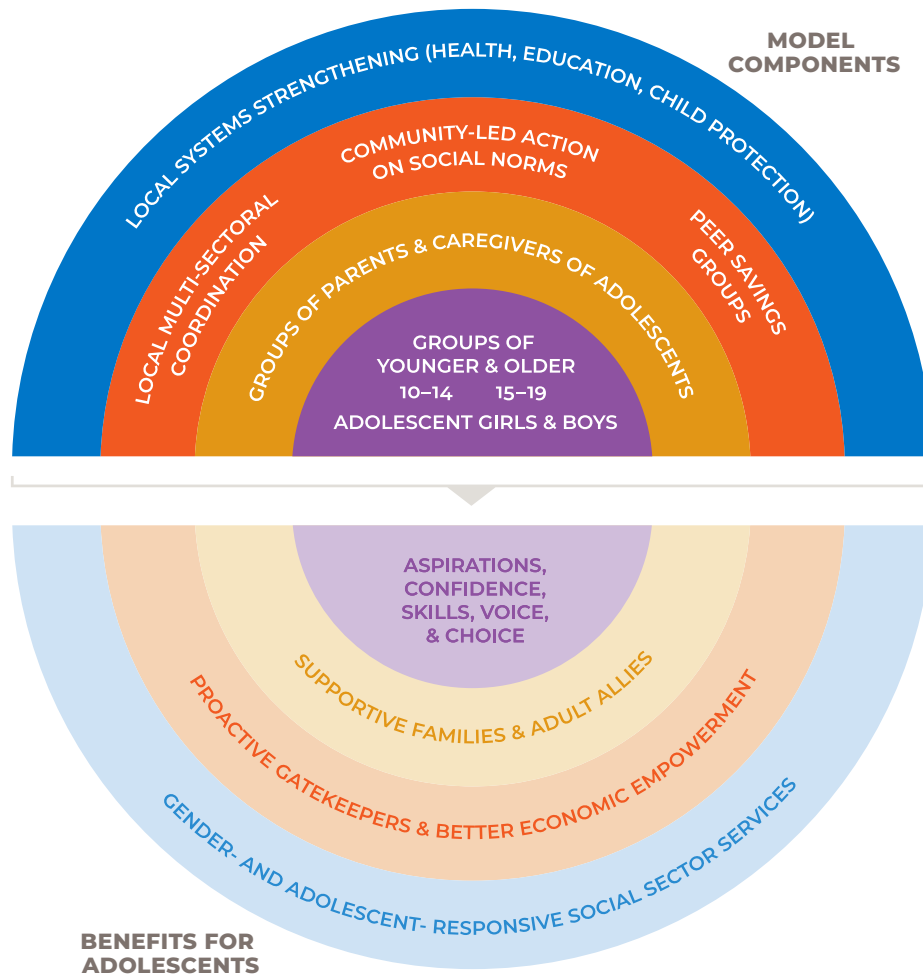
In Ethiopia, Pathfinder collaborated with the Government of Ethiopia, in partnership with CARE International, and through funding from the Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation to implement the flagship AWH program from 2017 to 2023. After a startup period that involved collaborative design and planning, between 2019 and 2023 we reached more than 50,000 adolescent Ethiopian girls and boys by scaling up an existing girls' empowerment program (called Her Spaces) while simultaneously assessing the potential value-add of an expanded version with additional components (called Act With Her). A randomized impact evaluation conducted by the UK Aid-funded Gender & Adolescence: Global Evidence (GAGE) research consortium is determining to what extent Her Spaces and the multiple variations of Act With Her:

a) strengthen individual and collective capabilities among adolescent girls across six domains: physical health, education, bodily integrity, psychosocial well-being, voice and agency, and economic empowerment; and b) increase knowledge and positively shift gender equitable attitudes among adolescent girls and boys.

In 2021, leveraging the original investment from the Gates Foundation, the Elsa & Peter Soderberg Charitable Foundation provided Pathfinder with a matching grant to expand AWH from Ethiopia into Jordan. We adapted the model for the new context and in 2022 reached more than 3,000 Jordanian and refugee adolescents living in Amman and five governorates of Jordan. The project is delivered in close partnership with the Institute for Family Health (IFH).

While the impact of various component combinations of the model continue to be evaluated in Ethiopia through 2024, the 'Essential' package for very young adolescents was used in Jordan (see Figure 1).

# The Act With Her Program Model



## **ESSENTIAL**

- Adolescents in age- and gender-segmented groups receive either 25 discussion modules (ages 15-19) or 40 discussion modules (ages 10-14). Topics covered include a wide range of puberty and menstruation, health, nutrition, education, safety, gender, communication, and economic empowerment themes (with 4 sessions designed as joint-gender meetings). The curriculum-based discussion groups are led by local “near peer” mentors of the same gender ages 18-25. Mentors are provided with training, stipends, and supportive supervision.
- Parents or caregivers of adolescents meet 5 or 6 times for facilitated discussions on the topics shared with their children, improving their own knowledge and their ability to communicate about complex issues with their children.

## **STRONGLY RECOMMENDED**

- Key local powerholders from multiple sectors committed to jointly playing a more vocal and proactive role in bringing adolescent issues to the forefront of local policy and community discussions.
- CARE’s Social Analysis and Action (SAA) methodology uses a community- led cycle of dialogue that encourages challenging restrictive local gender and social norms through joint reflection and problem-solving.

- Older adolescents form streamlined Village Savings and Loans Associations (VSLAs). If feasible, we recommend expanding these self-managed, sustainable savings groups for use by younger adolescents and by adults participating in the parent or social norms activities.

## **COMPREHENSIVE**

Light-touch local-level systems strengthening activities should be responsive to specific local conditions, capacity, and needs. Ours included:

- Improving Youth-Friendly Health Services at local clinics
- Enhancing social accountability structures via Community Score Cards
- Offering gender- and age- sensitivity training with a focus on school-based violence
- Strengthening implementation of a national School Health and Nutrition Package
- Improving menstrual health and hygiene management (MHM) in schools
- Establishing “Roll Back Early Marriage” clubs for girls

## How To Use This Guide

This guide provides 20 simple step-by-step suggestions for adapting the Act With Her program for different contexts, and for making basic startup preparations and decisions. Primarily intended for program implementation teams, it can also be a reference for policymakers, advocates, and funders who are seeking more information on what adolescent interventions such as AWH entail in practice.

**The guide provides considerations for implementers to think through:**

- **Whether this program is right for your setting (Steps 1-2)**
- **Who should be involved (Steps 3-5)**
- **What will be delivered, or the ‘technical adaptation’ (Steps 6-12)**
- **How it will be delivered and by whom, or the ‘operational adaptation’ (Steps 13-20)**

The amount of time this adaptation and startup process will take differs across situations, but in a typical scenario a team could complete these design and preparation steps and be ready for implementation within three to six months (largely depending on whether staff are already in place, how much technical content will be revised, whether language translation is needed, and how long local vendors take to complete basic services or procurements).

### Key principles for adapting Act With Her:

- Listen to adolescents and communities
- Leverage existing initiatives, networks, and materials
- Learn as you go



**Look for the “RESOURCE ALERTS” throughout the Steps with links to resources, tools, and materials that can be used for your adaptation and implementation.**



# The How-To Checklist: Steps 1-20

## STEPS 1-2: IS THIS PROGRAM RIGHT FOR YOUR SETTING?

### STEP 1

Before undertaking an adaptation process, first familiarize yourself with the basic facts about what the AWH approach is and what it delivers.

#### RESOURCE ALERT



With a wide range of materials available about the project, the most efficient way to gain a foundational understanding is to:

[Watch this 15-minute video](#)

### STEP 2

Once you have gained a basic understanding of the AWH model and its potential benefits, you can then **assess and confirm if it is a good fit for your current context, priorities, and deliverables**. Regardless of where she lives, every adolescent girl deserves and needs a wide range of respectful, rights-based information, support, and encouragement from her peers, the adults in her life, and her broader community. At the same time, it is still important to assess whether those needs are already being fully met for girls in your area, or if there are remaining gaps that could be filled using the AWH model.

**Using a desk review or other scoping exercise**, create an inventory of local girl-centered programs and become familiar with their geographic reach, their areas of focus, and their stated objectives. Then determine how a program like AWH fits into this broader girl-centered ecosystem. Is it merely duplicative, or would it offer something additional and bring complementary benefits? For example, many girl-centered programs ONLY include girls, but AWH is gender-synchronized and directly engages boys as well (to meet their own needs and to foster current and future allies for girls, too). If you determine that this model offers something unique in your setting, proceed with adaptation and use this program inventory to inform additional steps in stakeholder engagement and technical design. In most cases there will be an opportunity for strategic alignment, collaboration, and joint learning between AWH and these other local projects working within health, nutrition, education, gender, child protection, and youth economic empowerment or livelihoods.

## STEPS 3-5: WHO SHOULD BE INVOLVED?

### STEP 3

**Conduct a conventional stakeholder mapping exercise** to determine groups of people and individuals who should be informed and consulted, or more deeply involved either periodically or consistently. Determine who should be part of your early conversations and why, and then develop a specific plan for when to connect with them, what your reason is for engaging them, what you will ask of them or provide to them, and how you will manage this network of relationships over time. Relevant examples include (but are not limited to) adolescents and young people; caregivers of adolescents; community representatives; local youth-led or girl-focused coalitions and advocacy groups; cross-sectoral policymakers and government officials at both higher and decentralized levels; and implementing partners delivering adolescent programming. One key consideration in this exercise is to 'begin with the end in mind' and closely engage with people who could be involved in the future sustainability and scale up of the model over time.

#### RESOURCE ALERT



**BLOG:** [Working across sectors on adolescent issues is trendy... but how does it work?](#)

# The How-To Checklist: Steps 1-20

## STEP 4

**Assemble an adaptation task team of people who will be directly responsible for the decision-making and tasks necessary to complete the entire startup and preparation process.** A successful adaptation team will include members with a diverse set of skills, with many assigned as full-time contributors and some participating only when necessary. It is important to have people on the team who can be responsible for operational, financial, and technical aspects of the process. For example, our AWH teams had small groups of full-time project staff managing the entire process, and who consulted other administrative staff within the organization, external partners and government officials, or specific subject matter experts during different steps and phases.



### TIP

We strongly recommend including adolescents and young people as members of the core team whenever feasible, prioritizing their input and ideas in the beginning, and their partnership and feedback through to the end. At minimum, focus group discussions can be held to gain adolescents' viewpoints at this critical early stage.

## STEP 5

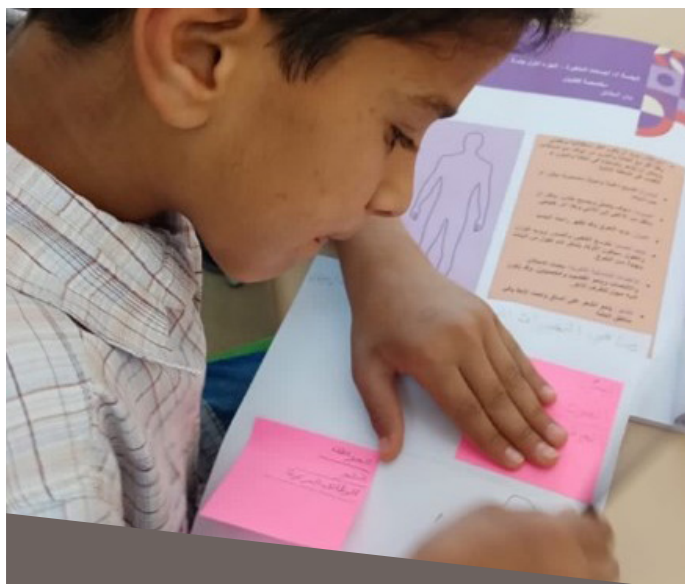
To avoid delays later, **take action early to identify startup needs** that will require establishing relationships, contracts, or procurement agreements with external vendors for providing professional services such as:

- Language translation
- Graphic design
- Printing
- Master training or training facilitation
- Venue rentals for trainings, stakeholder meetings, graduations, and other convenings

## STEPS 6-12: WHAT WILL BE DELIVERED?

## STEP 6

**Building on your general familiarity with the program model gained in Step 1, spend time reviewing key technical and learning documents from the program in more detail.** You can access our entire suite of concise and user-friendly learning materials here (examples of topics include strategies for working with mentors, why working with younger adolescents is unique, insights gained from the gender-synchronized approach, and why adolescents need adult allies and how AWH mobilizes them).





# The How-To Checklist: Steps 1-20

## STEP 7

**Choose which components of the model you will implement.** This critical decision depends on a wide variety of factors such as the needs in your area, other existing programs, your timeframe, your mandate, and your budget. Revisit Page 3 to review the different layers of components and their related activities (Essential, Strongly Recommended, and Comprehensive).

A critical factor in adopting, scaling, and eventually institutionalizing any intervention or program successfully is **understanding which of its elements require fidelity and which can be optional or adapted depending on the context.** In general, your team can begin by assessing the feasibility of offering the 'Ideal' total package of components and then paring down further if specific activities are deemed not feasible, appropriate, or affordable.

Based on the original rationale used in designing this model and our implementation experience, **we recommend that at minimum any replication of AWH include the 'Essential' package of offering group meetings to both girls and boys, as well as to their parents and caregivers.** If only one age segment can be accommodated, that is acceptable, although we recommend striving to include both. We do not recommend operating this particular model as a girl-only approach, or without including groups for parents and caregivers. However, if you have determined that this option is best in your setting, we suggest adapting a different program model (which can be found through resources such as the [Coalition for Adolescent Girls](#) and [The Girl Center](#)).



### TIP

This is a good step to deeply engage the different types of stakeholders that you identified during Steps 3-4. By including key inputters from outside of your project team in the decision-making process for which of the model's components you will deliver, you can increase political will from cross-sectoral leaders or officials, reduce duplication with other implementers, and most closely align your package with what participants actually want and need.



### LEARNING BRIEFS



**LEARNING BRIEF:**  
**Mobilizing Adult Allies for Adolescents**



**INFOGRAPHIC:** **Using Savings Groups with Older Adolescents**



**INFOGRAPHIC:** **Menstruation Matters in Very Young Adolescence**



**LEARNING BRIEF:**  
**Strengthening Local Systems for Very Young Adolescents**



**LEARNING BRIEF:**  
**Delivering Adolescent Programming in a Migratory Pastoralist Setting**



**LEARNING BRIEF:**  
**What Costs are Involved in Multi-Faceted Adolescent Programming?**

# The How-To Checklist: Steps 1-20

## STEP 8

**Determine what “dosage” (number of total weeks/months) is the most rational and feasible to deliver the program based on which package you have selected.** The default curriculum for very young adolescents is designed to be delivered weekly over a period of ten months, so it includes 40 session modules. The parents/caregivers have six sessions. In Ethiopia, this spacing and overall timeline worked well. In Jordan, the team leveraged the advantage that seasonal breaks from school presented, and successfully condensed the delivery of 40 sessions into a 2-3 month period. For older adolescents, the default curriculum is designed for weekly delivery over six months, with 25 sessions. These parents/caregivers have five sessions.

The decision for dosage and timing will **depend on your program’s workplan, budget, deadlines, and staff availability**, but in choosing the length of each round or phase of programming it is also critical to take into account the realistic way that adolescents and their parents can meaningfully participate. For example, in some settings it might not be reasonable to assume they can attend more than once per week or that they could stay for more than two hours at a time, but in others this may be simple and work well. Find the right balance between the very best experience for your participants and any constraints the structure of your project may present.

## STEP 9

Now that you know how many total months and weeks you will deliver sessions per round of programming, you can **start to adapt the content that will be delivered in each of those meetings**. First, you must select the major overall themes of adolescent well-being your program will address (i.e., what topics will you cover). You will develop the specific information provided for each theme next in Step 10.

In this step it’s helpful to remember that the **AWH curriculum is built for customization**. The guiding philosophy of AWH is to meet adolescents’ needs through a holistic, panoramic, multi-sectoral lens – and yet what that looks like in practice will differ across diverse settings. Therefore, the Global Curricula presents a ‘menu’ of modules on themes across the different dimensions of adolescents’ lives (including puberty and menstruation, health, nutrition, education, safety, gender, communication, and economic empowerment). Yet the specific information contained within each discussion module on those broad themes is meant to be further customized and adjusted to the realities for participants (girls, boys, and parents/caregivers) in each context. Some, but not all, may be relevant to the adolescents in your program. Or, some topics that are not included in this Global Curriculum may also be important in your context, and it will be critical for your team to develop and include them. For example, girls in rural Ethiopia are often at risk of FGM/C. Yet this practice is far less common in Jordan, so when we adapted the program model, the discussion sessions on FGM/C were removed. On the other hand, adolescents (especially girls) in rural Ethiopia tend to have extremely limited access to digital technologies, and therefore the Ethiopian Curriculum did not include that topic as a significant focus. Adolescents in urban areas of Jordan, however, commonly use phones and other devices to access online resources and social media. Therefore, we built out a new module for the Jordanian Curriculum with information about good technology navigation, and cyber-bullying.

In most circumstances this thematic identification should not require undertaking any new research. Review local data sources for information on the biggest current challenges for and unmet needs of adolescent girls and boys with regard to their health and overall well-being (government plans, national calls to action, DHS, grey or published literature, etc.). Based on your team’s knowledge and experience plus any data reviews, proceed with reviewing the topics represented by each module of the Global, Ethiopian, and Jordanian Curricula to make decisions on which topics are necessary for your program, if any should be removed, and if any topics need to be newly added.



### RESOURCE ALERT

Please consult the **Act With Her Program Package: Open-Access Editable Materials for Replication & Adaptation**

# The How-To Checklist: Steps 1-20

## STEP 10

**Adapt the specific information included in each thematic module of the Curricula.** Materials include separate sets of curricula for:

- Younger adolescent girls and boys (ages 10-14)
- Older adolescent girls and boys (ages 15-19)
- Their parents/caregivers, respectively

Each set includes the facilitation manuals for mentors to use in delivering the modules, plus participant booklets. The content may need slight adaptations per setting, as well as ensuring culturally appropriate references and examples are used throughout (e.g., names, food items, places, etc.).

**This step requires a good amount of effort from people with strong technical backgrounds,** and a deep grasp of the information presented in each of the thematic modules. This step may also take the most time if a significant adaptation is needed, although it could be fairly efficient if very light modifications are needed.



### TIP

Even when tailored to each unique setting, the curriculum will always cover certain sensitive topics such as violence and sexual and reproductive health. In addition to customizing the technical information in these sessions, the adaptation team also needs to ensure that guidance is included in these sections regarding how group mentors and their supervisors should respond during instances when an adolescent discloses that they are experiencing violence or need another form of support. The plan you develop will depend on local laws, organizational policies and practices, and available resources. The plan should be developed with consultation from gender or violence advisors where possible. Consider the following points as you develop your plan and the associated instructions that will be included within the curricula and manuals:

- The key principle to remember is “Do No Harm” – project staff and volunteers likely have good intentions and want to help adolescents in any way they can. However, sometimes these attempts to help can inadvertently cause harm.
- Comply with organizational policies and practices and local law – does the country where you are working have mandatory reporting laws about violence against minors? If so, make it clear to the adolescents that if they share certain information with you, you will not be able to keep it a secret. Does your organization already have referral pathways or processes in place? If so, these can be adapted for AWH.
- Develop a referral plan – while we would like to refer adolescents to health, legal, or other services if they are interested in them, we don’t want this referral to cause them further harm. If you are referring adolescents to services, you should ensure that referral sites are equipped to confidentially provide the type of care the adolescent is seeking.
- Protect confidentiality – staff and volunteers need to be trained to keep any disclosures of violence private, and to fully understand that if the incident is tracked through any internal systems that no personally identifiable information is recorded. It is also important to train mentors to remind adolescents that there is no need to share personal stories in the group setting but that if any personal stories are shared, they should not be repeated outside of the group.
- Respond with kindness – when an adolescent shares that they have experienced violence, the response of the friend, parent, or mentor can influence the impact that the experience will have on their lives. Therefore, it is important to train staff to respond in a non-judgmental way and to tell the adolescent you are sorry they experienced that and that violence is never their fault.
- Remember that while many programs focus on violence against girls, violence also happens to boys. Boys’ group mentors should be equally trained on responding to reports of violence.

# The How-To Checklist: Steps 1-20

## STEP 11

**If you are delivering only the 'Essential' components of the model, you may skip this step and now move to Step 12.** Stay on this step if you are planning to deliver any of the activities in the 'Strongly Recommended' or 'Comprehensive' model components, such as:

- Local multisectoral coordination
- Community-led action on social norms
- Peer savings groups
- Local systems strengthening (in education, health, and/or child protection)

First, revisit the graphic on Page 3 to see what each of these entailed for our AWH program. Your approach to each will be specific to your setting but should start with assessing the current status of related programming in your area, identifying remaining gaps, and then filling those through your program. For example, are there any programs already addressing local social norms related to gender or adolescence? Which services in the community meant for use by adolescents may need the type of strengthening you could feasibly achieve with your financial and human resources, and overall timeline? For example, in Ethiopia we delivered a range of activities designed to improve the school setting for younger adolescents, and for older adolescents focused on key health and financial supports.

### RESOURCE ALERT



[Learning Brief: Strengthening Local Systems for Very Young Adolescents](#)

[CARE International's Social Action & Analysis \(SAA\) Methodology](#)

[Infographic: Using Savings Groups with Older Adolescents](#)

## STEP 12

After finalizing all the content across your materials, **you will likely need to have them translated into one or more local languages.** We have intentionally made the AWH Curricula series available as fully open-access and in the Microsoft Word format so that other teams can easily undertake the adaptation process, including for any graphic design you would like to add that feels the most culturally appropriate and visually interesting to your team. Total time for this step will vary, but could range between 2-3 months, taking into account reviews and revisions needed during both translation and design processes.

## STEPS 13-20: HOW WILL IT BE DELIVERED, AND BY WHOM?

## STEP 13

**When considering the best operational structure for your delivery of AWH, begin with the end in mind.**

In each of the remaining steps, explicitly consider: how can your approach and structure be the most embedded within existing platforms, and the most likely to be realistically sustained (or even scaled) in the future, taking into account the human resources, finances, capacities, and platforms at hand? For example, are there existing cadres of workers who could potentially incorporate this into their responsibilities, or from whom program collaborators could be drawn? For example, are there public sector health, education, or child protection staff posted at local levels who could possibly contribute to program monitoring or mentor supervision? Are there teachers or school staff, or youth workforce development projects or early career training programs in the area who may have young people in need of real-world experience and who could serve as AWH mentors?

In some settings there simply will not be existing initiatives or cadres of workers to leverage, but it's important to assess this availability first before deciding on any project-specific delivery avenues.

# The How-To Checklist: Steps 1-20

## STEP 14

### Define your geographic reach and cohort size.

- In collaboration with key stakeholders, determine which specific areas you will work within. Considerations include (but are not limited to) the magnitude of need, an aim to reduce duplicated efforts with similar projects, reaching the most vulnerable, safety, and cost.
- Determine how many adolescents you can realistically reach within those places, given the available meeting sites, timeline, funds, etc.

In Ethiopia, a large portion of our cohort was part of a randomized study assessing the overall impact of the model. To retain the integrity of the study we implemented one cohort of groups in each location (e.g., kebele or village), spread across a wide geographic area. In the areas of Ethiopia where the study was not being conducted, and in our Jordan sites, we chose instead to implement multiple groups in each location (either simultaneously or consecutively), saturating as much of the total adolescent population in each place as possible. The latter approach allowed us to operate more economically and more efficiently by clustering staff and by reducing transportation needs, and it also satisfies a larger portion of the demand in each community.



#### TIP

We recognize that it is often cost-efficient to operate in the easiest to reach locations (for example, in and around the capital city or large district towns). We strongly recommend striving to reach adolescents in more remote or underserved areas whenever possible.

## STEP 15

**Develop your monitoring, evaluation, and learning (MEL) plan.** Collecting high-quality MEL data can help the project team to understand how implementation is going and make evidence-based adaptations to improve project performance. Additionally, MEL data can be used to understand the impacts of the project, such as how many adolescents participated or their perceptions of the project. Although some pieces of the plan may continue to be developed over time as you move through other steps, the team should begin MEL planning at this point in the process because certain MEL data may need to be collected during those next steps (for example, key demographic and contact information would be gathered first during adolescent recruitment).

### To work with the project team (MEL and programmatic or technical staff) to develop the project's MEL plan:

- Engage the core project team to understand what information should be collected during project implementation. Here are some questions to consider when deciding what information to collect:
  - Does the government or the project funder have specific reporting requirements? Make sure that data collection tools will generate this information.
  - What information would be most useful for project staff to have access to on a regular basis to track implementation? For Ethiopia and Jordan, adolescent attendance rates and the dates that sessions happened were the most critical. In Ethiopia, we had mentors report whether they felt that each session went well, okay, or poorly, so that supervisors could easily identify which mentors may need more support.
  - What statements would you like to be able to make at the end of the project? In Ethiopia, we had an external research partner that was conducting a randomized-controlled trial. Therefore, we chose to collect qualitative, Most Significant Change (MSC) stories from adolescents and communities to understand their experiences and complement the data from the external evaluation. In Jordan, there was no external evaluation, so we created a simple pre- and post-test to administer to adolescents at the first and the last session to track shifts in knowledge.

continued →

# The How-To Checklist: Steps 1-20

## STEP 15

CONTINUED

- How much funding is allocated for MEL activities? More comprehensive evaluation activities are more costly and may require hiring external consultants. Other activities, such as regularly collecting attendance at each session, are simpler and thus more affordable. Digital data collection methods can facilitate data entry and use, but present additional costs (i.e., purchasing tablets and mobile data).
- What ethical protections does your team have the capacity to implement? If you are collecting data that will be used for more than routine monitoring (i.e., for publication in a journal article) you will need to get ethical approvals and submit the research protocol to an Institutional Review Board.
- How will the data be used? This, in some ways, is the most important question. The more data you collect, the more time implementers will have to focus on data entry and not supervising or implementing the project. While it is worthwhile to use staff time to collect data, it is important to find the right balance between how much data you want to collect versus how much data you will be able to use to improve project performance. It is better to limit routine data collection and then if there are additional questions, less frequent data collection activities could be developed and implemented.
- Are there specific learning questions you would like to gather data on? Learning questions of interest may be explored through non-routine data collection. For example, if you are implementing a new topic/theme/module as part of AWH, you may want to collect data from project participants on their experience learning about the topic so that you can adjust for future rounds of programming. One approach used by AWH Ethiopia was to send out short surveys at two points during implementation to gather staff insights on project implementation and what could be improved.
- How will MEL data help us to understand adolescents' experiences participating and how can we share project data with adolescents and communities? In Ethiopia, our team collected regular feedback from adolescent participants on how their experience could be improved and any challenges they may be facing in attending sessions. Additionally, we shared a short flyer with adolescents at the end of each project phase which included key data collected from adolescents in their community, so they could see the bigger picture of what they were part of and what their peers thought of it.
- Will you collect data on mentors? Mentors play a key role in the project's success, and they reported many positive impacts as a result of participating in the project. Collecting baseline and endline data on mentors could help us understand how programs like AWH impact their lives.
- How will you monitor unintended outcomes? Complex projects like AWH require monitoring tools that can track unintended outcomes in addition to intended outcomes. AWH Ethiopia did this via the Most Significant Change approach, as well as by using an open-ended implementation tracking form which allowed staff to record any changes to implementation or unintended consequences of the project.
- Based on this prioritization exercise, develop data collection tools. It is generally not recommended to collect personal information from adolescents about sensitive subjects (i.e., experiences of violence) as this could put them at risk of harm. If you are interested in collecting this kind of data, you can contract with a research partner who is experienced in collecting data on sensitive topics, or use existing data sources to answer your questions.
- Decide how data will be collected and stored. In Ethiopia, most data were collected by mentors on paper-based forms. Their supervisors then entered the data into tablets and uploaded the data to the project's DHIS2 database. Mentors did not enter data directly into tablets due to poor internet connection in the rural areas where they work and security concerns about having tablets in these remote areas. Depending on multiple factors, digital data collection may or may not be appropriate (or affordable). Create a database where all routine project data are stored and develop visualizations or dashboards that allow the quick and easy visualization of data.
- Make a plan to ensure data quality and encourage data use. This could include regular data quality assessments, creating routine reports or dashboards, or holding data review meetings to interpret and apply the data with programmatic and technical teams.

# The How-To Checklist: Steps 1-20



## RESOURCE ALERT

The following tools are available in the Act With Her Program Package: Open-Access Editable Materials for Replication & Adaptation:

- [AWH Monthly Data Collection Tool](#)
- [AWH Adolescent Flyer](#)
- [AWH MSC Data Collection Tool](#)
- [AWH Implementation Tracking Tool](#)

## STEP 16

### **Put robust overall Safeguarding and also Protection from Sexual Exploitation and Abuse (PSEA) policies and procedures in place.**

These policies are designed to protect all project participants from being harmed by individuals who are implementing the project. Adapt your organization's existing policy, or develop one based on those from other organizations. Ensure that staff are oriented to and trained on it appropriately and that you have assigned roles and responsibilities among team members to ensure it is adhered to. It is deeply important to make sure that mentors and any public sector officials who will play a role in implementation, who may not be considered staff, are covered under, and trained on, this policy. You will need to deliver training on these key policies to different stakeholders in several of the next steps.



## RESOURCE ALERT

[Pathfinder International Safeguarding Policy](#)

[CARE International Safeguarding Policy](#)

[Safeguarding Support Hub](#)



# The How-To Checklist: Steps 1-20

## STEP 17

Define your plan for engaging adolescents, parent/caregivers, and communities.



### TIP

If your plan is to have group mentors take an active role in community engagement or participant recruitment and enrollment, do Step 18 before this one.

### Community engagement

- As a first step in program rollout, **key stakeholders and community members (for example, local faith leaders) will need to be oriented to the program, its objectives, and the ways that they can be involved or supportive** (see below, with regard to participant recruitment). Consider what has worked best in your setting in the past to generate strong community interest and commitment on similar initiatives. Also consider ways to mitigate any potential opposition at the very earliest stages, if relevant. For example, in a small number of our AWH sites some community members had the misperception that the program was designed to convince adolescents to change from one religion to another. Identifying any opposition to the project as early as possible and working closely with community leaders to correct any misinformation will be critical not only for the project's inception but its success over time.

### Adolescent Recruitment and Participation

**Using a strategic and inclusive strategy for identifying the adolescents to invite and enroll into the program is a vital step.** Notably, it is all too common for both girls and boys who could benefit the most from programs to be excluded from participation due to a wide range of barriers. It's important to take time in this step to understand who you want to reach and why, and then plan how you will achieve that. For example, refugees, or adolescents who are already married, or have children, or live far from town, or have dropped out of school can all greatly benefit from participating in the adolescent groups, but bringing them into the fold may require intentional recruitment and programming strategies, tailored to their unique circumstances.

- First, determine how you will identify the adolescents in your implementation areas who would benefit the most from this program. For girl participants, one well-known tool for this is the Population Council's [The Girl Roster](#). Described as a "user-friendly, efficient, and cost-effective way to collect program-relevant information about girls in the community", using it can help reveal not only more about the lives of girls in your area, but also help identify the most socially or economically marginalized girls in specific communities.
- Next, building off your initial community engagement to build awareness of the program, continue engaging key community gatekeepers directly in the recruitment process. In Ethiopia, community leaders such as school staff, religious figures, and local sector officials were enlisted to help with participant recruitment efforts. To ensure that the "easiest to reach" young people were not the only ones engaged, the program encouraged the community recruitment committees to reserve at least five out of the 25 slots for every group for adolescents who are the most vulnerable (e.g., married, out of school, living with a disability, etc.). We strongly encourage you to adopt a similar target.



## Parent/Caregiver Recruitment and Participation

- Once the committee has identified a list of eligible adolescents, **the next step is to meaningfully reach out to their parents and caregivers** as adolescents themselves are not old enough to give informed consent for participation. You can visit households or call a community meeting to tell parents and caregivers about the program, and seek consent for their adolescents to participate. You should come prepared to answer common questions they may ask about the program's intent, its staff, or its requirements. At this same time, you can inform them that the program also offers a series of peer group discussions for them which they are expected to commit to. You will need to identify the most strategic ways to build their interest and mobilize their full participation, given how busy most of these parents/caregivers are and how many things will compete for their time. Things to consider are convenient times and places to hold the meetings, and if there are any reasonable incentives that could encourage attendance and participation (e.g., providing tea, setting up peer or group savings structures for members, etc.).

## STEP 18

### **Recruit, train, and prepare to supervise and support your group mentors. Mentors are the heart of this program.**

They are the frontline implementers, and the people who the community and the adolescents will associate with the project overall. They host the sessions for the adolescents and for the parents, support broader community activities, collect crucial monitoring data, and provide valuable feedback throughout implementation. You must thoughtfully define your approach for their recruitment, training, supervision, and compensation. Careful selection and recruitment combined with strong training and supervision are critical to ensure that mentors feel motivated, appreciated, and adequately equipped to lead the adolescents and the parents/caregivers through their group discussions.

- We recommend deploying 'near peer' mentors who are between the ages of 18-25, and who are from and live in the same communities as the adolescents. It is important that they can be a trusted adult for the adolescents, but still close enough in age that they can be relatable as well. If your adolescent enrollment includes specific subsets of the population, such as refugees, you will ideally recruit mentors from this same group. The goal is for the adolescents and mentors to be able to relate to each other and come from the same cultural background.
- In Ethiopia, we set up mentors to work in pairs. We found they appreciated this approach, and working a partner. It also helps prepare for instances when mentors may need to leave the program, as they move onto different opportunities. Regardless of whether you choose to assign them in pairs, you should devise a strategy for handling mentor dropouts (i.e., how mentor replacement work). In some of our sites we were able to train some extra mentors up-front, and they remained on standby as alternates.
- Using community-led committees to identify and recruit mentors in each local area will increase local buy-in and trust, and can help with finding the strongest candidates for the role. It is strongly advised that mentors live in the same community or neighborhood as the adolescents, although in some ultra-rural or underserved settings the requirements for basic literacy can make this difficult. Strive to find the best balance possible between the skills and the location of mentors.
- Like everyone else, mentors are members of and influenced by the communities in which they live. They need strong support during training to confront and reflect upon the ways that local social, culture, or gender norms affect their own attitudes toward these themes. Values clarification exercises may be needed during training to ensure that mentors are fully prepared to work through transformative portions of the curriculum with adolescents and with parents/caregivers. In fact, it is advisable to offer these values clarification exercise to your own project staff and team, in addition to the mentors.
- Determining mentor compensation is more of an art than a science. Most mentors are considered "volunteers", but they deserve adequate compensation and incentives that correspond to the significant amount of time, effort, and dedication this role requires. At the same time, sustainability issues often constrain paying very high cash stipends. However, if stipends are too low and there are many other economic opportunities for young adults in the area, turnover may be high, which presents additional challenges. Explore what has worked well and what feels both the most fair and the most feasible in your context. There may already be a national policy in place that dictates how social volunteers are compensated, and in that case, follow that.

# The How-To Checklist: Steps 1-20

## STEP 18

CONTINUED

- One key function for the program is to provide ongoing supportive supervision for the mentors. We recommend assigning people to serve as mentor supervisors (whether these are program staff or public sector officials who agree to take on the role). Their responsibility is to ensure the supervisors are well trained, are monitored and provided with performance assessments and improvements. Importantly, often these are young adults who may not have finished their own educations, and can benefit from extra coaching and practice for key facilitation skills. They should also be periodically directly observe by their supervisors so real-time guidance and feedback can take place (we budgeted this to be monthly but there are several factors that could influence your decision for frequency). On a quarterly basis, all of the mentors from the same area were convened to share challenges and best practices and learn from their peers' experiences. This proved very useful for exchanging problem solving ideas, and for mutual encouragement and inspiration.



### TIP

As you develop your approach for mentor engagement and support, consider the benefits they can gain, too. In most adolescent-centered programs the young adult mentors who lead the adolescent groups are often considered a means to an end, or as the "inputs" needed to reach the ultimate goal of adolescent empowerment. Yet our experiences in Ethiopia and Jordan revealed that these only slightly older youth reap very meaningful personal benefits of their own. For example, our mentors reported having expanded personal aspirations, confidence, community respect, and financial literacy. They also described using their new skills to seek further education, economic, and employment opportunities. Rather than viewing this as a pleasant side effect, we strongly recommend devising your mentor strategy in a way that directly seeks to cultivate positive impact on mentors in addition to the adolescents. Given their status as volunteers and with projects typically having limited budgets, full financial compensation is not always possible. This should provide even more incentive to your project team to intentionally maximize the ways that their mentorship role can serve as a "first rung" step toward improving their own economic prospects and employability. For example, consider whether mentors can be drawn from pools of local youth who may be participating in career training or vocational programs. In the reverse, define a plan for how mentors can be introduced to and linked up with local economic empowerment or employability programs, using their experience as an AWH mentor as a bridge to even greater opportunities. This is an especially critical consideration for the mentors who are young women, as they often have severely limited knowledge of or access to key economic initiatives.



### RESOURCE ALERT

Population Council Toolkit: Making the Most of Mentors

The following tools are available in the [Act With Her Program Package](#):  
[Open-Access Editable Materials for Replication & Adaptation](#):

- VYA Mentors' Pre- and Post-Test
- VYA Mentors' Pre- and Post-Test Answer Key
- OA Mentors' Pre- and Post-Test
- OA Mentors' Pre- and Post-Test Answer Key

## STEP 19

**Develop your detailed workplan and related budget.** In this step your team will be familiar with the process from working on many other similar projects and programs, and can apply best practices for routine project planning, management, and reporting.

With regard to budgeting, we cannot provide a specific “bottom line” for a new program to use, or even a per-participant cost. While we have made this information available for reference from part of our Ethiopia implementation (see Resource Alert below), the actual ‘price tag’ is not simply transferable to any new setting. We must consider how widely the prices for staff salaries and benefits, supplies and materials, appropriate mentor stipends, venue hall fees, per diems, and transportation can vary so widely not only across but even within countries, as well as how they can fluctuate over time. To help your team develop a budget for an adapted AWH program in a new context, we have developed a list of “key ingredients” that new implementers can use to estimate costs using the specific prices for those line items in your area. In other words, instead of simply using our own spending totals to budget for your replication effort, it will be more useful to understand what you need to buy and pay for to successfully deliver this program and then budget for those inputs using current and local prices. Also, our list only describes elements specific to the AWH model and does not include budget line items that are standard across all projects, such as a monitoring and evaluation system.



### RESOURCE ALERT

**Learning Brief: What Costs are Involved in Multi-Faceted Adolescent Programming?**

## STEP 20

**Get started! Go forth and partner with adolescents in laying the health, education, economic, and social foundations that they need to thrive during the transition to adulthood!**



# Resources Appendix

[Act With Her Program Package: Open-Access Editable Materials for Replication & Adaptation](#)

[The Act With Her Program Legacy Report: Learning from Implementation in Ethiopia & Jordan \(2017-2023\)](#)

Learning materials from Ethiopia:

- Working with very young adolescent girls and boys: [brief](#) & [infographic](#)
- Engaging mentors in very young adolescent programming: [brief](#) & [infographic](#)
- Strengthening local systems for very young adolescents: [brief](#) & [infographic](#)
- Mobilizing adult allies for adolescents: [brief](#)
- Gender-synchronized programming: [brief](#)
- Using savings groups with older adolescents: [infographic](#)
- Delivering adolescent programming in a migratory pastoralist setting: [brief](#) & [infographic](#)
- Menstruation matters in very young adolescence: [infographic](#)
- What applying a gender lens to our data taught us: [infographic](#)
- What costs are involved multi-faceted adolescent programming? [brief](#)



**PATHFINDER**



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Act With Her is led by Pathfinder International, in collaboration with the Government of Ethiopia, in partnership with CARE International, and with funding from the Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation. Evidence of impact is being assessed by the UK Aid-funded Gender & Adolescence: Global Evidence (GAGE) research consortium.

**TO LEARN MORE VISIT** [www.pathfinder.org/projects/act-with-her/](http://www.pathfinder.org/projects/act-with-her/)

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