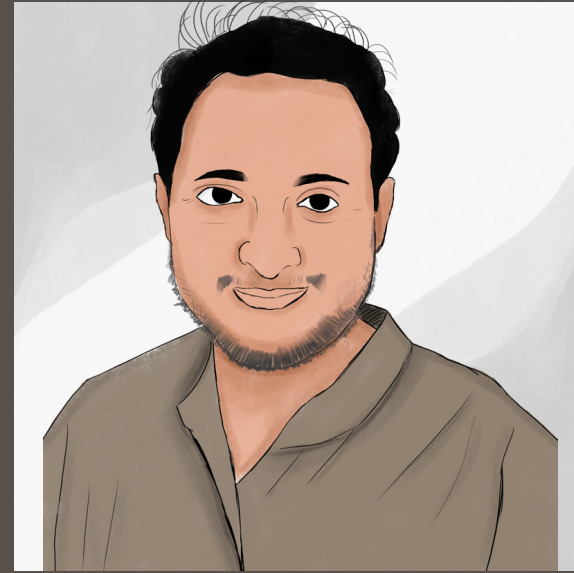
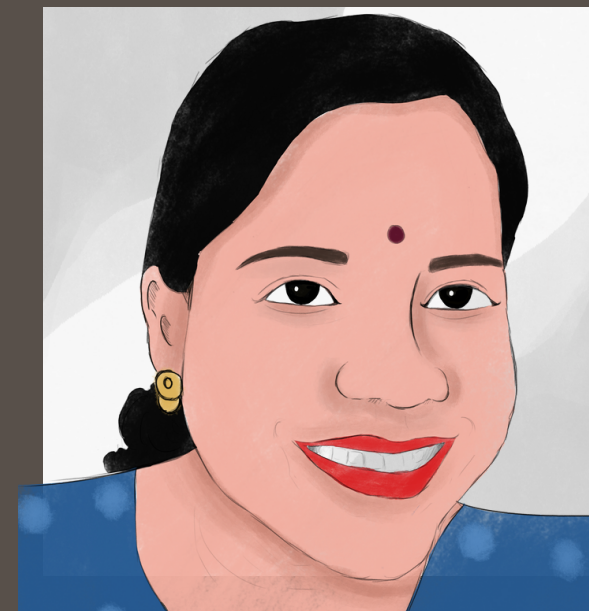
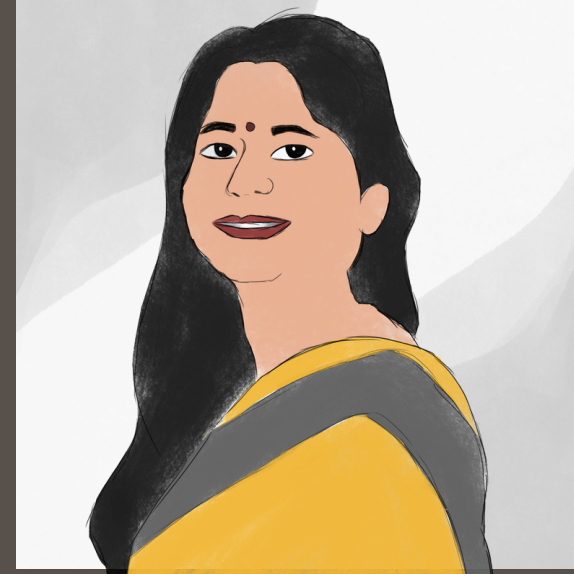
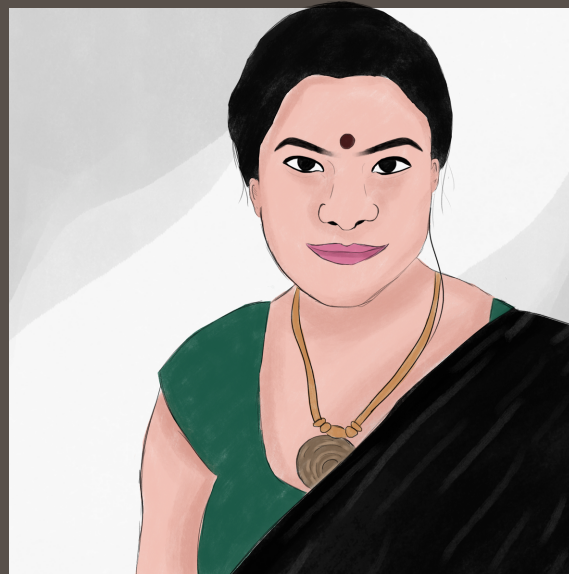


TARSHI, 2023



## Pathways to safe and inclusive schools: How can CSE help?

TARSHI's CSE training and beyond: A case study from Hopetown Girls' School.



# WHY COMPREHENSIVE SEXUALITY EDUCATION?

Comprehensive Sexuality Education (CSE) enables children and adolescents to acquire accurate, age- and stage-differentiated knowledge, and empowers them to make responsible decisions. Teachers and educators play an important role in this process, given the significant interactions and positive influence they have on children and young people.

**TARSHI** believes in the right of all people – especially young people – to have accurate information on sexuality, so they can make informed choices about their own lives. For over 20 years, we have been strengthening the capacities of educators, and **developing resources** for children, young people, parents and educators, on sexuality education.

TARSHI has worked with many schools over the years to conduct trainings on CSE, building up the capacities of educators to initiate and sustain conversations on sexuality with their students in an age and stage differentiated manner. When working with teachers and educators, we are aware that they often find it difficult to become sexuality educators given that they have limited scope to explore their own doubts and feelings about gender, sex, sexuality, and get few opportunities to learn how to address these issues in a matter-of-fact manner.

In our trainings, we seek to help teachers understand the importance of CSE and build their knowledge and perspective around CSE in a way that is not fear-based, but affirmative; we firmly believe that offering children and young people messaging on gender and sexuality issues that is driven by fear is unlikely to help them navigate their growing-up issues in a positive, respectful and safe manner. Our trainings also help educators explore their discomfort around the issue, given most educators have likely not received sexuality education when they were growing up. The trainings look to help educators assimilate accurate knowledge about sexuality at a personal level and also develop the skills to talk about these topics with their students, and even parents/concerned adults that they interact with.



# TARSHI'S WORK WITH HOPETOWN GIRLS' SCHOOL ON CSE

**Hopetown Girls' School, Dehradun, first reached out to us in 2018** to train all its academic, administrative and hostel staff on CSE. Senior staff members had identified the need for a formal sexuality education curriculum in their school, as well as the specific areas they wanted guidance, as a boarding school, where staff and students interacted in diverse spaces within and outside the classroom (for instance, in the hostel, on the campus grounds, during mealtimes, etc.)



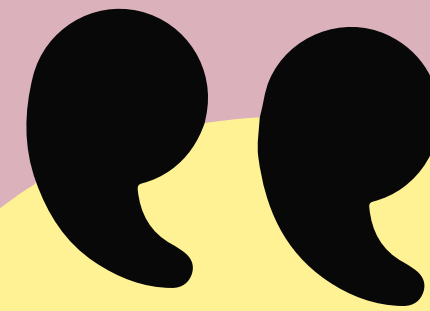
Questions they wanted to explore in the training included topics to be covered in a CSE curriculum, strengthening their own technical knowledge on these topics, learning how to bring up these issues with students, as well as ways to navigate everyday situations related to boundaries between staff and students or between students themselves, including attraction, bullying, students bringing in different norms for what is “acceptable” behaviour when, for instance, changing clothes in front of their roommates. Being a boarding school where staff and students interact in diverse settings, Hopetown understood the importance of taking CSE to all its staff, not just the counsellors as is common in many school settings. This approach aligns with TARSHI’s belief that it is crucial for all school staff, teaching and non-teaching, to have a common understanding of CSE, to approach it from a rights-based and affirmative perspective (and not one driven by fear), and jointly think about how to implement it.



Over 60 staff members participated in TARSHI's trainings covering the basics of gender, sexuality, understanding CSE, on sexual and gender identities and expression, on child sexual abuse, and on principles that can guide educators in their work on CSE with their students. Following our training, the school formed a core group of educators who also went through TARSHI's online course on CSE, and then developed a CSE curriculum for middle school (classes 6 to 8). TARSHI provided feedback on this curriculum and this was implemented until the pandemic necessitated a pause.

As the school resumed operations after the pandemic, they reached out to us again for a training, both as a refresher as well as to train on CSE their new staff who have joined since TARSHI's training in 2018. **This training was held for over 70 staff (again, including teaching and non-teaching staff) in July 2023.**

The objective of the case study is to document the experiences, challenges, and hopes and wishes of a few staff members as they go on their journey of providing CSE for children and young people. It also seeks to emphasise the importance of regular trainings on CSE, to understand and reflect on one's own biases/hesitations, learn accurate information on Sexual and Reproductive Health and Rights (SRHR) topics, and then explore how to talk about these topics with students in a way that is safe, inclusive and self-affirming.



*"As an educator, it is extremely important and wonderful to talk about sexuality, especially if you are a part of a girls' residential school...it's significant for teachers to know about sexuality education as we directly deal with the students in a boarding school, and they do share their problems with us as they are away from their home. Therefore, we must have trained faculty to deal with such issues in a mature manner to help our students..."*

*Sarita Uniyal, housemistress and  
Fine Arts teacher, Hopetown Girls' School*





## Section: Teacher's Talk

### Why do teachers need training on sexuality education?

We firmly believe in the importance of including Comprehensive Sexuality Education in a child's learning process in an age- and stage-differentiated manner. There are many sexuality-related questions and concerns that come up for young people, and it is necessary that they be addressed accurately and comprehensively. The educators at Hopetown Girls' School have shared why they think it is particularly important to include CSE into their students' education and why they believe that teachers must be trained on these topics in order to provide accurate and comprehensive information to their students. They also shared some challenges they have faced in the past when it comes to addressing sexuality-related topics with their students. Here are their thoughts:

***CSE trainings can prepare educators on how to address students' questions and evolving concerns on topics related to sexuality, SRHR, and wellbeing***

There are many challenges that come with trying to incorporate CSE into a young person's education and prior to TARSHI's training. Hopetown's teachers often found it difficult to address sexuality-related questions that came from students.



For example, for Rajani Nair, a teacher of Global Perspectives and Political Science who regularly engages with pre-teen and teenage students at Hopetown Girls' School, it was difficult to respond to students accurately and comprehensively when they approach her with questions about their sexuality and sexual identity.

For Harsh Bhatia, a chemistry teacher at Hopetown Girls' School, young students have sometimes approached her with questions regarding their changing bodies and insecurities. It is very common for young people to have these questions and Harsh believes that being trained in CSE would make educators better equipped to answer these questions.



Another factor is that issues of sexuality evolve as times change, and the concerns of young people change rapidly with each cohort, requiring teachers to keep up with these changes.



As young people have greater-than-ever access to information through various online platforms and social media, there is increased awareness of diverse gender identities and sexual identities, and heightened sensitivity to a wide range of issues, including those related to sexuality. They are also well-informed about terms such as “trauma”, “wellbeing”, and the significance of expressing their emotions. All the same, there are concerns around misinformation, overwhelm, and increased anxiety, including due to vicarious trauma from being constantly plugged into information and perspectives from around the world.

As Rekha Tomar, Senior School Coordinator at Hopetown Girls' School says, teachers need to build capacities to provide CSE as the “current generation is tech-savvy and often encounters incomplete or inaccurate information from online sources.”



With constantly evolving terminology and information in the fields of gender and sexuality, it is crucial to stay updated with the changing times and understand that sexuality education is an ongoing process. This is especially important in contexts where educators themselves may not have received sexuality education in their growing-up years, and now have to handle questions from students that may surprise or stump them. TARSHI believes that educators require regular training

to equip themselves with the evolving needs of young people, as well as refer back to principles to guide their institution’s approach to CSE.

***CSE training can help educators build a safe and inclusive space in which students feel comfortable to talk about sexuality***

Educators at Hopetown have not just faced difficulty with how to answer students’ questions on sexuality, but also with the fact that many students are not comfortable bringing up these topics with teachers. For example, in Sangeeta Debnath’s case, many of her students have been reluctant to seek support when it comes to menstruation. Sangeeta, an English teacher at Hopetown Girls’ School, says that menstruation is still seen as a ‘taboo topic’.

According to her, *“there have been many instances when girls felt shy or did not speak openly about it. First time periods are experienced by some students in grade 6 and they are completely unprepared for the changes that will take place during this time.”*



Sangeeta goes on to say that *“this lack of knowledge can lead to confusion and isolation. That’s why it is a necessity to provide age-appropriate education about puberty, body changes, and emotions to help students understand and cope with these changes.”*



According to Rekha Tomar, a Senior School Coordinator and Biology teacher at Hopetown Girls' School students are often not willing to seek answers to their sexuality-related questions from teachers and instead choose to get their information through other means. According to Rekha, when young people get their information on sexuality from their peers or from the internet, which is all too common, it leads to misinformation. Educators who are trained in CSE are more well-equipped to address misconceptions and create an environment in their school which encourages discussing these topics openly.

***CSE training can demonstrate the breadth of sexuality-related issues in the lives of children and young people***



According to Srinjoy Ghosh, an administrative officer for teenage students at Hopetown Girls' School, "Sexuality education is not limited to knowledge about sexual health but also encompasses broader topics such as gender equality, body image, boundaries, and consent. Providing training to teachers enables them to address these inter-connected topics in an age-appropriate manner, fostering an inclusive and respectful learning environment."

Many people have the perception that sexuality education is primarily to teach about safer sex, but there are so many other aspects of sexuality. Training educators on CSE can help them to have a better understanding of the scope of CSE and address this common misconception with their students.

***CSE training can help educators reflect on their learnings, hesitation and biases***

Training teachers and educators on CSE not only supports them in better addressing students' questions and creating a more open learning environment, it also helps educators manage their own biases towards sexuality. According to Sapna Sagar, a Post Graduate Teacher (PGT) in Commerce who engages with high school students at Hopetown, "Teachers hold personal beliefs or biases that can affect their ability to discuss sexuality objectively. Their discomfort, values, or religious views may influence how they approach these conversations. Educators must recognise and manage their biases to create a safe and inclusive learning environment."

There are so many reasons why training educators in Comprehensive Sexuality Education can help to create a space for students to engage comfortably on these issues. This is an age of great change for young people, and if educators have a solid understanding of CSE, they are more likely to be able to help young people navigate these changes in a safe and inclusive manner.



## Learnings and implementation following TARSHI's CSE trainings

Hopetown Girls' School, Dehradun saw a need to incorporate Comprehensive Sexuality Education into their students' learning. By participating in TARSHI's training they were able to gain insights into CSE and even began implementing a CSE curriculum at their school. Hear from some of Hopetown's educators on their learnings and the changes they have noticed in their teaching styles following the training:

***Built confidence talking to students about sexuality and fostered new perspectives on CSE for young people***

Following the training with TARSHI, many of the educators at Hopetown have noticed an increased openness on the part of the staff to discuss sexuality-related topics, as these issues have become less taboo.



For example, Ashu Thapa, an economics teacher at Hopetown Girls' School, has noticed that there is much less hesitation on the part of teachers to talk about these issues. The students are also much more confident in talking about their sexuality.

For Harsh Bhatia, participating in the training has helped her to destigmatise the topics of sex and sexuality for herself. Harsh was very hands-on in the process to implement CSE into the curriculum at Hopetown. While working in a team with other educators, they were able to design lessons and activities that address some of the common concerns that have come up related to adolescents and their sexuality. Having a background in biology, Harsh was assigned to teach the students about the female and male reproductive system. She also taught her students about hygiene and safety, particularly when it comes to any kind of sexual activity. After the training, she finds that she is much more confident in using the correct terminology to talk about body parts, which is something that is heavily emphasised in CSE.

Sadhana Lenka, an Indian Classical Dance teacher at Hopetown Girls' School, says something similar. For her, the workshop has helped her immensely in building her confidence to talk to students about sexuality and appropriately handle curiosity among students for such topics. She says that after the training, she is *“very confident to talk to the [students] and smartly handle their queries.”*





### ***Discovered that a wide range of topics is included in CSE***

For some teachers, attending TARSHI's training helped them to better understand the broad scope of CSE. For example, Rajani Nair says that one of her *“key learnings was to understand the extent of the scope of sexuality education and that it is so much more than understanding responsible and healthy sex.”* She goes on to say that she *“was intrigued by the discussions on sexuality as an identity. Understanding that component helped [her] design a curriculum on Comprehensive Sexuality Education.”*

### ***Enabled Hometown's educators to create a more safe and inclusive space for their students***

Following the training, Rajani also says how she has been more conscious of making her classroom more inclusive. For example, she says, *“I am more conscious of using the terms male and female...In my teaching...I have tried to use case studies where males or other genders have faced discrimination.”* Rajani is making very important strides by choosing to be more gender inclusive in her classroom; at a Girls' School it is easy to assume that all of the students identify as female, but there should be room for gender diversity in all spaces. For Srinjoy Ghosh, attending the training has helped him attempt to create a safer space for his students. Srinjoy cites inclusivity and sensitivity as two of the most important changes that he has noticed in his work with students following the CSE training with TARSHI.

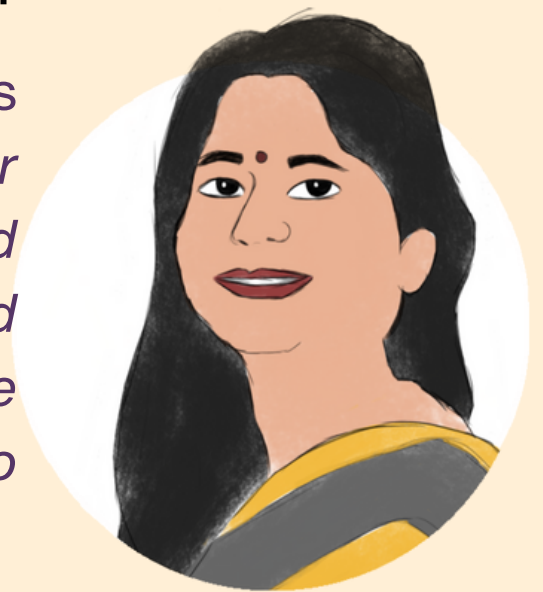
He says, *“it helped me to recognise signs of abuse or bullying and offer support to students who might be struggling with their sexual identity or facing discrimination.”* The training has helped him to go about these issues in a more sensitive and inclusive manner.

### ***Expanded technical knowledge on CSE and SRHR and offered useful frameworks for incorporating CSE***

In addition to bolstering a more open-minded, safe space for students to discuss their sexuality, TARSHI's training also helped to fill in the teachers' gaps in technical knowledge about sexuality. For Sapna Sagar, one of the biggest takeaways from the training was that it provided comprehensive information on sexuality.

According to Sapna, participating in TARSHI's training, *“equip[s] teachers with a deeper understanding of pedagogical strategies and instructional techniques. This expanded knowledge allows them to employ a wider range of teaching methods and approaches tailored to different learning styles and student needs.”*

Furthermore, *“Trainings can encourage teachers to incorporate more active learning strategies into their classrooms. This shift moves away from traditional lecture-based approaches towards student-centred activities that promote engagement, critical thinking, and collaboration.”*





TARSHI understands that no training can help educators anticipate and respond to **every** question from children or young people on sexuality. That is why in all CSE trainings TARSHI facilitators discuss key guiding principles for working on sexuality that could offer a useful framework for educators in responding to different situations and CSE-related concerns of their students

Glimpses from TARSHI's trainings at Hopetown





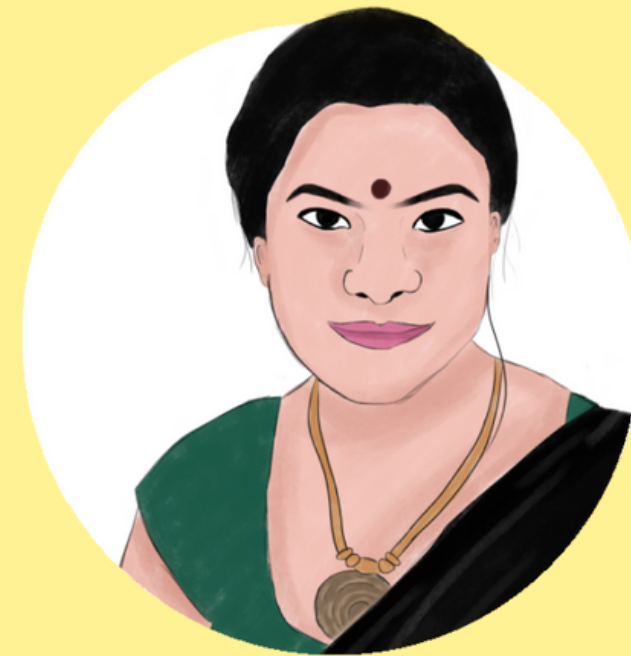
## Hope for the Future: How can teachers sustain and adapt CSE for students?

The educators at Hopetown have taken solid steps in providing Comprehensive Sexuality Education to their students and in creating a more safe, inclusive, and self-affirming space at their school. That said, CSE is an ongoing journey and as times change, newer challenges come up, necessitating regular refresher trainings and ongoing discussions. Hopetown's educators share their experiences and challenges implementing CSE at their school, and the kinds of support that could help address these challenges.

### *Finding and utilising accurate and accessible resources for CSE*

Hopetown's teachers and educators now have a better understanding of what needs to be incorporated into their teachings in order to provide their students with CSE. A common method of teaching sexuality to students involves using external resources such as videos and books, which often can help to explain concepts in a comprehensive yet concise way. Finding such resources can be a challenge.

This is the case for Sarita Uniyal, a housemistress and Fine Arts teacher at Hopetown Girls' School.



There is so much information available regarding sexuality, but not all of that information is reliable and inclusive, which is why Sarita says that *“knowing the appropriate materials and methods can be helpful.”*

Srinjoy Ghosh also shares that a crucial area of improvement for CSE at Hopetown will be to provide more easily accessible resources on CSE to his students. Accessibility to CSE is different for every student and some students may grasp these topics more easily than others, which is why providing easy-to-access information is so important.

### *Support on addressing CSE outside of the classroom*

CSE is not just about teaching students sexuality-related concepts in the classroom; it is also about addressing issues outside of the classroom, because sexuality does not go away when a student leaves the classroom.

Suman Anand, an Indian Classical Music teacher engaging with students of middle and high school at Hopetown, wants educators to explore more about how they can incorporate discussions on sexuality outside regular teaching and studies and guide students through a practical approach to make informed decisions for themselves. This is very important because sexuality education should be provided for its real world applications. It is not just about technical knowledge taught in a classroom, but also about preparing students for the emotional implications of the different relationships they will experience in their lives.



***Help in dealing with pushback and managing student behaviour to be respectful***

Sexuality is a “controversial” topic for many people, so discussing these topics in the classroom is not always received well. According to Sapna Sagar, *“addressing topics related to sexuality can sometimes raise sensitive or controversial discussions in the classroom. Teachers may require support in creating a safe and inclusive environment, managing student behaviour, and facilitating respectful dialogue.”* .

Going forward, she believes that teachers must be trained on strategies to handle challenging questions or reactions from students.

*“One of the challenges for teachers is having a conservative mindset and inhibitions to talk about sexuality openly. However, about five years ago, we had a group of trainers from TARSHI educating our teachers on sexuality, which enabled us to launch our own CSE curriculum co-created by teachers. This process led by TARSHI has helped us to openly and freely talk about sexuality as a community of educators as well as residential (non-academic) staff working with young people.”*

*Maya Norula, Principal, Hopetown Girls' School*

TARSHI believes in the power of regular follow-up trainings and internal discussions to ensure that the spirit of rights-based, pleasure-affirming CSE is maintained, and challenges that educators face are addressed to the best extent possible, by tapping into their collective experiences and insights.



# WHAT DOES TARSHI'S CSE TRAINING OFFER?

TARSHI offers in-person trainings and sensitisation sessions, as well as different kinds of online courses that people can complete at their own pace, for service providers who are working with young people and teachers and parents in schools and colleges on a range of issues related to sexuality. These capacity strengthening initiatives seek to provide educators a safe space so that they can clarify their doubts and have an opportunity to engage comfortably on such issues. Learn more about the various online course options [here](#).

The in-person trainings are 2-3 days long and offer a foundation on CSE through the following topics. The trainings incorporate a lot of interaction through case studies, group activities, games, role plays, and with participants, TARSHI jointly builds a safe and non-judgmental space that allows for personal reflection and learning.

- **Understanding gender** as a social construct and to examine their own assumptions, and related implications, in a school setting.
- **Understanding sexuality** and the variety of concepts that it covers, including gender identities and sexual identities, drawing out the many different ways people identify themselves, the stereotypes that exist in society and their effects.
- **Why CSE is important** in helping children/young people develop the knowledge, skills, and values they require to be able to grow up happy and healthy.
- **Sexuality in schools** and the wide range of issues related to sexuality that come up in the lives of students across different age groups, including gender and sexual identities, relationships and safety, consent, child sexual abuse, and mental health issues related to sexuality.

- **Tips for participants** to work on any discomfort they may have in talking about sexuality, and suggestions for practical ways to incorporate sexuality education in the school system.
- **Guiding Principles for working on sexuality**, as sexuality education, however scientifically it may be designed, may not be value-free, given that it is transacted by people who may bring their own personal values. TARSHI's CSE trainings also articulate some guiding principles based on rights-based, affirmative values that can guide educators throughout their CSE journey - whether it is developing curricula or responding to a question from a student that the educator did not ever anticipate.

These trainings are introductory and seek to offer educators a common understanding of CSE and its principles, so that all staff attending the training have a clarity on CSE and its implications in their school environment. For more detailed guidance, TARSHI also supports with follow-up trainings, inputs to curriculum and detailed sessions on selected topics as deemed necessary by the educational institution.

Want to know more about our CSE offerings? Write to us at [\*\*trainings@tarshi.net\*\*](mailto:trainings@tarshi.net)!



# ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

We are grateful to the staff at Hopetown Girls' School, Dehradun, for their commitment to providing students a safe, positive and nurturing environment to learn about sexuality, and for involving TARSHI in their CSE journey. We thank the educators featured in this case study who have candidly shared their experiences taking part in TARSHI's CSE training and how they have incorporated CSE into their work with students. Their insights have also helped TARSHI in our broader work on CSE. The stories presented in this case study represent just a handful of the people who have been involved in incorporating CSE into the curriculum at Hopetown School.

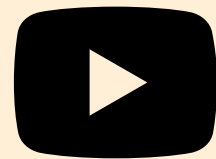
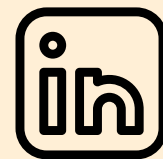
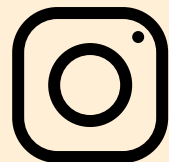
This case study was developed by Katherine Yenna during her internship at TARSHI in the summer of 2023, under the guidance of Nandhini Jaishankar. It includes the inputs of Ramya Anand and Vani Viswanathan from TARSHI and was designed by Nandhini.

We extend our gratitude to Amogh R Anand for volunteering with us and creating illustrations of teachers from Hopetown Girls' School, Dehradun.

## ABOUT TARSHI

TARSHI has been working on sexuality and Sexual and Reproductive Health and Rights (SRHR) since 1996. TARSHI believes that people have a right to sexual wellbeing and a self-affirming, enjoyable sexuality. TARSHI supports and enables people's control over their sexual and reproductive health and wellbeing within a human rights framework.

Check out TARSHI's [website](#) to know more about our work.



## ABOUT HOPETOWN GIRLS' SCHOOL, DEHRADUN

Hopetown Girls' School is a residential school, based just outside Dehradun. It was founded in 1999 with the intention of creating a happy place for children to grow up in and foster an environment which enables children to explore their interests, discover themselves, and prepare themselves for adulthood. Hopetown aims to develop the young minds that enjoy the challenges of inquiry, knowledge, and experimentation.

You can know more about the school, through their [website](#).

