



Get Started: How to Use This Toolkit

Picking up this toolkit for the first time? We suggest you start here.

Let's Get Started: What's the Big Idea?

The goal of this toolkit is to help you to protect the health and wellness of your community by eliminating EM, and improving the health and well-being of your community's women and girls. Specifically, we want to make sure that you know about the risks of EM and how to engage your community in a conversation on this harmful traditional practice.

How Can I Use This Toolkit?

We know there's a lot that it's in here, but don't worry, you don't have to do it all. Every faith leader is different, and every community is different. You should pick and choose the pieces that work best for you.

Some faith leaders may have been involved in EM work for a long time, whereas many may have only heard about the negative effects of EM recently. Not to worry, we've got something for everyone. Here's how you can get started...



Early Marriage

A Faith Leader Toolkit
to Address Harmful
Traditional Practices
in Your Community

GET STARTED MODULE 1

There is Something for Everyone...

1

About you

If you had never heard about the negative effects of EM before...

If you know about EM practices but have never spoken to your community about it...

If you're an expert on the topic and have already begun having conversations with your community...

2

Where to start

Read Over Module 2: "Teach Yourself," and really familiarize yourself with the facts on EM.

Familiarize yourself with the basics on EM in Module 2: "Teach Yourself," and then begin with Module 3: "Begin the Conversation."

Familiarize yourself with EM in Module 2: "Teach Yourself." Review the curricula for Module 4: "Engage Women" and Module 5: "Engage Youth," and select one lesson that you can begin to implement.

3

Next steps...

Review and familiarize yourself with the conversation starters in Module 3: "Begin the Conversation." Pick two of the conversations to have with your community, and find a time you can have them!

Familiarize yourself with EM in Module 2: "Teach Yourself." Review the curricula for Module 4: "Engage Women" and Module 5: "Engage Youth," and select one lesson that you can begin to implement.

Implement the remaining curricula from Modules 4: "Engage Women" and Module 5: "Engage Youth." Review the Conversations in Module 3: "Begin the Conversation"; use these conversation starters to help inspire you to create some conversation starters of your own!

Some Common Questions You Might Be Thinking About...

What if I don't feel comfortable talking about early marriage (EM)?

Marriage practices in your community, including the prevalence of child or early marriage (shortened to EM in this toolkit), can definitely be a difficult topic to discuss. It involves the sensitive issues of sex and sexuality and gender relations in your community. However, conversations don't have to just focus **just on** these challenging topics: this toolkit is about equipping communities to live full, healthy, and happy lives, by improving the lives of girls and women. That's what the conversation is really about.

Not worried about these questions? Ready to get started? Skip this section and start working with the rest of the toolkit!

One important thing to know is that many in your community may support and/or hold strong beliefs about EM. However, often times the sources of information are either unreliable or not based on fact. Their beliefs may reflect incorrect information about the role of marriage in your faith, and they may not fully understand EM's harm to women and girls. That's one reason why it's so important that *you* be an active part of the conversation. If you don't, then you are allowing the conversation to occur without the guidance and wisdom that you can offer.

OK, but do I have to talk about sex?

You don't have to talk about any particular topic any more than you are comfortable. However, one thing that we have learned is that communities that speak openly and honestly about all the issues related to EM are best able to protect themselves against unwarranted harm. And yes, sometimes that means dealing with issues of sex and sexuality. However, you don't have to do it by yourself: there are lots of good resources in this toolkit that will help you address these issues in a way that is sensitive to the concerns of faith communities.

There are definitely some important things that you should know before you begin this process, such as the specific harmful effects of EM. But rest easy! All that you need to know to get started is in Module 2: "Teach Yourself."

What if I don't know a lot about the effects of EM?

Don't worry! This toolkit isn't about giving you *all* the answers; it's about giving you the tools to help reduce the risk of injury, disease, and death through the harmful practice of EM on your community's women and girls.

More important than having all the answers is raising important questions in a supportive and caring environment – and as a faith leader, that’s one of the things that you do best.

What if someone in my community asks me a question that I don’t know the answer to?

There’s no way to be prepared for every question that someone might ask. If someone asks a question that you don’t know the answer to, don’t feel like you have to make up an answer. Just tell them that that’s a great question, that you aren’t sure of the answer right now, and that you want to make sure that they get an accurate answer so you are going to get back to them about it. Then, you can consult any of the resources that are available to you.

I’m busy. How will I find the time to talk about EM?

There’s some good news here: you don’t have to do it all yourself! In fact, it’s great if members of your congregation or community take on leadership roles. This creates greater community involvement, and also means makes your job much more manageable. For instance, if you already have a woman’s group, the leader of that group might actually be the best person in your community to lead Module 4: “Engage Women.” Similarly, if someone in your community is particularly good at working with youth, they could lead Module 5: “Engage Youth.”

The other piece of good news is that talking about EM doesn’t have to be a distraction from your regular responsibilities as a faith leader. What we have found is that faith leaders who advocate for the elimination of EM find it to be an extension of their core role – ministering and supporting the needs of their communities. Supporting the health and wellness of women and girls does not need to be a distraction – it’s an important way that you can support the spiritual and physical needs of your community.