



## **Begin the Conversation: Four Conversations That Healthy Communities Should Have about Early Marriage (EM)**

Faith leaders touch the lives of their communities in many ways: at weekly prayers, during lifecycle events, during individual counseling, or out in the community. Each of these interactions can be a *teachable moment* – an opportunity to discuss health and well-being with your community and share important messages. Here are five key conversations that all faith leaders – regardless of faith – can have with their community about early marriage (EM) of girls under 18.

### **Introduction**

Congratulations, and thank you for your willingness to empower girls in your community through the eradication of harmful traditional practices! It may seem a daunting task to change the minds of your community members about these harmful practices. However, educating yourself and continuing to brush up on your newly acquired knowledge about EM will help you pave the way for real and sustainable change in your area. These conversation starters are a good first step to engaging your community in a (you guessed it!) conversation about the practice of EM. They are meant to provide talking points and key messages to convey to your congregation and community about these practices. Each talking point/key message comes with appropriate theological/scriptural references to support them.

There are many ways to use these conversation starters – it's up to you. No matter how you choose to use them, though, be sure to study them carefully before you begin talking to your community about EM – and continue to use them as a resource for yourself, as needed.

### **Instructions**

Read through these conversation starters, and then, in Module 2: “Teach Yourself,” the theological/scriptural references around each key message/talking point. Each conversation starter corresponds with the key messages/talking points in Module 2: “Teach Yourself” numerically (1 with 1, 2 with 2, etc.) Each conversation starter comes with a reiteration of the Key Facts about EM for you to use as a reference in each conversation. If you find anything you disagree with, take this as an opportunity to educate yourself further. These theological/scriptural references have been tested, debated, and approved by both Christian and Muslim faith leaders.

When you feel ready, and adequately prepared to speak about EM using these talking points/key messages and their scriptural references, you can begin engaging your community in a discussion about these issues. There are several ways you can do this:

- If you make frequent home visits to your community members, use them to help you structure conversations about these topics. These conversations can be as long or as short as you like – you don't need to get to every talking point/key message! Just one per conversation can be enough, since everyone will likely have a lot to say.
- If you lead a men's or women's group, use them as a way to informally get them thinking about the realities of EM for their daughters. It is best to begin by engaging a small, trusted group you know will listen and discuss issues with each other respectfully.
- If you feel comfortable enough, you can use these conversation starters to address larger groups of adults or youth in your community.

Again, how you use these conversation starters is up to you. Once you have educated yourself, and feel prepared, the possibilities are endless!

### Eliminating EM: “Honor the Institution of Marriage”

- **Conversation 1:** What are the religious requirements of marriage in the context of our faith? Does that include marrying a child?
- **Conversation 2:** Marriage is a gift from God/Allah. Are we treating it as such when we marry underage girls?
- **Conversation 3:** How does preparing adequately for marriage help uphold its sanctity?
- **Conversation 4:** How can we make marriage a mutual partnership based on love and respect?
- **Conversation 5:** What is the proper time for marriage?

## Begin the Conversation: Four Conversations That Healthy Communities Should Have about Early Marriage (EM).

### Begin the Conversation: What's the Big Idea?

Faith leaders touch the lives of their communities in many ways: at weekly prayers, during major life events, during individual counseling, or out in the community. Each of these interactions can be a **teachable moment** – an opportunity for you to discuss health and well being with your community and share important messages. 'Start the Conversation' outlines 5 key conversations that your can have with your community.

**KEY TERM: A TEACHABLE MOMENT** is any opportunity for you to share an important lesson with your community. It doesn't have to be in a sermon, a class, or a formal setting.

### How Do I "Begin the Conversation"?

It's not about waiting for the perfect moment or having all the answers...it's about offering you opportunities to encourage. Those opportunities might be during a meeting of your women's group, during a sermon, during pre-marital counseling, during a holiday celebration, or another appropriate moment where you can start a conversation about these issues.

Sometimes it can be hard to have conversations about a community's traditional practices, including EM. But when we talk about making sure no one marries underage, what we are really talking about is what we can all do to create healthy and strong communities – and that's a goal that all religious communities share.

And remember, you don't have to have to have all the answers! These are 'conversations,' not lessons. You can just ask the question and support your community as they engage with these issues. However, if you are reading this toolkit, chances are you have a lot to contribute.

**Remember to refer back to Module 2: "Teach Yourself" for more detailed talking points around each of these scriptural references!**

OK, enough chit-chat. Let's start the conversation. Conversation One begins on the next page...

### Begin the Conversation on Eliminating Early Marriage (EM) – “Honor the Institution of Marriage”

**Conversation One: What are the religious requirements of marriage in the context of our faith? Does that include marrying a child?**

**The BIG ideas:**

**Before entering into marriage, one must understand the requirements of marriage**

- Successful marriages demand physical, mental, emotional, spiritual, and financial maturity. The four main purposes of marriage are:
  - i. To secure an equal, loving partner for life.
  - ii. To experience mutual joy and sexual satisfaction.
  - iii. To safely bear children and create a healthy family.
  - iv. To help us avoid sexual temptation, through fidelity to our spouses.
- “And the Lord God said, ‘It is not good that man should be alone. I will make a helper comparable to him.’” (Genesis 2:18) God united Adam and Eve, so that their lives might be more productive and blissful. Notice that God created Eve “comparable” to Adam – different in build and abilities, but an equal, respected life partner.
- In order for two spouses to be “comparable partners,” both must be physically, mentally, emotionally, spiritually, and financially prepared for marriage. This means that both husband and wife must be physically able to fully enjoy marital relations in order bear healthy children, able to handle household duties, raise children with love and attention, be able to love another person selflessly as God wants us, and have adequate income and means of supporting a family. An underage girl is not yet prepared in any of these ways for marriage, and is therefore not the comparable partner required for a God-pleasing marriage.

### Before entering into marriage, one must understand the requirements of marriage

- There are several verses that may be interpreted as arguments against waiting for marriage. However, closer examination reveals that Allah above all, wants us to wait until we are prepared for marriage. Successful marriages demand physical, mental, emotional, spiritual, and financial maturity. The four main purposes of marriage are:
  - i. To secure an equal, loving partner for life.
  - ii. To experience mutual joy and sexual satisfaction.
  - iii. To safely bear children and create a healthy family.
  - iv. To help us avoid sexual temptation, through fidelity to our spouses.
- Marriage is a means to a spiritual end, not the end itself. “When a youngster marries early in his youth, *Shaitaan* (Satan) cries out of desperation and says, ‘Alas! This person has protected one third of his religion, now he will protect the remaining two thirds also.’” (Mustadrakul Wasail) Education, self-discipline, and financial independence are absolutely necessary for both spouses, in order to create a happy, healthy marriage and Allah-pleasing family. This verse does not argue for EM— in fact, it argues just the opposite. Satan cries out of desperation when we reach a place of physical, mental, emotional, spiritual, and financial maturity that makes us less likely be tempted. Healthy marriages within Islam occur where both spouses are mature, finished with school, and above 18 years of age.
- “O young men, whoever among you is (financially and physically) able to marry, he should do so, as this helps him lower his gaze and maintain his chastity; and whoever is unable to (marry), he should observe fasting, as this protects him.” (Hadith of Al-Bukhaari) This sunnah clearly tells us that Islam considers the need for mental, physical, and financial maturity before entering into this highly regarded and honored institution, as it provides a way for those who are not prepared to love a spouse and support a family to wait until they are prepared. “Lowering our gaze” and “fasting” are not the only things we can do, but they stand for a multitude of ways we can – and must – practice mental and spiritual discipline. Prayer, education, and self-discipline, and not early marriages (EM) of girls under 18, are what we should emphasize to maintain chastity and rightness with Allah.
- “O people, Jibrael has brought unto me a divine command stating that girls are like fruits from a tree. If they are not plucked in time then they get rotten by the rays of the sun and a slight blow of the wind will result in their falling down from the tree.” (as narrated by Imam as-Sadiq) As the Prophet’s teachings do not contradict one another, this sunnah should be interpreted in light of the previous sunnah, which provides ways for us to wait and keep ourselves from temptation. This verse does not warn against waiting the proper amount of time; rather, it warns against delaying marriage when we are, in fact, fully capable of entering into marriage and mature enough to do so.

- Marrying simply to satisfy sexual urges or maintain chastity is a sign that we are, in fact, not seeing the whole picture or purpose of marriage as Allah sees it. An adult man who marries an underage girl makes it impossible for both to achieve the spiritual end of marriage that Allah intended.

## Key Facts

- Girls who are married under the age of 18 are often forced to drop out of school, discontinuing their education and seriously limiting their future.
- Children and youth under 18, especially those who have left school, are often not ready to shoulder the responsibilities of a spouse and family.
- Girls who are married under the age of 18 can develop fistula and other problems that lead to infertility, due to early, forced sexual relations.
- Girls who are married under the age of 18, and subsequently become very young mothers, are at a much higher risk of maternal death, and their babies are more likely to die as well.

## Some Quick Tips

- Look for opportunities to begin talking to your community about issues of **health and wellness, as well as marriage**. We want to make sure that people walk away with a sense of personal and communal responsibility for the health and well-being of their community's girls and women.
- Address the **Key Facts** referred to above. If people have misconceptions about EM, it's important to correct those (see below for additional resources to help you do that).

## Additional Resources:

For more basic information and **Key Facts** about EM, see **Module 2: "Teach Yourself"**. For more help on how to talk about EM or have difficult conversations, see 'Some Common Questions' in **Module 1: "Getting Started"**.

### Start the Conversation on Eliminating Early Marriage (EM) – “Honor the Institution of Marriage”

**Conversation Two: Marriage is a gift from God/Allah. Are we treating it as such when we marry underage girls?**

**The BIG ideas:**

**Marriage is a gift from God, and should be treated as such.**

- Marriage is a precious, divine gift that demands knowledge and maturity so that we can make the most out of it. Before marriage, we must be mature enough (physically, mentally, emotionally, spiritually, and financially) to know its blessings, challenges, and realities; this includes the willingness to love and sacrifice one's own well-being for one's husband or wife.
- As mentioned in Genesis 2:18, God created Eve so that she and Adam each might have a “comparable” partner in life. An adult husband and a child bride cannot have this kind of relationship, and therefore cannot treat marriage as a gift from God in their daily lives.
- “Husbands, love your wives, just as Christ loved the church.” (Ephesians 5:25) Christ loved the church, mainly for the benefit of the church. He cared for the church to the extent of sacrificing himself for her well being. Anyone who marries an unprepared girl with or without her consent, and subjects her to physical and/or mental suffering, is not God's ideal model of a husband, and abuses God's gift of marriage – which is meant to bring together comparable, mature partners in life.

**Marriage is a gift from Allah, and should be treated as such.**

- “Marriage is my Sunnah, whoever disregards my (sunnah) path is not from among us.” (Hadith of ibn Majah) Our Prophet endorsed healthy marriages, that ensure that both spouses have a reliable partner for life.
- “Whoever is able to marry, should marry.” (Hadith of al-Bukhari) The term “able” is important here; it is interpreted as physical, mental, emotional, spiritual, and financial preparedness.



- “...He created for you spouses of your own kind in order that you may repose to them in tranquility and He instilled in your hearts love and affection for one another...” (Quran 30:21) This verse clearly shows how much of a gift the institution of marriage is, but it also shows how both spouses must be able to love and respect one another as comparable partners. Both spouses must be physically, mentally, emotionally, spiritually, and financially prepared for marriage. This means that both husband and wife must be physically able to fully enjoy marital relations in order bear healthy children, able to handle household duties, raise children with love and attention, be able to love another person selflessly as God wants us, and have adequate income and means of supporting a family.
- Marriage is one of the greatest gifts from Allah to humanity, and we must respect the institution. One way we can do this is to respect our future spouses enough to know when they are prepared, and have adequate knowledge of what marriage involves. Marriage to an unprepared, underage girl does not treat marriage as a gift from Allah.

### Key Facts

- Girls who are married under the age of 18 are often forced to drop out of school, discontinuing their education and seriously limiting their future.
- Children and youth under 18, especially those who have left school, are often not ready to shoulder the responsibilities of a spouse and family.
- Girls who are married under the age of 18 can develop fistula and other problems that lead to infertility, due to early, forced sexual relations.
- Girls who are married under the age of 18, and subsequently become very young mothers, are at a much higher risk of maternal death, and their babies are more likely to die as well.



## Some Quick Tips

- Stress the fact that all people can play a role in reducing your community's practice of EM, and thus play a key role in promoting the health and well-being of girls and women. Whether it is telling people about the harmfulness of EM, supporting family members who decide NOT to marry their daughters early, or choosing not to allow our daughters to marry until they are 18, there are many things that we can each do to help create a healthy community.
- Make sure that during this conversation your community begins to really understand the basic facts about EM, as these will be built upon in subsequent conversations.

## Additional Resources:

For more basic information and **Key Facts** about EM, see **Module 2: "Teach Yourself"**. For more help on how to talk about EM or have difficult conversations, see 'Some Common Questions' in **Module 1: "Getting Started"**.

### Start the Conversation on Eliminating Early Marriage (EM) – “Honor the Institution of Marriage”

**Conversation Three: How does preparing adequately for marriage help uphold its sanctity?**

**The BIG ideas:**

**We must uphold the sanctity of marriage by being properly prepared for marriage.**

- We must be mentally, emotionally, financially, physically, and spiritually prepared for marriage. We must have knowledge of all that marriage entails, including spousal relations and raising a family. Underage youth do not yet possess this knowledge.
- “Who can find a virtuous woman? For her price is far above rubies. The heart of her husband doth safely trust on her...” (Proverbs 31: 10-33). The description of the virtuous woman tells us that she is mature enough to handle household duties, make her husband happy, and fulfill related responsibilities before God and humanity. In other words, she enjoys family life and is a blessing to the household, meaning she is physically and mentally ready for a family life. Even if her age is not stated, her engagements and achievements reveal that she is at her mature age. The contextual meaning (for the 21<sup>st</sup> century Nigerian woman) of Proverbs 31 is a mature woman, well-educated, fit enough to undertake family responsibilities comfortably, and with the knowledge to give love and get satisfaction from her husband.
- Girls are not physically ready to be wives and mothers before menses, or even directly after. At the time of menses, a girl’s pelvis is only 85% developed. It will not be fully developed until the age of 18. Thus, pregnant girls under 18 have a much higher risk of obstructed labor and possible death in childbirth.  
Subjecting underage girls to this kind of suffering within marriage does not uphold the sanctity of marriage. Marriage’s sanctity is upheld when both spouses are willing to love and support each other, and are physically, mentally, emotionally, spiritually, and financially prepared to raise God-pleasing families.

### **We must uphold the sanctity of marriage by being properly prepared for marriage.**

- We must be mentally, emotionally, financially, physically, and spiritually prepared for marriage. Underage youth do not have adequate knowledge of what marriage entails, and are not adequately prepared to have joyful marital relations or raise a family.
- Girls are not physically ready to be wives and mothers before menses, or even directly after. By the time of menses, the pelvis is only 85% developed; it will only develop fully by the age of 18. Therefore, pregnant girls under 18 face a higher risk of experiencing obstructed labor.
- “O young men, whoever among you is (financially and physically) able to marry, he should do so, as this helps him lower his gaze and maintain his chastity; and whoever is unable to (marry), he should observe fasting, as this protects him.” (Hadith of Al-Bukhaari) This sunnah does not just refer to young men; it highlights the need for all of us to be physically, mentally, emotionally, spiritually, and financially mature before we enter into the divine institution of marriage. Remember, if Allah did not want us to be properly prepared to love a spouse and raise a healthy family, He would not have given us a way to avoid temptation. “Lowering our gaze” and “fasting” are obviously not the only things we can do; prayer, education, and self-discipline should be the guiding forces in all of our lives. We must practice all of these things, because they help us not only wait until we are prepared financially and physically, but are also the ways we achieve mental, emotional, and spiritual preparedness for marriage!

### **Key Facts**

- Girls who are married under the age of 18 are often forced to drop out of school, discontinuing their education and seriously limiting their future.
- Children and youth under 18, especially those who have left school, are often not ready to shoulder the responsibilities of a spouse and family.
- Girls who are married under the age of 18 can develop fistula and other problems that lead to infertility, due to early, forced sexual relations.
- Girls who are married under the age of 18, and subsequently become very young mothers, are at a much higher risk of maternal death, and their babies are more likely to die as well.

## Some Quick Tips

- Know that EM has never been shown to have ANY beneficial effects whatsoever; on the contrary, all studies on the subject show how much EM hurts girls and women.
- Make the conversation easier by talking about what a healthy marriage and a healthy family looks like and how one way to support one another is making sure that everyone in the family stays healthy. Ensuring both spouses are prepared for marriage is one way to do that.

### Additional Resources:

For more basic information and **Key Facts** about EM, see **Module 2: “Teach Yourself”**. For more help on how to talk about EM or have difficult conversations, see ‘Some Common Questions’ in **Module 1: “Getting Started”**.

### Start the Conversation on Eliminating Early Marriage (EM) – “Honor the Institution of Marriage”

**Conversation Four: How can we make marriage a mutual partnership based on love and respect?**

**The BIG ideas:**

**Marriage is meant to be a partnership based on mutual love and respect.**

- The Bible clearly tells us that both husband and wife must treat each other with love and respect – this can only occur when both spouses are prepared (physically, mentally, emotionally, spiritually, financially) and willing.
- “Let the husband render unto the wife due benevolence; and likewise also the wife unto the husband.” (1<sup>st</sup> Corinthians 7:3) “Due benevolence” here means two things: kindness and respect, and also sexual love. Those who take a young, unprepared, and especially a forcibly consented bride will find it very difficult to foster an environment of caring, kindness, and respect; the immature, underdeveloped child bride can also not be assured a stress/pain free and joyful sexual life with her adult husband. Marrying a young girl breeds resentment and fear, not love and respect, as God wants.
- A girl is not physically prepared for childbirth and marital relations, even when she first hits puberty. Medical science has proven that a girl is healthiest if she does not have a child until, at the very least, two years after her first menses. Additionally, no one should marry until they are financially and physically able to support a family, and engage in consensual, loving marital relations.
- We honor the institution of marriage, and preserve its sanctity, by reserving it for those who can enter into a mutually respectful, loving partnership.

### **Marriage is meant to be a partnership based on mutual love and respect.**

- Marriage is an institution of love, dedication, and genuine affection founded from a consensual match between comparable partners.
- Islam emphasizes mutual respect in a marriage, between both husband and wife. Imam as-Sadiq states: “The blessed of women are those who ask for small living expenses, and the evil of them are those who are demanding in terms of living expenses.” Likewise, the Hadith of Abu Dawud tells us: “The most perfect in faith amongst believers is he who is best in manners and kindest to his wife.” These two sunnah, together, show that a good marriage in Islam is one where both husband and wife are mature, kind to others, and respectful of one another.
- Marrying a young girl before she is ready, and forcing her into sexual relations is the opposite of kindness; it is doing harm to an innocent, which is a grave sin. Also, a marriage between an adult man and an underage girl is often a non-consensual match between two people who are at very different places physically, mentally, emotionally, spiritually, and financially, which is an arrangement that breeds resentment and fear, not love and respect.
- A good Muslim will not marry a woman without her full consent, or if she is underage, and will treat her with kindness and respect as a partner, so that she can do the same!

### **Key Facts**

- Girls who are married under the age of 18 are often forced to drop out of school, discontinuing their education and seriously limiting their future.
- Children and youth under 18, especially those who have left school, are often not ready to shoulder the responsibilities of a spouse and family.
- Girls who are married under the age of 18 can develop fistula and other problems that lead to infertility, due to early, forced sexual relations.
- Girls who are married under the age of 18, and subsequently become very young mothers, are at a much higher risk of maternal death, and their babies are more likely to die as well.

## Some Quick Tips

- Recognize that our decisions do not just affect us – they affect our families, loved ones, and all those around us.
- Help your community to understand that this means: EM similarly does not just affect us. If a daughter or mother dies in childbirth because she is too young to be married and bearing children, or is shunned because she has developed fistula from traumatic childbirths or forced sexual relations, they are less able to work and support our families. We have a responsibility to protect ourselves and those around us.
- Above all, emphasize this: **the practice of EM does not just hurt one girl; it hurts the entire community, and robs it of its dignity.**

## Additional Resources:

For more basic information and **Key Facts** about EM, see **Module 2: “Teach Yourself”**. For more help on how to talk about EM or have difficult conversations, see “Some Common Questions” in **Module 1: “Getting Started”**.



### Start the Conversation on Eliminating Early Marriage (EM) – “Honor the Institution of Marriage”

#### Conversation Five: What is the proper time for marriage?

##### The BIG ideas:

**The proper time for marriage is different for everyone – but successful marriages occur only when both parties are prepared, and preparation is only guaranteed when both spouses are over 18 and finished with school.**

- Sexual morality and purity is best before marriage, and fidelity is necessary for a happy afterwards. However, this does not mean we should marry before we are ready or as early as possible.
- Many believe marrying early, often at or before puberty, is the only way to guarantee virginity, and presumably morality, in a bride. However, physical virginity is not the guarantee to morality: “You have heard it said, ‘you shall not commit adultery.’ But I tell you that anyone who has looked at a woman lustfully has already committed adultery with her in his heart.” (Matthew 5:27-28) According to Matthew 5:27-28, sexual sin, or adultery, includes lustful looks and thoughts. This means that marrying a girl early to guarantee that she is a virgin at marriage is not pleasing to God, as it is ignoring the critical need for mental and spiritual purity, which cannot be attained without adult maturity. Learning self-control is a better/healthy way to ensure virginity until after 18—which is healthy and achievable through spiritual growth and through medical, social, historical and legal education. We must exercise purity of mind and discipline – this is what God wants, not early marriage.
- God rewards the patient – especially when they wait/prepare for marriage. The Genesis 24 story of Rebekah and Isaac is a model for chosen marriage. Her family respected her decision. In fact, they wanted to keep her for at least ten days before she married Isaac. But she refused to stay, decided to go, and they respected her right/free will—for she was mature enough to make the right choice. Forcing a girl or boy into a marriage simply to ensure their virginity is not right – good marriages like that of Isaac and Rebekah are formed by mutual free will. “There is time for everything...a time to love...he has made everything beautiful in its time.” (Ecclesiastes 3:1) This verse tells us that everything has its proper time, including love affairs and marriage. Everything is beautiful when it is done at the right time, and this means waiting for marriage until everyone is mature enough to bear its responsibilities. Nature clearly tells us that girls are not guaranteed to be ready for marriage or children before 18 years of age.

- The right time for marriage is therefore whenever we are physically, mentally, emotionally, spiritually, and financially prepared to be married and support a family – and this is not guaranteed unless both spouses are at least 18, and definitely not when one spouse is a child.

**The proper time for marriage is different for everyone – but successful marriages occur only when both parties are prepared, and preparation is only guaranteed when both spouses are over 18 and finished with school.**

- Sexual morality and purity is best before marriage, and fidelity is necessary for a happy marriage afterwards. However, this does not mean we should marry before we are ready or as early as possible. (See 1.) “Before entering marriage, we must understand the requirements for marriage.”)
- Marriage is not meant to be an institution of financial gain: rather, it is a partnership based on mutual love and respect, between two comparable partners, who can support themselves and their family. Both spouses must be physically, mentally, emotionally, spiritually, and financially prepared for marriage. This means that both husband and wife must be physically able to fully enjoy marital relations in order bear healthy children, able to handle household duties, raise children with love and attention, be able to love another person selflessly as God wants us, and have adequate income and means of supporting a family. (See 2.) “Marriage is a gift from Allah, and should be treated as such.”)
- Marrying a girl off for financial gain is against Allah’s wishes. Therefore, as faithful Muslims, we should fight against and avoid marriages underpinned by direct or indirect material benefit (as widely observed in many parts of Nigeria). A true Muslim understands the importance of supporting the poor without taking their young girl in return. Additionally, parents are supposed to pave the way for their daughters to marry at their right age; they are not supposed to impose a high dowry or demand top-of-the-social-ladder husbands for their daughters before they are even ready to marry. (See 3.) “We must uphold the sanctity of marriage by being properly prepared for marriage” and 4.) “Marriage is meant to be a partnership based on love and respect.”)
- There is only one verse in the Quran which may appear to support EM: “If you are in doubt concerning those of your wives who have ceased menstruating, know that their waiting period [before one can divorce them] shall be three months. The same shall apply to those who have not yet menstruated.” (Quran 65:4). This is the only verse which specifically mentions early marriage. A footnote acknowledges that child marriages were common custom in the days of Mohammed, dating back to “al- gahiliyyah,” or, “the era of ignorance.”

# Early Marriage

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

## BEGIN THE CONVERSATION MODULE 3

- It is a fact that adolescent girls are not physically prepared to have healthy pregnancies and births. They are not mentally or emotionally prepared to love a husband, raise children, and handle household duties. They are not financially prepared to support themselves. If we pull them out of school to marry them early, we stunt them spiritually, and in all of these ways – which is the greatest tragedy of all.
- Prosperity and community growth comes from choice: give your children the choice of whom to marry and when.

### Key Facts

- Girls who are married under the age of 18 are often forced to drop out of school, discontinuing their education and seriously limiting their future.
- Children and youth under 18, especially those who have left school, are often not ready to shoulder the responsibilities of a spouse and family.
- Girls who are married under the age of 18 can develop fistula and other problems that lead to infertility, due to early, forced sexual relations.
- Girls who are married under the age of 18, and subsequently become very young mothers, are at a much higher risk of maternal death, and their babies are more likely to die as well.

### Some Quick Tips

- Be sure that your congregants understand that marriage is a path to spiritual peace and righteousness for both spouses. Marrying a young girl, when she is not fully prepared to be a wife and mother, has the opposite effect, and does not breed mutual love or spiritual growth.

### Additional Resources:

For more basic information and **Key Facts** about EM, see **Module 2**: “Teach Yourself.” For more help on how to talk about EM or have difficult conversations, see “Some Common Questions” in **Module 1**: “Getting Started”.