

A Provider Self-Assessment Tool to Measure Gender Competency for Family Planning Services

Module E: Facilitating Positive Couples' Communication and Cooperative Decision Making

Data for Impact

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Overview

This document contains one of six modules (A–F), each of which are related to one domain of gender competency. In each module, providers respond to statements that represent knowledge, attitudes, and skills in the domain. For each statement, providers indicate if they “Strongly Agree, Agree, Disagree, or Strongly Disagree” with the statement. Select modules can be administered on their own, or as part of a holistic assessment. The background and development of the provider self-assessment tool is described in detail in the parent document.

The tool includes three sections for each module as follows:

- The first section is the **Statement and Response Form**. This is the form used by providers to document their responses to each statement. The form includes the statements that relate to the domain, and the response options (strongly agree—strongly disagree). Providers review the statement and select one response for each statement.
- The second section is the **Answer Key**, which shows the ideal response for each statement and a point value for each response. Providers write the point value for their response in the “Your Score” column of the answer key and sum their score for the module.
- The third section is a **Discussion Guide**, which provides a brief explanation about why certain responses demonstrate gender competency. It also summarizes main points about the domains and includes self-reflection and group discussion questions.

This provider self-assessment tool aligns with HRH2030 and USAID’s Office of Population and Reproductive Health’s gender-competency framework and eLearning for family planning service providers. A free, self-paced online training program can be accessed at <https://chemonics.com/resource/defining-and-advancing-gender-competent-family-planning-service-providers/>.

Statement and Response Form

Consider each statement and whether you strongly agree, agree, disagree, or strongly disagree with it. Write a check in the box next to your response in the column to the right.	
Statement	Check the box with your response here
E1. Differences in control between a woman and man in a relationship influences how I talk about family planning with a couple.	<input type="checkbox"/> Strongly agree <input type="checkbox"/> Agree <input type="checkbox"/> Disagree <input type="checkbox"/> Strongly disagree
E2. I can explain contraceptive methods that can be used by women or men alone, and those that require a partner's involvement.	<input type="checkbox"/> Strongly agree <input type="checkbox"/> Agree <input type="checkbox"/> Disagree <input type="checkbox"/> Strongly disagree
E3. I should only ask a client about their partner if the client mentions them first.	<input type="checkbox"/> Strongly agree <input type="checkbox"/> Agree <input type="checkbox"/> Disagree <input type="checkbox"/> Strongly disagree
E4. When a client does not know how to discuss family planning with their partner, I can help them practice doing so.	<input type="checkbox"/> Strongly agree <input type="checkbox"/> Agree <input type="checkbox"/> Disagree <input type="checkbox"/> Strongly disagree
E5. When clients approve, inviting sexual partners to counseling about family planning is important, even if they aren't married.	<input type="checkbox"/> Strongly agree <input type="checkbox"/> Agree <input type="checkbox"/> Disagree <input type="checkbox"/> Strongly disagree
E6. I can encourage a female client to talk with her partner about family planning without compromising her ability to make her own decision.	<input type="checkbox"/> Strongly agree <input type="checkbox"/> Agree <input type="checkbox"/> Disagree <input type="checkbox"/> Strongly disagree
E7. I find it difficult to guide a discussion between a couple so that both partners are given equal attention.	<input type="checkbox"/> Strongly agree <input type="checkbox"/> Agree <input type="checkbox"/> Disagree <input type="checkbox"/> Strongly disagree

Answer Key

Step 1: Use your responses from the “statement and response form” to match your response choice with a point value. Then write your point value for the statement in the “your score” column.		
Statement	Points	Your score
E1. Differences in control between a woman and man in a relationship influences how I talk about family planning with a couple.	<input type="checkbox"/> Strongly agree = 4 <input type="checkbox"/> Agree = 3 <input type="checkbox"/> Disagree = 2 <input type="checkbox"/> Strongly disagree = 1	
E2. I can explain contraceptive methods that can be used by women or men alone, and those that require a partner’s involvement.	<input type="checkbox"/> Strongly agree = 4 <input type="checkbox"/> Agree = 3 <input type="checkbox"/> Disagree = 2 <input type="checkbox"/> Strongly disagree = 1	
E3. I should only ask a client about their partner if the client mentions them first.	<input type="checkbox"/> Strongly agree = 1 <input type="checkbox"/> Agree = 2 <input type="checkbox"/> Disagree = 3 <input type="checkbox"/> Strongly disagree = 4	
E4. When a client does not know how to discuss family planning with their partner, I can help them practice doing so.	<input type="checkbox"/> Strongly agree = 4 <input type="checkbox"/> Agree = 3 <input type="checkbox"/> Disagree = 2 <input type="checkbox"/> Strongly disagree = 1	
E5. When clients approve, inviting sexual partners to counseling about family planning is important, even if they aren’t married.	<input type="checkbox"/> Strongly agree = 4 <input type="checkbox"/> Agree = 3 <input type="checkbox"/> Disagree = 2 <input type="checkbox"/> Strongly disagree = 1	
E6. I can encourage a female client to talk with her partner about family planning without compromising her ability to make her own decision.	<input type="checkbox"/> Strongly agree = 4 <input type="checkbox"/> Agree = 3 <input type="checkbox"/> Disagree = 2 <input type="checkbox"/> Strongly disagree = 1	
E7. I find it difficult to guide a discussion between a couple so that both partners are given equal attention.	<input type="checkbox"/> Strongly agree = 1 <input type="checkbox"/> Agree = 2 <input type="checkbox"/> Disagree = 3 <input type="checkbox"/> Strongly disagree = 4	
Total score		
<p>Step 2: Add the values for each statement to find your total score (sum value from statements 1–7). Be sure to note that for the statements highlighted in blue, the point values are higher for “disagree” and “strongly disagree” (3 and 4 respectively). For all other statements, the highest point values are for “strongly agree” and “agree.”</p> <p>Step 3: Compare your total score to the values in the table below to see if you have high, medium, or low gender competency in this domain.</p> <p>Step 4: Review the discussion guide which explains the ideal response for each statement. To strengthen competency in this area, complete the eLearning course https://chemonics.com/resource/defining-and-advancing-gender-competent-family-planning-service-providers/</p>		

Module	Maximum possible score	High gender competency	Medium gender competency	Low gender competency
E. Facilitating Positive Couples' Communication and Cooperative Decision Making	28	25–28	22–24	Equal to or less than 21

Discussion Guide

This guide will help you reflect on your experience answering statements about facilitating positive couples' communication and cooperative decision making. First, please consider the following personal reflection questions.

- What statements were confusing to you? Why?
- What statements did you answer and then second-guess your response? Why?
- What statements touched on practices that you already do when providing family planning services?

The statements in this module assess your ability to facilitate positive couples' communication and cooperative decision making in your family planning service delivery. A provider with competency in this area should be able to positively impact interactions between a couple about family planning. This support can be provided by counseling both clients together, and by giving a client guidance on how to talk to their partner on their own, if they want to do so. The provider should help clients articulate and discuss their reproductive desires in a way that respects women's autonomy.

Three Key Takeaways from this Module are:

1. Facilitating positive couples' communication and cooperative decision-making brings together skills from other domains of gender competency including skills in gender-sensitive communication, promoting individual agency, supporting legal rights and status, and male engagement. Competency in this area is a culmination of these skills with the addition of being able to facilitate a positive dialogue between partners in a couple.
2. There are different types of couples that can benefit from couples counseling for family planning (for example, married, unmarried, age differences, monogamous, non-monogamous, and casual sexual partners). There is not only one type of couple. Power within a couple can also differ across types of partnerships. Cultural beliefs about masculinity and femininity often dictate that men have more say than women in decisions about family size, whether to use contraception, and how resources are used—all of which can influence women's ability to make the family planning decision that is right for them. To facilitate positive couples' communication and decision making, a provider should ask questions that can help the provider recognize differences in power in a couple. Their counseling should be conducted in a way that equalizes each partner's ability to express their family planning desires, ask questions, and learn about their family planning options.
3. There are times when couples may not agree about family planning. A gender-competent provider should use communication skills to support each partner expressing their perspective, asking questions, and learning information about family planning and contraceptive options. The provider should establish a counseling environment in which men and women are able to express their perspectives freely during couples counseling. They should reinforce the importance of respect for individual autonomy, and that the choice to use a method is up to the person using the method.

Below are the answers and an explanation for the statements in this module. The explanations are meant to assist with your understanding of the statements.

E1. Differences in control between a woman and man in a relationship influences how I talk about family planning with a couple.

Good answers for this statement include “strongly agree” and “agree.”

Strongly agree	Agree	Disagree	Strongly disagree
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If there is a clear unequal power dynamic between the couple, then it could be more productive to discuss family planning with each person individually instead of both together. The provider should ensure that both parties are being heard equally. However, this does not mean that they should have equal power over reproductive decision making. The person using the method should have the final say as to whether they use it. As explained in the Module B about promoting individual agency, a woman should make the final decision about her own contraceptive use, as she is the one who will experience pregnancy and delivery in case of pregnancy.

E2. I can explain contraceptive methods that can be used by women or men alone, and those that require a partner’s involvement.

Good answers for this statement include “strongly agree” and “agree.”

Strongly agree	Agree	Disagree	Strongly disagree
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A provider should be able to explain contraceptive methods that men can use on their own, that women can use on their own, and those that the couple can use together. When partners understand how each method works, they can better support their partner and continued method use.

E3. I should only ask a client about their partner if the client mentions them first.

Good answers for this statement are “strongly disagree” and “disagree.”

Strongly agree	Agree	Disagree	Strongly Disagree
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A gender-competent provider should be able to help clients articulate and discuss their reproductive intentions as a couple. To do this, the provider must first take time to ask about a client’s sexual partner (or partners). The provider could start the conversation by asking indirectly, for instance establishing whether the client is married or has a romantic partner. This might come off more respectful than asking directly about the client's sexual partner(s). These questions can also help a provider assess any potential differences in power in decision making that may exist within a couple. In cases where clients are uncomfortable sharing information about their partner, the client’s privacy should be respected. However, when clients are open to sharing information about their partner, the provider should ask questions that will help them

understand the client’s comfort, desire, and skills in articulating their family planning desires, and learning about their partner’s desires and intentions.

E4. When a client does not know how to discuss family planning with their partner, I can help them practice doing so.

Good answers for this statement include “strongly agree” and “agree.”

Strongly agree	Agree	Disagree	Strongly disagree
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Supporting good couples’ communication means that a provider can help prepare a client to talk with their partner on their own if they want to. Once a provider understands a client’s family planning desires, they can work with the client to think about how to express and explain things to their partner. They can also suggest and discuss questions the client can ask to learn about their partner’s family planning beliefs and desires. Role playing with the client can build their confidence to talk with their partner on their own and think about how to ask questions and respond in advance of the conversation.

E5. When clients approve, inviting sexual partners to talk about family planning is important, even if they aren’t married.

Good answers for this statement include “strongly agree” and “agree.”

Strongly agree	Agree	Disagree	Strongly disagree
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Understanding how gender, cultural, and social norms influence power dynamics within a couple can help providers guide a discussion wherein both partners are able to express their family planning preferences safely and on equal terms. These discussions should not be limited to instances where sexual partners are married. Taking time to ask questions to understand the dimensions of the relationship will help providers identify challenges related to power in decision making about family planning. The provider can reinforce the importance of both members of a couple expressing their family planning desires, reinforcing the importance of women’s free will in and rights in family planning decision-making, and that the choice to use a method should always be up to the person using it.

E6. I can encourage a female client to talk with her partner about family planning without compromising her ability to make her own decision.

Good answers for this statement include “strongly agree” and “agree.”

Strongly agree	Agree	Disagree	Strongly disagree
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In encouraging positive couples’ communication, it is important to reinforce that productive dialogue does not mean that partners must agree on all aspects of family planning. Introducing the concept of couples’ communication to clients should be done in a way that also explains that it is ultimately up to the user of a contraceptive method to decide if they will use a method. The

provider can explain ways of talking to a partner about family planning and remind clients that there are methods of contraception that can be used by men and women on their own, without their partner’s participation.

E7. I find it difficult to guide a discussion between a couple so that both partners are given equal attention.

Good answers for this statement are “strongly disagree” and “disagree.”

Strongly Agree	Agree	Disagree	Strongly Disagree
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A gender-competent provider can guide a discussion so that both partners are heard, and so that one partner’s perspective does not dominate the conversation. It is important that providers can facilitate dialogue so that partners do not overpower each other by interrupting or diminishing the importance of what the other partners says.

Group Discussion/Reflection:

After reviewing the statements, it is important to reflect on how you can facilitate positive couples' communication and cooperative decision making in your family planning service delivery.

- In your experience, what are cultural beliefs that influence the way in which men and women communicate with each other?
- How can you create a dialogue that will ensure each partner is understood and respected when one partner has more power in the relationship?
- What are some ways you can help clients talk to their partners about family planning if they want to?
- How have you supported productive dialogue about family planning with couples in the past?

The fifth module of the online Gender Competencies for Family Planning Providers eLearning Course is dedicated to facilitating positive couples' communication and cooperative decision making. The following learning objectives are addressed in the module:

- Define facilitating positive couples' communication and cooperative decision making;
- Explain the importance of facilitating positive couples' communication and cooperative decision making;
- Identify the competencies of the "Facilitating Positive Couples' Communication and Cooperative Decision Making" domain; and
- Apply the competencies to your work.

Taking this online training will help you develop your understanding of facilitating positive couples' communication and cooperative decision making as a gender-competent provider and offer more insights into the statements asked in this tool.

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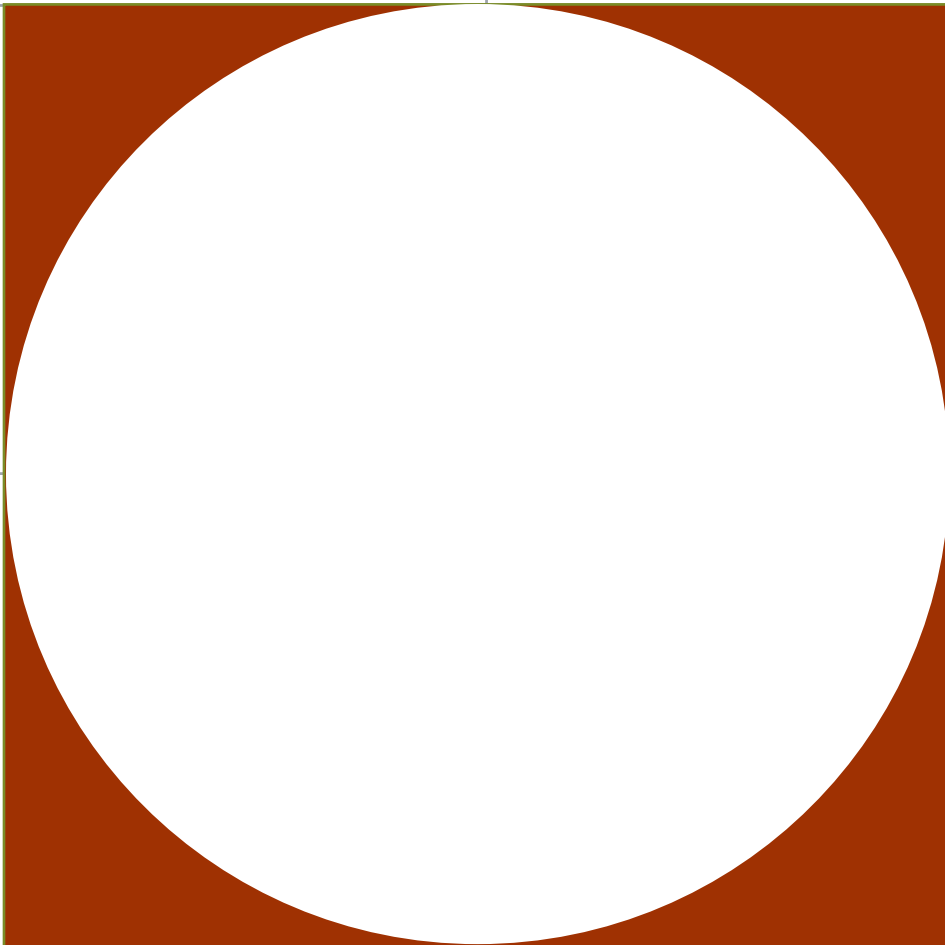
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