

INSPIREd Faith Communities:

Nurturing Values and Spirituality in Early
Childhood for the Prevention of Violence

BRAZIL



**Consortium on Nurturing Values and Spirituality in
Early Childhood for the Prevention of Violence**

About the International Consortium on Nurturing Values and Spirituality in Early Childhood for the Prevention of Violence

The Consortium, convened by Arigatou International, brings together civil society and faith-based organizations, religious communities, multilateral organizations, academia and individual experts to foster collaboration, share good practises and develop evidence-based and innovative approaches to integrate values-based education and spirituality in early childhood for the prevention of violence and the holistic development of children.

About INSPIRE: Seven Strategies for Ending Violence Against Children

INSPIRE is an evidence-based technical package to support countries in their efforts to prevent and respond to violence against children. It identifies a select group of strategies that have shown success in reducing violence against children. These strategies include implementation and enforcement of laws; norms and values; safe environments; parent and caregiver support; income and economic strengthening; response and support services; and education and life skills.
https://www.who.int/violence_injury_prevention/violence/inspire/en/

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The International Consortium on Nurturing Values and Spirituality in Early Childhood for the Prevention of Violence against Children is contributing to the implementation of the INSPIRE strategies through the organization of round table discussions on nurturing values and spirituality in early childhood for the prevention of violence in the framework of the project INSPIREd Faith Communities. The national round table discussions¹ aim to increase awareness on violence against children in early childhood among religious communities and their networks. The discussions also aim to engage different stakeholders to strengthen norms and values that support non-violent, respectful, nurturing, positive, and gender-equitable relations that contribute to reducing parenting practices that violate the dignity of the child. The reflections and ideas shared in this booklet derive from the preparation process and the discussions at the Brazil round table, which took place in Brasilia on 24 June 2019.

On behalf of the International Consortium on Nurturing Values and Spirituality in Early Childhood for the Prevention of Violence against Children, Arigatou International thanks the INSPIRE Fund for providing technical advice and generous financial support for the organization of the round table and the development of this booklet.

¹ The round table discussions took place in Sri Lanka (February), India (April), Lebanon (May), Kenya (May), and Brazil (June).



WHAT IS THIS BOOKLET ABOUT?

This booklet was designed to raise awareness about the importance of children's well-being during the early years, and the support needed from parents, caregivers, educators, and the community to provide nurturing care.

The booklet is based on the reflections of local religious leaders and other stakeholders in relation to the context of children in Brazil. It aspires to challenge social and cultural norms that condone violence in early childhood, reflect on the impact of violence on children, and inspire change at home, school, religious places of worship, and the community as a whole.

Who is it for?

The intended audience of this booklet are the members of religious communities, which include women, men, youth, children, leaders, and lay members; as well as civil society actors who work with religious communities.

What are the objectives of the booklet?



Raise awareness among our community members on the issues related to violence against children and the importance of nurturing values and spirituality in early childhood.



Jointly and individually, reflect on our own theological understandings of the child, the notion of the dignity of the child and their spirituality, and the meaning of non-violence in child upbringing.



Initiate dialogue in our communities to challenge social and cultural norms that condone violence in early childhood.



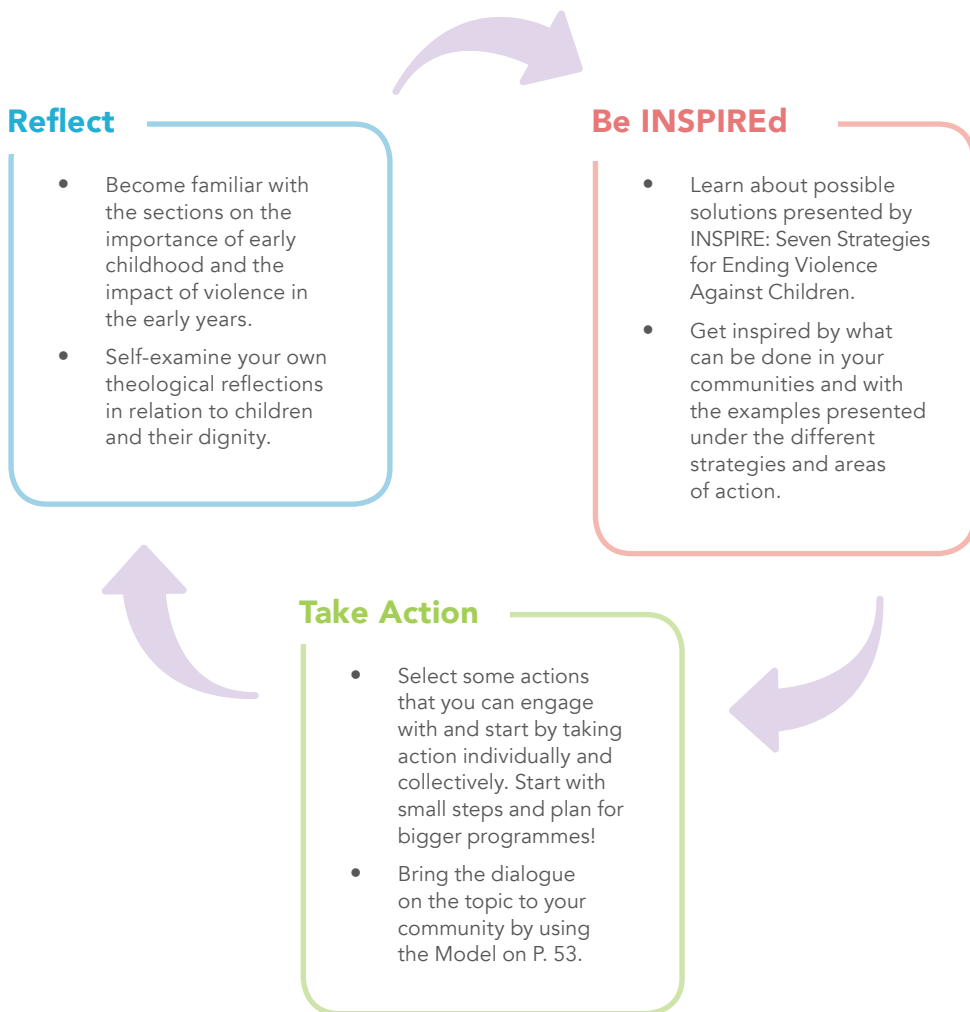
Influence the transformation of attitudes and behaviours around child upbringing that affect the dignity of the child.



Start concrete actions to support parents, caregivers, and educators to raise children in nurturing and caring environments, free of violence.

How can this booklet be used?

This booklet was designed to encourage reflection, suggest concrete solutions, share examples, and INSPIRE individual and collective actions. The following diagram shows how the booklet can be used by following its different sections.



Along the way take note of your reflections, questions and ideas for action!

WHY IS EARLY CHILDHOOD SO CRITICAL?

Before a child is born, an embryo takes a nine-month journey in the mother's womb, full of hopes and potentials. After this miraculous journey, the baby is born and develops rapidly into a person who is ready to learn, create, and engage with others. It is no coincidence that childhood is recognized with special significance in our religions.

Childhood has a critical importance from the religious perspective, as this is when children are introduced to their families' religious beliefs and practices, and immense care and love is given to nurture their spirituality.

In Christianity, Jesus taught his disciples that children are the most important members in the Kingdom of God. He set children as role models so that adults could emulate their humility. At one point, the disciples asked Jesus, 'Who is the greatest in the kingdom of heaven?'² Jesus placed a little child in their midst and said that they must learn to be like the child if they want to become members of the Kingdom of God. In Matthew 18:3-4, we learn that Jesus said, 'Truly, I say to you, unless you change and become like children, you will never enter the kingdom of heaven. Whoever humbles himself like this child, he is the greatest in the kingdom of heaven.'³ Jesus also strongly urged his disciples not to discriminate children from receiving their blessings and promoted their rightful inclusion into the Kingdom of

God.⁴ As a child, Jesus himself grew in wisdom and stature, and in favour with God and man.⁵ This is a pointer to the intellectual, physical, social, and spiritual well-being that is necessary for the holistic nurturing of all children.

Children are central to the Candomblé religious tradition; children are honoured, praised, and protected as they symbolize the present and future of the community. Since their birth, children are the protagonist in the religious practices; they are the expression of the Divine and they represent the continuity in family relations. In a view of life that is cyclical, children are also the custodians of ancestral memory. From the early years, children are initiated in the religion through songs, dances, prayers, and storytelling. The spiritual nurturing of the child includes connecting with the Divine, creating bonds with others, and building relationships based on respect. Children are viewed as whole persons and they learn and take responsibility within their families and groups, according to their own age.

Judaism views childhood as a period of purity, joy, and beauty to be valued and cherished. The child is the greatest blessing of God and the purest form of being created in God's image ('b'zelem elohim'). The Talmud states, 'Childhood is a garland of roses,' and, 'The very breath of children is free of sin.'⁶ Children are blessed every Friday evening when the

2 *The Holy Bible*, Revised Standard Version – Catholic Edition, Matthew 18:1.

3 *The Holy Bible*, Matthew 18:3-4.

4 *The Holy Bible*, Mark 10:13-16.

5 *The Holy Bible*, Luke 2:52.

6 *Babylonian Talmud*, Shabbat 152, 119.

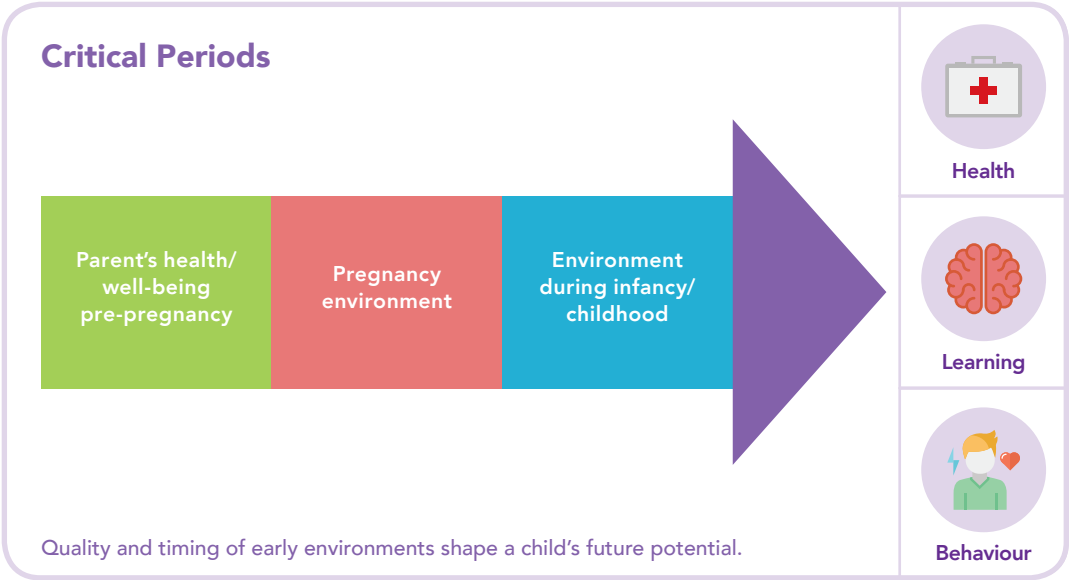
Shabbat starts, which is the holiest day for Jewish people. The sacredness of human life is applied to the infant as soon as she or he is born. The need to enable every child to recognize his or her own dignity and value is expressed in the teaching that states, ‘Every individual should perceive the world as having been created for his/her own sake.’⁷ As a logical consequence of this understanding, children are entitled to be loved and cared for so that they may have the possibility of developing to their maximum potential. Children are regarded as the Divine trustees and guarantors of the future. Therefore, Judaism recognizes that the well-being of society as a whole is determined by how we treat children.

In Judaism, childhood is an important phase in life. This is signified both by the cherished status of children and by the child-parent

relationship that epitomizes the way in which the human-divine relationship is understood.

To support children’s development from conception to eight years of age in terms of their cognitive, physical, language, socio-emotional, motor development, and spiritually, there are three critical windows of opportunity. These are:

- 1. Pre-pregnancy, during which the health and well-being of the future parents influence the development of the baby.
- 2. Pregnancy, during which the development of the baby is guaranteed to occur under optimal conditions.
- 3. Infancy and early childhood.



7 Babylonian Talmud, Sanhedrin 38.

One of the most impressive facts about early childhood is constituted by the development of the brain. Only recently has neuroscience been able to measure the development of the brain and to study those factors that can contribute or hinder healthy brain development. The brain is the only organ not fully developed at birth. Although the brain starts to develop about a few weeks after conception, infancy and early childhood are especially critical in determining the well-being of the child.

Early childhood is when children start understanding who they are and who the others around them are.

Science also tells us that while our genes, passed on to us by our biological parents, establish the broad basis of human development, the environment where children grow up helps form who they grow to be. Together, they shape the quality of brain architecture and establish either a sturdy or a fragile foundation for all of the learning, health, and behaviour that follow.

The first two years of a child's life have a significant influence on the development of physical, intellectual, emotional, and social capacities. It is in this light that infants (from birth to two years of age) need many positive and nurturing experiences when their brain is developing rapidly. Parents and caregivers have a critical responsibility since this vital period is largely spent at home with them.



Keep in Mind **THE PROCESS OF BRAIN FORMATION**

During early childhood, the brain forms and refines a complex network of connections. The process of forming the connections is both biologically and experience-driven. It is the constant interplay between our experiences, opportunities, and social interactions and genetics that shapes our brains. The connections in the brain are called synapses, and these synaptic connections form the basis of a person's lifelong capacity not only in terms of learning but also in terms of developing habits, internalizing values, and building positive relations with others.

In the first months after birth, in a baby's brain, synapse formation happens at an astonishing speed of 1,000–10,000 synapses per second in response to the baby's sensing the surrounding environment. As the child gets older, the pathways that are commonly used are reinforced while others are 'shutdown' or diminished. This process of synaptic formation is critical for functional development, such as hearing, language, and cognitive functions. After two years of birth, the speed of synapses slows down as pathways are being consolidated.

Religious Rituals and Celebrations in the Early Years

Many religious rituals and celebrations take place during this period, such as the naming ceremony, visits to places of worship for a special prayer for health and well-being, the first haircut, the first solid meal, and the first reading of the holy scripture, to name a few. During this time, parents grow into parenthood that is rooted in their religious and cultural traditions. These religious practices can help foster children's well-being and pass onto them ethical values that can develop as the foundations for spiritual nourishing, which can serve later in life as a source of strength to stand firm when things get difficult in life's journey. These ethical foundations enable us to think and act in ways that are honest, empathetic, and responsible.

Criança Feliz: Strengthening Early Childhood Development to End Child Poverty and Inequality

'Criança Feliz' was launched by the Brazilian government in 2016 to promote comprehensive development of children in their early years. The programme supports the most vulnerable families to prepare parents and caregivers to nurture and stimulate young children. The programme brings the science of early childhood development to the most disadvantaged parents in Brazil and it provides information regarding the importance of the early years. Trained social workers are dispatched around the country to people's homes to show them how to play, sing, and show affection to their infants and young children. They share with parents why this matters, emphasising why nurturing care and emotional safety underpin cognitive growth. Intelligence is not fixed, but formed through experience.

Criança Feliz is the largest coaching programme for parents worldwide. By the end of 2019, the programme aims to have reached 3 million children and 650,000 expecting mothers. *Criança Feliz* has two main pillars:

- Home visits to promote strengthening family skills. Pregnant women receive one visit per month; children from birth to 3 years, one visit per week; and children aged 3–6 years, one visit every 15 days.
- Intersectoral initiatives that seek to strengthen regional policies for social assistance, healthcare, education, culture, human rights, and children's rights.

As the programme continues, based on the home visits social workers report that parents and families are undergoing a transformation. Parents are playing with their children, they are making space and time to support early learning, and they are amazed to see the results. The evidence gathered so far shows improvement regarding children's cognitive development, language, school readiness, executive functioning, and behavioural development.

When children have a good start, this has a long-term impact in shaping their character and transforming them into thriving young adults.

Source: Ministério da Cidadania — Secretaria Especial do Desenvolvimento Social, *Criança Feliz*, <http://mds.gov.br/assuntos/crianca-feliz/crianca-feliz/conheca-o-programa>, accessed 13 Aug. 2019.



My own reflections

WHAT IS THE IMPACT OF VIOLENCE IN EARLY CHILDHOOD?

Every year, children worldwide experience physical punishment from their caregivers including parents, teachers, and other adults who are there to love and care for them. Globally, it is estimated that close to 300 million (three in four) children between the ages of two and four experience violent discipline (physical punishment and/or psychological aggression) by their caregivers on a regular basis, and 250 million (around six in ten) are punished by physical means.⁸

Religious traditions recognize the divinity in every child. In many religious stories and passages, children are viewed as a blessing. The birth of a child is seen as a blessing that brings us closer to the experience of God or the Divine in one's life. In our religious traditions, children are often described as a whole person, a very important member of our society, and as a gift. Science, at the same time, also shows that young children should be given special attention and care, and need positive and nurturing interactions. In their own ways, both science and our religious traditions point out the importance of early childhood. Yet, in silence, many children suffer different forms of violence inflicted upon them.

A major obstacle to ending violence against children is the perception of early childhood as being primarily a period of transition and evolving capacities towards adulthood—and only then is a person a fully-fledged person with inherent human rights. This perception must be challenged; the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child recognizes all children as rights-holders who must be respected and protected, rather than being treated as passive recipients of services or 'not-yet persons'.⁹

We have a responsibility to preserve the divinity and dignity of our children. In doing so, we must revisit the way violence and authority are used in raising children.

Violence against children includes all forms of violence against people under the age of 18, whether perpetrated by parents or caregivers, peers, romantic partners, or strangers. For younger children, maltreatment, sexual violence, emotional or psychological violence, and bullying are the most common forms of violence. The following table describes the different types of violence, followed by a figure that presents the most recurrent type of violence by age group.

⁸ United Nations Children's Fund, *A Familiar Face: Violence in the lives of children and adolescents*, UNICEF, New York, 2017, p.7.

⁹ Office of the Special Representative of the Secretary-General on Violence against Children, *Violence prevention must start in early childhood*. United Nations, New York, 2018, p. 6.

TYPES OF VIOLENCE AGAINST CHILDREN

Physical violence

Physical violence includes beating, punching, kicking, caning, hair pulling, ear twisting, and hitting with an object such as a wooden spoon, stick or belt. These types of physical violence are used as educational tools and means to discipline children, and are practices accepted and justified within the Brazil context.

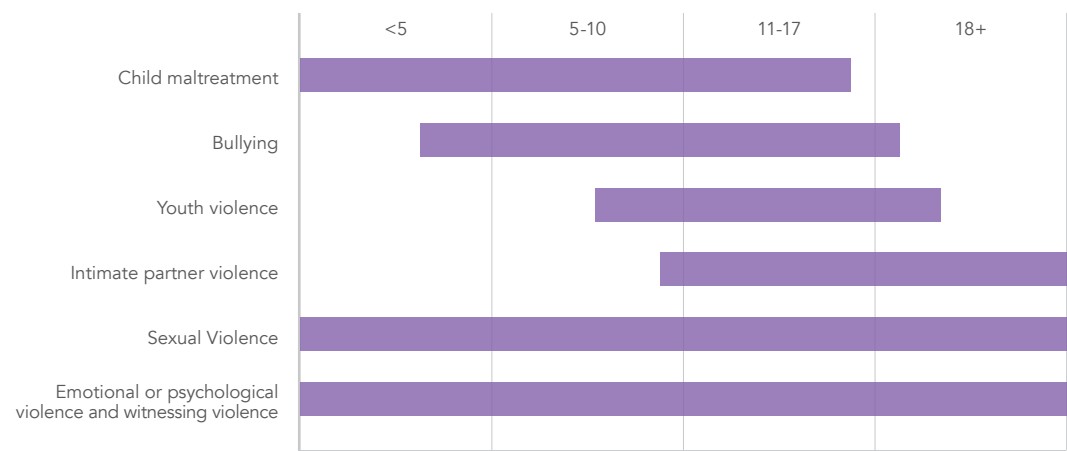
Psychological violence

Emotional or psychological violence and witnessing violence includes restricting a child’s movements, denigration, ridicule, threats and intimidation, discrimination, rejection, and other non-physical forms of hostile treatment. Witnessing violence can involve forcing a child to observe an act of violence, or the incidental witnessing of violence between two or more other persons.

Sexual violence

Sexual violence includes non-consensual completed or attempted sexual contact; non-consensual acts of a sexual nature not involving contact (such as voyeurism or sexual harassment); acts of sexual trafficking committed against someone who is unable to consent or refuse; and online exploitation.

Figure 1 Type of violence by age group affected¹⁰



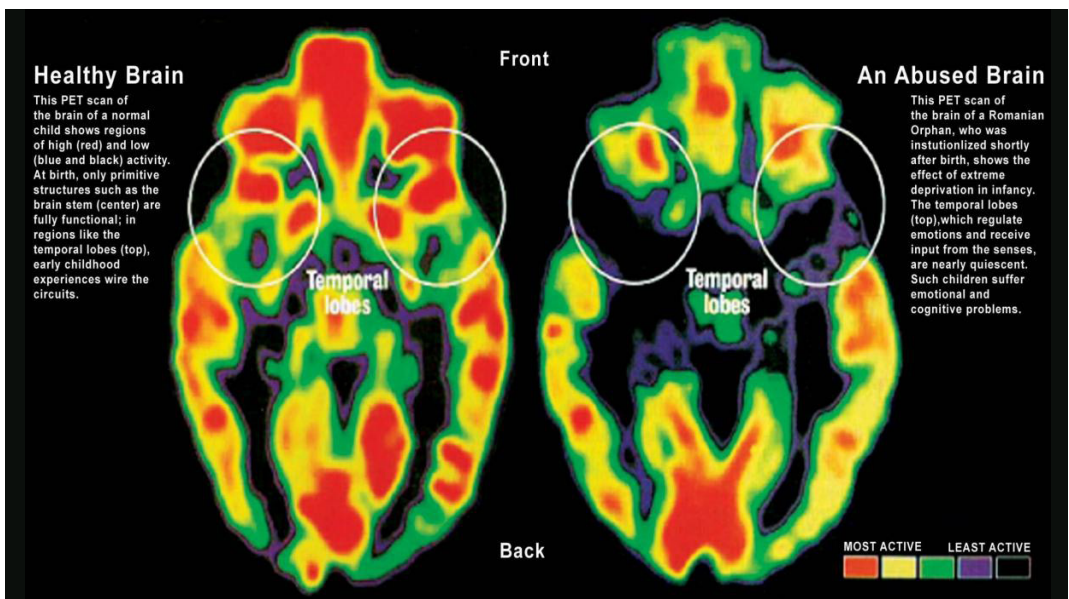
10 World Health Organization, *INSPIRE: Seven Strategies for Ending Violence Against Children*. Executive Summary, 2016, p. 4.

VIOLENCE AND ITS IMPACT ON THE DEVELOPMENT OF THE CHILD'S BRAIN

Experiencing violence in childhood often has effects throughout an individual's lifetime. Some studies show that children who suffer violence in childhood are more prone to mental illness such as anxiety and depression.¹¹ The severe effects of the lack of nurturing care are evident in scan images of a brain (Fig. 2). Studies show that a PET scan of a healthy brain generally presents more activities in the front lobe, where emotions are regulated and circuits are wired,

based on the early childhood experiences. When children experience violence and feel fear, their brain recognizes and reacts to it as a threat to their well-being. Another study shows that if children are continuously exposed to violence and fear, their system is kept on high alert. This might result in a rapid escalation of their physical and emotional response in a way that is not in proportion to the situation. The study shows that children who perceive a threat and have over-activated stress responses react by showing aggression towards others to protect themselves, perpetuating the cycle of violence.¹²

Figure 2 PET scan of a healthy brain and an abused brain¹³



11 E. McCrory et al., *Heightened neural reactivity to threat in child victims of family violence*. Current Biology Volume 21, Issue 23, Pr947-R948, 06 Dec. 2011.

12 Reuters, *Study finds how child abuse changes the brain* (5 Dec. 2011). <https://www.reuters.com/article/us-brain-violence-mentalhealth/study-finds-how-child-abuse-changes-the-brain-idUSTRE7B41KP20111205>, accessed 11 Jul. 2019.

13 H. Chugani et al, *Local brain functional activity following early deprivation: a study of post institutionalized Romanian orphans*, NeuroImage 14, 2001, p. 1290–1301.

Violence can alter the developing brain's structure and function: it can affect language acquisition and cognitive functioning, resulting in social and emotional competency deficits and generating fear, anxiety, depression, and the risk of self-harm and aggressive behaviour. Alterations to the brain resulting from childhood violence can also shape later adult behaviour. Longitudinal studies show that children exposed to violence are more

likely to be victims of violence later in life and become perpetrators, using violence as adults against domestic partners and their own children; and, be at increased risk of engaging in criminal behaviour.¹⁴

Breaking this vicious cycle for the child, the adult, and for society, requires that every child lives free from all forms of violence from the very start.

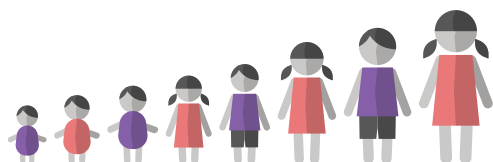


My own reflections

14 Office of the Special Representative of the Secretary-General on Violence against Children, *Violence Prevention Must Start in Early Childhood*, p. 4.

WHAT WE KNOW ABOUT VIOLENCE IN EARLY CHILDHOOD IN BRAZIL

The prevalence of violence in early childhood in Brazil is extremely high. According to the data collected through the human rights helpline, 47,253 children between the ages of zero and seven were victims of violence in 2017 alone. This constitutes 40 per cent of victims of violence for the 0-17 age group.¹⁵



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Structural violence

Children in Brazil are exposed to multiple vulnerabilities, including forms of structural violence such as poverty, extreme poverty, gender-based violence, and marginalization. The growing economic inequality in the country has affected children disproportionately; UNICEF estimates that 61 per cent of Brazilian girls and boys live in poverty, and they are economically poor and/or are deprived of one or more rights.¹⁶

The most vulnerable children in Brazil are those of indigenous and Afro-Brazilian origin. In general, Afro-Brazilians are affected by higher rates of homicide, poverty, and illiteracy; and these realities are connected to the fact that almost 70 per cent of impoverished Brazilians are black.¹⁷ Children living in a condition of extreme poverty are often victims of child labour as early as the age of five. Data from 2016 indicates that out of the 2.4 million children in a condition of child labour in Brazil, 65 per cent are black boys between the ages of five and seventeen.¹⁸

One of the most extreme forms of structural violence affecting children in Brazil is gender-based violence; the prevalence of violence against women and girls is the result of sexist values deeply rooted in Brazilian society. Abuse against girls and women is profoundly ingrained and accepted in many communities. Many children in Brazil grow up witnessing extreme intimate partner violence, which has deep consequences in their physical and emotional development, including in the likelihood of being perpetrators or victims of violence in adulthood. Brazil ranks first in Latin America and the Caribbean for femicide:

15 Ministério dos Direitos Humanos, *Disque Direitos Humanos Relatório 2017*, Brasília, 2018, <https://www.mdh.gov.br/informacao-ao-cidadao/ouvidoria/dados-disque-100/relatorio-balanco-digital.pdf>, accessed 9 Aug. 2019 (available in Portuguese).

16 UNICEF, *Pobreza na infância e na adolescência*, Brasília, 2018, <https://www.unicef.org/brazil/relatorios/pobreza-na-infancia-e-na-adolescencia>, accessed 29 Jul. 2019 (available in Portuguese).

17 Instituto Brasileiro de Geografia e Estatística, *Censo Demográfico 2010: Características Gerais da População, Religião e Pessoas com Deficiência*, Brasília, 2012, https://biblioteca.ibge.gov.br/visualizacao/periodicos/94/cd_2010_religiao_deficiencia.pdf, accessed 29 Jul. 2019 (available in Portuguese).

18 Fórum Nacional de Prevenção e Erradicação do Trabalho Infantil, *Pesquisa Nacional por Amostra de Domicílios*, 2016, <https://fnpeti.org.br/cenario> accessed 13 Aug. 2019 (available in Portuguese).

40 per cent of all murders of women in this region occur in Brazil. In a country with such a high prevalence of violence against women, it is of utmost importance to strengthen prevention and protection measures to protect women and children. Gender-based violence is one of the most extremes forms of violence and discrimination in Brazil and the impunity that often characterizes gender-based killings of women conveys the message that such violence is tolerated. This favours its perpetuation.¹⁹

Neglect, child sexual violence and abuse, and physical and psychological violence

Together, neglect and physical and psychological violence linked to corporal punishment constitute the most prevalent forms of violence affecting children in Brazil. Neglect accounts for 72 per cent of the violence affecting young children, while physical and psychological violence amount to 47 per cent. The total exceeds 100 per cent because each report may contain more than one type of violence. The Ministry of Human Rights highlights that the age group considered most vulnerable is between four and seven.²⁰

Part of the problem is that violence involving young children is often considered normal, even

acceptable. Mothers are the main perpetrators of violence (37 per cent), followed by fathers (18 per cent) as violence is normalized and used by parents to discipline their children. A 2010 survey which involved interviews with 4,025 people over the age of 16, found that 70.5 per cent had experienced physical punishment as young children.²¹

This happens despite the efforts of the Brazilian government to end corporal punishment in all settings. Brazil has one of the most advanced legislation in the world regarding the protection of children and adolescents. Since 2014, Law 13,010/2014 prohibits the use of physical punishment or cruel and degrading treatment against children and adolescents in Brazil.

The law, unfortunately, is not effectively enforced and corporal punishment remains widely practised and tolerated as a method of disciplining children. Brazil has allowed all cases of violence—including sexual abuse and exploitation—to be reported directly to authorities through the Disque 100 (Dial 100) programme. However, the increased reporting has not translated into effective protection of victims nor into holding the perpetrators accountable.²²

Sexual violence is the second most common form of violence against children between the ages of zero and nine. In an analysis of

19 United Nations Economic Commission for Latin America and the Caribbean (ECLAC), *Gender Equality Observatory for Latin America and the Caribbean*, <http://oig.cepal.org/en>, accessed 29 Jul. 2019.

20 Ministério dos Direitos Humanos, *Disque Direitos Humanos Relatório 2017*.

21 N. Cardia, *Pesquisa nacional, por amostragem domiciliar, sobre atitudes, normas culturais e valores em relação à violação de direitos humanos e violência: Um estudo em 11 capitais de estado* (São Paulo: Núcleo de Estudos da Violência da Universidade de São Paulo, 2012), <http://www.nevusp.org/downloads/down264.pdf>, accessed 29 Jul. 2019 (available in Portuguese).

22 Report submitted to the Universal Periodic Review of Brazil at the 27th Session of the Human Rights Council by the NGOs IIMA–Istituto Internazionale Maria Ausiliatrice and VIDES International–International Volunteerism Organization for Women, Education and Development (NGOs in Special Consultative Status with ECOSOC).

the prevalence of sexual violence and abuse affecting children, a 2017 study revealed a tremendous increase in the prevalence of sexual violence and abuse affecting young children between the ages of one and five. Between 2011 and 2017, 184,524 cases of sexual violence were reported; 58,037 (31.5 per cent) against children (between the ages of zero and nine) and 83,068 (45 per cent) against adolescents (between the ages of ten and seventeen). Of the total cases of sexual violence against children zero to nine-years-old, 51.2 per cent were in the age group between one and five-years-old. Afro-Brazilian children are affected by higher rates of sexual violence and abuse; in 45.5 per cent of the total reported cases, the victims were Afro-Brazilians children. The study also showed that sexual violence happens in homes in the majority of the cases (69.2 per cent of the reported cases occurred in the home) with the perpetrators being close relatives of the child victims.²³

Child sexual violence and abuse in Brazil is also the main cause of early pregnancies. In some cases, this is related to the increase in infant and child mortality, as levels of infant and child mortality in early pregnancy are higher.²⁴ The 2010 Census indicates that in the ten to seventeen age group, 2.9 per cent of girls had already had at least one child and most of these mothers were or had already been married or lived in a consensual union. Afro-Brazilians girls constitute 69 per cent of girls younger than 18 with at least one child.

To accelerate the efforts to end violence against children, Brazil became a Pathfinder country with the Global Partnership to End Violence Against Children in 2018. This commits the Government to three to five years of accelerated action towards the achievement of Target 16.2 of the Sustainable Development Goals, that aims to end abuse, exploitation, trafficking, and all forms of violence and torture against children.

This also includes the commitment of the government of Brazil to create a system of specific indicators for violence affecting children and adolescents and integrating different databases to improve reporting. Accurate and regular reports on violence against children are an essential way to prevent it and to protect children and adolescents. At the moment, Brazil does not have a Violence against Children Survey that integrates and monitors the different forms of violence affecting children. While some types of violence—such as child sexual exploitation and abuse—are regularly monitored by the Ministry of Health, other types of violence like neglect, corporal punishment, and psychological violence are not registered regularly.

The lack of data contributes to the lack of adequate policies to tackle these forms of violence.

Additionally, more efforts are needed to promote positive, non-violent, and participatory forms of child-rearing and discipline.

23 Secretaria de Vigilância em Saúde Ministério da Saúde, *Análise epidemiológica da violência sexual contra crianças e adolescentes no Brasil, 2011 a 2017*, Boletim Epidemiológico 27, 49, 2018, <http://portal.arquivos2.saude.gov.br/images/pdf/2018/junho/25/2018-024.pdf>, accessed 29 Jul. 2019 (available in Portuguese).

24 UNICEF, *Gravidez na Adolescência no Brasil – Vozes de Meninas e de Especialistas*, Brasília, 2017, <https://www.unicef.org/brazil/relatorios/gravidez-na-adolescencia-no-brasil-vozes-de-meninas-e-de-especialistas>, accessed 29 Jul. 2019 (available in Portuguese).

A Kenyan saying goes, ‘Mchelea mwana kulia hulia mwenyewe’ (‘He who does not want his child to cry, ultimately cries him/herself’). This saying creates an expectation to use violence to raise the child, implying that the failure to use physical punishment with the child will create issues later. When violence is used by parents and caregivers in the name of discipline, a great unlearning needs to take place. Parents need to be aware of the long-term effects of violence and of the different types of violence affecting children and their development. They also need to equip themselves with tools to support the upbringing of children to nurture their spiritual capacities.

In Kenya, while there are legal provisions banning corporal punishment in all settings, there is evidence that teachers, parents,

and caregivers still recur to emotional and physical violence in schools and homes. There is a high presence of domestic violence against boys and girls, as well as gender-based violence against girls, including sexual and physical violence both in public and domestic spheres. Teachers, parents, and caregivers are not fully aware of the legal ban on corporal punishment; therefore, there is a need to reinforce public awareness on the issue. National campaigns are also necessary to promote positive, participatory, non-violent forms of discipline as an alternative to corporal punishment at all levels of society.



My own reflections

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HOW CAN WE NURTURE OUR SPIRITUALITY FOR THE PREVENTION OF VIOLENCE?



Homes need to become nurturing environments for children to grow, develop, and thrive, but also to support them in developing their critical thinking and resilience. Article 27 of the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child recognizes the right of every child to holistic development including 'physical, mental, spiritual, moral and social development.'²⁵ For parents and caregivers to create nurturing environments to support the holistic development of the child, they must first and foremost nurture their own spirituality, reconnecting with themselves and others around them, and uplifting their ethical responsibilities.

By nurturing one's spirituality as a parent or caregiver, we are preparing ourselves to provide nurturing care to children, to respond in more positive manners to their needs, and to help create safe and respectful spaces for them to explore their interconnections with others. The encouragement of spiritual growth is important for all, especially for children and young people, because it is related to a non-material, ethical, and self-awareness aspect in their development. It is also a necessary counterbalance to the attainment-focused demands of educational curricula and society.

²⁵ Convention on the Rights of the Child (adopted and opened for signature, ratification and accession 20 November 1989, entered into force 2 September 1990).

Our religious traditions also remind us of values and notions that strengthen our understanding of and care for the other. Practising religion and nurturing our own spirituality mean that we are developing relationships, not only with ourselves or vertically with the Transcendent or with God, but also horizontally with peers within and outside of our immediate community. These horizontal relationships are also intergenerational. Through interactions with peers and elders, children learn how to be active participants and critical thinkers. This feeling of interconnectedness enables us to have a sense of belonging; to understand universal values that are common to all religious and humanistic traditions such as respect and empathy; to have a sense of self-control and patience to find peaceful solutions to challenges; and to strengthen a sense of social responsibility that encourages us to address problems that affect others.

Interconnectedness can be expressed through the term 'ubuntu' which means, 'I am because you are.' Ubuntu is an African philosophy that places emphasis on being human through other people. Ubuntu places emphasis on values of human solidarity, empathy, human dignity, and the humaneness in every person. At the centre of the Ubuntu philosophy are interconnectedness and respect for all people.

Adults, too, learn from these intergenerational interactions. As in Christianity, Jesus said, 'Truly, I say to you, unless you change and become like children, you will never enter the kingdom of heaven.'²⁶ This passage reminds us to recognize that children already have a spirituality and that adults can learn from them.

Children's spirituality is often hindered by the violence inflicted upon them by adults.

Jesus also taught that the two greatest commandments are, first: 'Love the Lord your God with all your heart, and with all your soul, and with all your mind, and with all your strength. The second is this: 'Love your neighbour as yourself.' There is no commandment greater than these.'²⁷ Loving oneself is perhaps a prerequisite to love others. With these words, Jesus shows a path towards unity and solidarity with others—solidarity that requires ethical care for our 'neighbour' as if we were caring for ourselves. The interconnectedness of life, compassion for one another, and solidarity with the stranger are ethical demands in our lives that are transmitted to children not with words but with practical actions and day-to-day positive examples.

Judaism understands that the spiritual life of children is expressed through the study of Torah (Jewish learning), by participation in the ritual and prayer life of the community (*avoda*), and in the righteous deeds and acts of loving-kindness (*gemilut hasadim*). Nurturing our own spirituality requires not only nurturing our own selves but also our relations with others and practising the fundamental principles that guide our lives.

The five pillars of Islam are meant to enhance the inner spirituality of its followers, including children, while connecting them with the outer community as well as with God. Creating opportunities to observe, learn, contemplate, practise, and share each pillar of Islam and its meaning, promotes a sense of ethics in

²⁶ The Holy Bible, Matthew 18:3.

²⁷ The Holy Bible, New International Version, Mark 12:30–31.

In our society today, mediated interactions among people are dominated by social media and other technologies. To nurture our spirituality we need to find spaces to reconnect with ourselves and with our children to understand their needs, aspirations, and dreams, by creating moments of dialogue, listening to them, and giving them space.

take responsibility in our communities. It is also about understanding the injustices and oppression around us and committing to transform them. By fostering our own 'conscientization'²⁸—developing a critical awareness of our own social reality through reflection and action— we are nurturing our capacity to care for one another and to respond to the ethical demand to affirm the dignity of everyone.

When parents and caregivers have the space to nurture their own spirituality and to develop critical awareness, their actions speak for themselves, and they become role models for their children.



My own reflections

INSPIREd Faith Communities: Nurturing Values and Spirituality in Early Childhood for the Prevention of Violence

INSPIRE-ING CHANGE: STRATEGIES FOR ENDING VIOLENCE AGAINST CHILDREN



Ending violence against children starts with us, in our families, by opening our hearts and minds to be more attentive to the needs of children, and by putting children at the centre of their upbringing. A nurturing and nourishing environment for children is a violence-free space where children can thrive and reach their full potential.

In Brazil, religion plays a significant role in people's lives. This is true not only because of the high percentage of people practising religion but also because religious and faith-based institutions provide a large portion of services, including healthcare and education. Religion is an important component in the daily lives of people in Brazil and has the potential to be a catalyst of transformation for the entire society.

No religion condones violence. When violence happens, it must be disconnected from the religious perspective and viewed from a different paradigm. Religious leaders in Brazil can play a key role in strengthening child protection

mechanisms within their own community and contributing to raising awareness about the impact of violence against children. In addition, they can lead the path to promote—among parents, caregivers, and teachers—positive, participatory, and non-violent forms of discipline as an alternative to corporal punishment.

The role of religious communities in the prevention of violence against children has been affirmed and endorsed by religious leaders themselves through multiple declarations and in several meetings. The Declaration produced by more than 500 religious leaders and representatives of civil society and faith-based organizations from around the world during the Fifth Forum of the Global Network of Religions for Children held in Panama in May 2017, titled *Ending Violence Against Children – Faith Communities in Action*, contains ten commitments to renew the efforts by religious communities to end all forms of violence that affects children.

The Panama Declaration recalls: ‘children thrive and grow in trusting relationships with people who love and care for them. Ideally, and for the most part, this happens within families. Sadly, it also cannot be denied that the home is the place where most abuses occur. Families need support to grow to become peaceful, safe sanctuaries.’ It continues by affirming that ‘transformed religious and spiritual communities can offer moral teachings and model practices to prevent, heal, reduce and ultimately end violence against children.’²⁹

This booklet takes into consideration the importance of multi-stakeholder and multisectoral approaches to end violence against children. To empower families and communities to provide the best care for their children, it proposes three strategic actions that religious communities, families, and civil society organizations can take. These include:

- Challenging norms and values that condone violence.
- Supporting parents and caregivers.
- Enhancing education and life skills that support the creation of safe and inclusive school environments.

These actions are based on a violence prevention and response package called INSPIRE.³⁰ The INSPIRE strategies include implementation and enforcement of laws; norms and values; safe environments; parent and caregiver support; income and economic



Implementation and enforcement of laws



Norms and values



Safe environments



Parent and caregiver support



Income and economic strengthening



Response and support services



Education and life skills

strengthening; response and support services; and education and life skills.

Areas covered by the INSPIRE strategies are interconnected and, one way or another, related to all aspects of children’s lives. To successfully eradicate violence against children, multisectoral approaches catalysing change and transformation in all seven areas are needed. While religious communities are often present in all these areas touching children’s lives directly or indirectly, it should be noted that the moral authority and influence of religious leaders and exemplary actions among members of their communities, can be more effective in the three areas noted above.

29 Global Network of Religions for Children (GNRC), *The Panama Declaration on Ending Violence Against Children*, Panama City, 9-11 May 2017. <https://gnrc.net/en/what-we-do/gnrc-forums/fifth-forum/gnrc-5th-forum-documents>, accessed 9 August 2019.

30 In 2016, ten global agencies launched *INSPIRE: Seven Strategies for Ending Violence Against Children*, an evidence-based resource package of seven strategies to end violence against children.

CHALLENGING NORMS AND VALUES THAT CONDONE VIOLENCE AGAINST CHILDREN



Every thinking process that leads to violence goes through the moral dimension and through cultural norms.

– Ms Helena Oliveira Silva, Coordinator, Salvador office, Brazil

Norms guide attitudes and behaviours around child-upbringing, gender roles, and the acceptability of violence within a group or society. Strengthening norms and values that support non-violent, respectful, nurturing, positive, and gender-equitable relationships for all children is proven effective in ending violence against children. Religious leaders can contribute to supporting nurturing environments and positive parenting practices by reflecting on the scriptures and providing a positive theological understanding of the child.

Some forms of violence, often against women and children, are perceived as 'normal' in society. This social tolerance towards victimization of women, girls, and boys—and often perpetration by men and older boys—stems from social and cultural norms surrounding gender and masculinity, and lower status of children and women.

In Brazil, gender-based violence is one of the most extreme forms of violence against girls and women. Mothers are often the victims of abuse at home, and children witness violence

at home or are victims of violence from a very young age. As these forms of violence are often normalized, it is important to challenge the social and cultural norms condoning them to promote behavioural change. This also applies to the cultural and social norms that perpetuate exclusion and discrimination, particularly against Afro-Brazilian children. These forms of exclusion and discrimination take place in the community as well as in schools. They also send a message to children that it is acceptable to discriminate and marginalize other children based on their race and colour of their skin.

Nurturing positive values such as respect and empathy in early childhood would prevent children from becoming perpetrators of violence against their peers. These values nurtured in early childhood will break the vicious cycle of violence passed down from one generation to another, where children become perpetrators of violence as adults.

How can religious leaders work with parents and caregivers to break the vicious cycle of violence and gender discrimination being passed down from one generation to another? How can they contribute to promoting values and norms that foster respect and affirmation of the dignity of the child?

Actions to challenge cultural and social norms that condone violence against children:



Advocate for gender equality



Promote policies and programmes to support families



Challenge theological interpretations that condone violent discipline



Raise awareness and join advocacy efforts at regional and national levels



Advocate for gender equality

Gender inequality in Brazil is a reality often accepted and normalized by men and women alike. The impact of gender inequality is visible in many spheres: the different levels of income between women and men, political participation and representation, and the level of education among women.

Gender inequality is also the primary cause of gender-based violence against women in Brazil. Promoting gender equality is critical for violence prevention and to strengthen child protection. These efforts have to include interventions that confront the entrenched beliefs and cultural norms from which gender inequalities develop, as well as efforts to engage all sectors of society in redressing these inequalities.

In 2006, the Maria Da Penha Law established harsh penalties for domestic violence and discrimination against women, in addition to creating specific courts and mechanisms to protect and assist victims. While the Maria Da Penha Law has certainly been an important contribution to end gender-based violence, legislative advances need to be accompanied by other actions and campaigns to raise awareness and promote behavioural change.

Religious leaders have a key role to play when it comes to promoting equality of mothers and fathers in the upbringing of the child. Christianity calls us to create and promote equality between men and women. Joseph, father of Jesus, accepted his paternity even

though he was not married to Mary, which symbolizes a rupture of a patriarchal concept of the role of paternity.³¹ Sadly, very often the care of children is attributed solely and exclusively to women. Therefore, it is impossible not to think of the protection of children without considering the violence to which women are subjected to in the domestic environment.

Through dialogue and reflection, social and cultural norms and behaviours that condone violence in our communities can be transformed. Bringing change to social norms and behaviours is not a sprint but a marathon. In time, more people will embrace beliefs that are favourable to gender equality and attitudes that support non-violent approaches to childcare. Once the dialogue and reflection take place within your own community, it may be helpful to have an open dialogue with members of other communities as well.

Efforts to promote gender-equitable norms and reduce gender-based violence are enhanced if they include men and boys as well as women and girls, though these efforts can benefit from having same-sex groups to help participants feel comfortable talking and exploring ideas.³²

What can you do?

- Organize meetings with men and boys, in an intergenerational format, to discuss the root causes of violence against girls and women; reflect on gender equality; and discuss the normalization of violence.
- Promote examples of fathers' engagement.

31 Pastor Romi Márcia Bencke, Lutheran Pastor and Secretary General of the National Council of Christian Churches (CONIC) during the Round table discussion on Nurturing Values and Spirituality in Early Childhood for the Prevention of Violence held in Brasília on 24 June 2019.

32 World Health Organization, *INSPIRE Handbook: Action for Implementing the Seven Strategies for Ending Violence Against Children*, Geneva, 2018.

- Religious leaders can challenge gender norms through sermons and during family visits by providing examples and reflections that foster respect for women and girls.
- Use the World Day of Prayer and Action for Children³³ celebrated every 20 November to commemorate Universal

Children's Day and raise awareness about violence against children in all its forms. Select specific topics, such as gender-based violence, to sensitize about the impact on early childhood; include successful examples, and advocate for the enactment of laws and protection of children.

Get Inspired

CANDOMBLÉ TEMPLES: LEARNING SPACES TO PROMOTE EQUALITY AND SOCIETAL TRANSFORMATION

The traditional temples of Candomblé are institutions in the community that are actively engaged in social initiatives. In the Candomblé tradition, women religious leaders play a key role, and gender equality is one of the pillars of the religion. The Candomblé community is active in advocating for public policies to support gender equality and gender-equitable relations among parents. Such actions are an important mechanism for social transformation as it mobilizes the community in challenging cultural and social norms that condone gender violence and violence against children. The temples become learning places for parents and caregivers.

Early childhood development is a priority in the Candomblé community. Many activities are carried out in the Candomblé temples providing for the most essential needs of the young ones but also providing guidance and support to parents and caregivers. Young children are fed, provided with diapers, and they are stimulated through play, prayers, dances, and singing.

Parents find a space for guidance on health and nutrition for their children, but also to reflect about femicide, alcoholism, and other types of violence. During the discussions about violence and the effects of domestic violence, parents are also informed about the Maria Da Penha Law on Domestic and Family Violence that was enacted by the Brazilian government in 2006, which created mechanisms to curb domestic and family violence against women.

Conversations with parents also cover the Statute of Racial Equality and other laws to fight race discrimination in Brazil. *The Children Yes, Racism No project*, for example, is designed for young children seeking to develop their self-esteem and raise their awareness of racism from an early age. The project focuses on the different dimensions of identity by showing children how to feel confident about their own identity. Children are often addressed as 'negra/o' (black), 'diferente' (different), 'gorda/o' (fat), and 'magra/o' (thin). All these labels can make them feel hurt and excluded, but through the programme children learn how to react to these comments and how to feel confident with who they are. The programme builds the resilience of children against racism and discrimination.

33 Learn more at <https://prayerandactionforchildren.org>, accessed 19 August 2019.



Promote policies and programmes to support families

Over the years, Brazil has made significant progress in reducing child mortality and lifting millions of people from extreme poverty. This has benefited millions of children that were at the centre of these efforts. The cash transfers of the *Bolsa de Família* programme—assigned to families according to the number of children and conditioned on children's school attendance and regular health consultations—also contributed to improving the life of children living in conditions of extreme poverty in Brazil.

However, these efforts have not been coupled with comprehensive policies and programmes to support vulnerable families, including improving overall social protection, access to services, and equitable employment. Many families live in conditions of vulnerability, and this exacerbates the hardship conditions for children.

The lack of adequate and comprehensive policies to support families certainly contributes to the daily pressure and stress that parents and caregivers experience. This pressure produces toxic stress that is transmitted to children in the form of neglect and physical and emotional violence. It is of paramount importance to address this reality through consistent public policies that contribute to end violence and strengthen child protection. Some of these policies need to address the lack of proper and safe housing, for example, by creating housing for people with low income, to increase the access to health services, and to create equitable and sustainable employment opportunities.

Religious communities can do more in advocating for these policies to be put in place.

What can you do?

- Make public statements on national and international days, at events, conferences, meetings, and assemblies to highlight the need for creating comprehensive social protection policies that create opportunities for the most vulnerable.
- Work in network with people and institutions that provide care for children in order to address their needs in holistic ways.
- Promote more investment in and support for professionals working in children's care.
- Strengthen the dialogue between religious communities and those involved in guaranteeing the rights of children in Brazil.
- Reinforce and extend family-focused public policies, involving psychosocial support and strengthening the parenting capacity of the aggressor, including psychosocial monitoring.
- Mobilize efforts to advocate for public policies in an intersectoral way to ensure children's protection.



Challenge theological interpretations that justify violent discipline

In Brazil, parents and caregivers often use violent discipline with their children. Some people justify violence against children based on their misinterpretation of religious texts and under the belief that punishment sanctifies. This thinking is rooted in a theology that is not based on grace, that does not emancipate, that does not value the human being, and that is not based on the human dignity that places God in each person.

In Christianity, upholding the sanctity of life is central to the affirmation of faith. Violence—whether physical, structural, psychological or any form—is a denial of life and goes against the foundations of love and compassion.

In our society, the discourse on punishment manifests itself in our public policies, in the penitentiary system, in our view of corporal punishment at home, and in systemic ways in our public systems.

Every religion has an obligation to promote the rights of the child, as these rights are consistent with the scriptures that give a special place to the child in society.

Recalling the images of children as blessings and gifts, and the affirmation of their dignity in all religious traditions, we cannot deny that there is a contradiction with the reality children face and the teachings of our religions. This leads to reflecting on the following:

- How can we hit someone who is given to us as a gift and a blessing?
- What is going through in our minds when we raise our hand against the child in our care?
- How can we take a cane against another human being and not face legal consequences?
- How often do we acknowledge children's views and ideas instead of ignoring their views or asking them to stop asking questions?

This realization calls for religious traditions and their members to employ self-examination on our understanding of nurturing children. Self-examination of practices that condone violence against children should start within our religious communities, places of worship, and homes. By acknowledging that we, at times, are also perpetrators of violence in direct or indirect ways, we contribute to de-normalizing violence and making it visible, which in turn helps address its root causes and take concrete action.

The way children are raised is the basis for building children's character as well as their society. Therefore, it is important for adults to use methods that encourage and empower children and stop using violent methods such as hitting that affects their self-esteem; it is also important to listen to children and engage in dialogue with them.

Building on these reflections, religious communities are called to influence families, parents, and caregivers to de-normalize violence against children and disconnect violent discipline practices from religion. This can be done by raising awareness about children's rights and the responsibility that parents have to raise children, physically, socio-emotionally, and also spiritually.



Raise awareness and join advocacy efforts at regional and national levels

Often, adults resort to violence because that is the best way they know to raise children.

For this reason, it is crucial to raise awareness and inform parents and caregivers about the following:

- The importance of the early years in terms of brain and identity formation of the child (refer to p. 8).
- The long-lasting effects of violence in terms of negative health and development outcomes (refer to p. 13)
- The benefits of positive parenting (refer to p. 34).
- The importance of communication and space for dialogue between parents and children.
- The importance of involving fathers more in daily parenting and in dialogue with their children.

Religious leaders are key to raising awareness on these topics through sermons, or pre-marital courses, or campaigns. Religious leaders can be champions of non-violence among their places of worship and contribute to changing attitudes and behaviours that justify violence against children.

NOTE: You can use the information about the issue of violence against children provided in this booklet to prompt discussions. In the section 'Bring the dialogue into your community', you can also find a model to bring the dialogue on the issue of violence in early childhood to your communities in practical ways.

A few actions to advocate for include the following:

- Ask the Brazilian authorities to invest more in early childhood, for example, by extending early childhood education to a larger number of children in Brazil and to start providing this service from age three.
- Promote and encourage the use of *Disque 100*, which works 24 hours a day, to report cases of child abuse. Encourage the use of *Proteja Brasil*, a free application that allows people to report anonymously, find child protection institutions and get information about different types of violence. The reports are then forwarded to *Disque 100*.
- Ask the Brazilian government to produce better data on violence against children in the early years to better understand and capture the magnitude of this phenomenon.
- Work with other partners to build coalitions of individuals and organizational supporters. This might include advocating for legislation to protect children from child abuse and neglect, end gender-based violence, sexual abuse and exploitation, child labour, or enforce laws that criminalize femicide and corporal punishment.



Get Inspired

SAFE CHURCHES FOR CHILDREN

In our places of worship, we are entrusted with the care of many children and we have the responsibility to protect them. Sadly, children in many places of worship are often vulnerable and exposed to emotional, physical, and sexual harm.

World Vision implements the Safe Churches for Children programme in Brazil. The programme consists of a 24-hour-course for religious leaders focusing on child protection. It sensitizes religious leaders about violence and abuse against children, presents the legal framework for child protection, and provides theological reflections on violence against children.

The programme also works with churches to create child safeguarding policies that can help religious leaders and communities to react and take action against cases of violence against children. The child safeguarding policies include information about the referral system of abuse cases to the competent local child protection authorities. It also includes a plan for child protection to be implemented for violence prevention and the reception of victims in the church space.



My own reflections

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SUPPORTING PARENTS AND CAREGIVERS



While the entire community should be a part of the dialogue on social and cultural norms, it is equally important to work directly with parents and caregivers to end violent practices and to create positive parent-child relationships. Supporting parents and caregivers to understand the importance of positive, non-violent methods of disciplining children, and effective communication is critical in this effort. This can prevent separation of children from families, risk of child maltreatment at home, witnessing intimate partner violence, and violent behaviour among children and adolescents.³⁴





The holistic well-being and happiness of our children cannot wait. Therefore, as parents, caregivers, and religious leaders, we have to find ways to raise children that place them at the centre and protect them from violence. This means that parents need to undergo a process of unlearning their current habits, also in terms of re-thinking the happiness of the child, not only in terms of academic achievements and, later, career goals in life, but especially in terms of values, love and compassion, and the happiness of the child.

34 World Health Organization, *INSPIRE: Seven Strategies for Ending Violence Against Children*, p. 49.

By focusing on the spiritual development of the child, parents can discover the best ways to improve their parenting styles, respond to the needs of children, and help empower them as active agents.

Parents and caregivers need to be supported so that they may nurture their spirituality. Further, spiritual and emotional care should be provided to them through different institutions, including, religious communities, which can play a critical role in creating safe spaces for parents and caregivers.

Actions to support parents and caregivers:

| | |
|--|--|
|  <p>Encourage positive parenting</p> |  <p>Stress the importance of role modelling</p> |
|  <p>Foster communication and dialogue with children</p> |  <p>Strengthen the agency of the child</p> |



Encourage positive parenting

Our religious traditions emphasize the importance of harmony in the family.

In the Jewish tradition, peace and harmony in the home and within the family is referred to as 'Shalom Bayit' (peace of the home). This is a religious concept that encourages making homes and families nurturing environments where love, respect, and kindness are the guiding principles for harmony.

In the Christian tradition, while the Gospels do not make many references to Jesus' infancy, it is clear that Jesus' childhood was filled with happiness, safety, and love. This could not have happened in an environment of domestic violence. This is the first challenge that we need to face and address: to ensure that our children can grow up in environments filled with more human values. Yet, today parents recur to violence and harsh parenting. Every time parents and caregivers use violence they break this harmony and the peace in their homes.

Religious communities support parents and caregivers in many ways, but what distinguishes faith-based support from others is that they cover the practicality of childcare, and also what lies behind it. In other words, what religious communities do derives from their understanding of the child and from the importance of ethical values and spirituality in the child's upbringing. Notably, religious communities embody a space where action can be taken holistically with both parents and

caregivers, and children. This intergenerational work can be effective in breaking the cycle of violence and encouraging children to flourish and thrive to their fullest potential.

Nurturing spirituality in the lives of children is decisive because the child, who has experienced violence, can realize that there is someone or something beyond the pain and suffering that their loved ones have inflicted on them.³⁵ This helps with their healing process, and it helps build their resilience, their capacity to restore themselves, and their trust in others. This, however, does not mean that perpetrators should go unnoticed or that children should be asked to bear the pain and suffering of being victims of violence. On the contrary, nurturing spirituality in children strengthens their capacity to stand up for their rights, to report violence and to look for help.

How can we support parents to unlearn some of the child upbringing practices that violate children's physical and emotional well-being in favour of parenting that is violent free, more positive, and empowering?

Violence-free and positive parenting requires us to put ourselves in the shoes of children so that we can better understand the reasons for their behaviours, frustrations, and difficulties. It is also essential to guide our children in expressing their feelings and emotions with words and to have a dialogue, rather than turning to corporal or verbal abuse of the child.

³⁵ Bishop Leonardo Ulrich Steiner, Auxiliary Bishop of Brasília, Federal District, and Secretary General of the National Council of Bishops of Brazil, during the Round table discussion on Nurturing Values and Spirituality in Early Childhood for the Prevention of Violence held in Brasília on 24 June 2019.

Religious leaders can support families in their journey of parenthood, and provide practical suggestions and training to parents and caregivers to nurture values and spirituality and to make homes free of violence and fear.

What can parents and caregivers do?

- Talk and listen to children, allow them to ask questions freely and create time to talk about their day.
- Remind each child about their uniqueness and the positive things they do, and encourage children's natural inclination towards goodness and altruism with examples of openness and dialogue that nurture their innate spirituality.
- Refrain from pushing children to compete with each other.
- Encourage children to explore and dream, to envision their ideas, and imagine new ways of doing things.
- Spend quality time with your children; take time to play, listen, share stories, and attend to their needs.
- Use a restorative approach to discipline; instead of punishing children, using fear or physical violence, discuss with them why they acted in the way they did, the consequences on themselves and others, and what they can do to make things right.

- Use respect and empathy when correcting children; pause before raising your voice and try to understand that the child might be tired, overwhelmed, or is in need of attention.
- Teach children to meditate or pray, as it helps them find peace within and strengthen their capacity to deal with problems in peaceful ways.



Keep in Mind **WHAT IS POSITIVE PARENTING?**

Positive parenting focuses on creating safe home environments and building a foundation of support and care for children through affection, quality time, praise, and healthy methods of dealing with difficult behaviour, such as positive discipline that teaches prosocial behaviour.

Nurturing parenting involves helping children develop healthy social and emotional behaviours, teaching life skills, and promoting well-being through modelling healthy ways to solve problems and communicate feelings.

Positive discipline refers to praising, rewarding, supporting good behaviour, and non-violent responses to misbehaviour that take children's cognitive and emotional stage into account, such as natural or logical consequences, time-out or taking breaks, and redirection.

Source: World Health Organization, *INSPIRE Handbook: action for implementing the seven strategies for ending violence against children*, Geneva, 2018.



Get Inspired

PASTORAL DA CRIANÇA: SUPPORTING THE HOLISTIC DEVELOPMENT OF THE CHILD

Pastoral da Criança begins its activities on child development by accompanying expecting mothers. The volunteers and staff from Pastoral, based in the community, guide expecting mothers in the importance of prenatal care, quality childbirth, cohabitation, and breastfeeding. They accompany each trimester of the pregnancy, the development of the baby in the womb, respond to the most common complaints, identify any signs of risk, and support the preparation for childbirth and postpartum.

The programme from Pastoral includes providing psychosocial and emotional support to help mothers nurture their spirituality by creating moments of dialogue where mothers can connect with their inner-self and think about their journey of parenthood. This contributes to improving their self-esteem as it prevents the mothers from feeling isolated and depressed.

After the birth, Pastoral continues to accompany the family with information about the child's development at every stage of life. They support parents by providing guidance on positive parenting, introducing concepts of child rights, explaining child development and the learning needs of the child, but also sharing information on health, nutrition and vaccinations.

The programme always looks at the holistic development of the child and highlights how families can create a nurturing environment in the home that is conducive to the physical, cognitive, emotional, and spiritual development of the child.

The programme uses home visits, and, once a month, larger gatherings are organized in the community to celebrate the growth and development of children. These are called *Celebração da Vida*. During these days, families gather and share the progress they made in creating nurturing environments for children and in helping their children reach their fullest potential and thrive.



Stress the importance of role modelling

In early childhood, children learn not only physical and cognitive skills, but also fundamental social and emotional skills, such as sharing, helping one another, communication, and resolving disagreements without violence. Since children learn these skills and values through observation and interaction—including playing—parents and caregivers have a tremendous influence on children’s learning. Children look to their parents and caregivers as role models and observe how adults around them interact with one another. Through modelling and observation, they learn not only the hallmark of positive relationships but also negative prejudices and discriminatory norms. This is why parents and caregivers must also focus on nurturing their own spirituality and

values so that we are positive role models and provide children with a safe and emotionally secured environment.

Parents and caregivers nurture ethical behaviours of children in both explicit and implicit ways. From the time the child is a baby, parents explicitly and automatically tell the child to eat everything on their plate, share their toys, obey their parents, not to take other people’s belongings, tell the truth, etc. On the other hand, implicit teaching is more complex and less overtly moral. It refers to how parents deal with disagreements, parents’ relationships with their friends, with other family or community members, and with people of other faiths. It is also shaped by the way parents answer questions, and the opinions they casually or repeatedly express about other people. Parents nurture ethical values through the ways they



interact with their children. In contexts of domestic violence, studies show that it is likely to pass on to the next generation because children learn that violence is a way of dealing with problems. Most parents understand the importance of teaching explicit values, while they often underestimate the implicit ways they shape their children's development of ethical values and identity formation.

Children—as well as parents and caregivers—who use violence, often learn it from their families and from being victims or witnesses of violence. This increases the possibility that they will use violence against others. When the surrounding environment is dominated by violence, violence and aggressiveness become the only ways known to relate to others.



What can parents and caregivers do?

- Parents and caregivers need to practice the values they want to transmit to their children, showing to children 'the value of the values', as opposed to trying to impose values as commandments.
- Respect the views of children, their ideas, and interests.
- Engage children in service activities so they can learn responsibility, compassion, and solidarity.
- Treat all members of your family (wife, husband, children, parents, siblings, and others) with empathy and respect and solve disagreements in non-violent ways based on dialogue.
- Select and apply cultural and social norms that have a positive influence and contribute to the child's overall well-being.
- Model respect of people of different faiths and backgrounds by allowing children to mingle with those who do not practice their same religion.



Strengthen communication and dialogue with children

The lack of dialogue as a key factor in the education process of children is one of the main expressions of violence.

– Pastor Romi Márcia Bencke, Lutheran Pastor

Parents often recur to violence, without even listening to the child or letting the child explain why a certain behaviour took place. Brazilian children spend an average of five hours a day in front of the television, which reflects an 'outsourcing' of education and leads to less time and spaces to build relationships.

Parents often recur to violence, without even listening to the child or letting the child explain why a certain behaviour took place. Instead, parents should make the time to communicate with their children, learn from them, and be closer to them. This allows parents to better understand the needs and aspirations of their children. Indeed, only when children are at the centre of parenting can we truly understand their needs and positively respond.

What can be done?

- Learn how to communicate and explain to children, refraining from telling children what to do without explaining why.
- Speak the language of the child.
- Use joy in the interaction with children; it is fundamental to transmit positive values to them and to make them feel safe and appreciated.
- Do not address children in negative ways, for example, by insulting them.
- When you want to reprimand children for wrong behaviour, do not insult the child but, rather, focus on the 'bad behaviour'.
- Refrain from using comments such as 'a man doesn't cry'; these expressions reinforce negative masculinity and prevent children from feeling and expressing their emotions.
- Be patient as children might not be ready to have a dialogue or to communicate about what is disturbing them. Wait for the right time!



Get Inspired

RAISING CHILDREN WITH TENDERNESS: THE WORLD VISION APPROACH TO END VIOLENCE AGAINST CHILDREN

For a child, the clearest reflection of God's love is the love of the person who takes care of him/her. This will impact his/her life forever.

– Michele Gonzalez-Mendia, Senior Regional Advisor on Latin America and the Caribbean, World Vision

Raising Children with Tenderness is both a programme and an approach that focuses on cultivating loving relationships between parents, caregivers, and children. The programme aims to build unbreakable relationships based on trust and dignity and fostering empathy and reciprocity as principles for daily living. The programme includes training modules to empower parents and caregivers with knowledge on children's rights, child development and positive parenting, focusing on building relationships based on tenderness and without violence. Their methodology combines self-awareness and self-discovery, with active and participatory learning. The process also uses theological reflections to explain why love and tenderness are so important in building positive relationships with peers and family and community members. The programme works in partnership with schools and churches in the community to contribute to the prevention and response of violence against children at different levels in society.



Strengthen the agency of the child

Mary asked her son why he left her and returned to the temple when he was 12. He replied: 'Did you not know that I must be in my Father's house?'

– Luke 2:39-52

The topic of the agency of the child—how much space we give to our children to grow, develop, and follow their aspirations from a young age—must be a central aspect of parenting. The above quote from the Bible shows a worried Mary. At the same time, the story shows a Mother that respects the choices of her child as she wisely and knowledgeably gave her child freedom. This exemplifies that it is important to give space to our children to express their views and be heard; and we need to listen to them and allow them to participate in making decisions that affect them, even during early years.

Young children are acutely sensitive to their surroundings and very rapidly acquire understanding of the people, places, and routines in their lives, along with awareness of their own unique identity. They make choices and communicate their feelings, ideas, and wishes in numerous ways, long before they are able to communicate through the conventions of spoken or written language.³⁶

In the Candomblé tradition, children actively participate in many of the rituals and functions. At the Temple during festivals, they help with food preparations, and they also get actively engaged in prayers. In Candomblé, the child becomes the protagonist of history from the moment that she or he becomes an elder sister or brother; the child acquires responsibilities and continues to be a child in formation but, at the same time, becomes a role model for a younger child.

Children are subjects not objects on which to impose our views. Discipline should always be carried out through the form of counselling, an encounter mediated through mutual love, respect, and trust, rather than a harsh, unloving, disrespectful encounter. Children should be allowed to question as this builds their critical thinking and capacity to make their own decisions.

Children are whole persons and not an extension of parents. Their individuality needs to be respected which means that parents need to listen to them, respect their choices, and provide guidance. In one sense, our children do 'belong' to us. We bring them into the world; they are in our care. Yet we do not own them. They are individuals in their own right, ready to blossom into what they will become. As Khalil Gibran expressed in *The Prophet*:

36 UN Committee on the Rights of the Child (UNCRC), General Comment No 7: Implementing Child Rights in Early Childhood. Rev.1, 20 Sept. 2006. https://www.unicef-irc.org/portfolios/general_comments/GC7.Rev.1_en.doc.html, accessed 11 Jul. 2019.

And a woman who held a babe against her bosom said,

Speak to us of children. Your children are not your children.

They are the sons and daughters of Life's longing for itself.

They come through you but not from you, And though they are with you yet they belong not to you.

You may give them your love but not your thoughts,

For they have their own thoughts.

You may house their bodies but not their souls,

For their souls dwell in the house of tomorrow,

which you cannot visit, not even in your dreams.

You may strive to be like them,

but seek not to make them like you.

For life goes not backward nor tarries with yesterday.

You are the bows from which your children as living arrows are sent forth.

The archer sees the mark upon the path of the infinite,

and He bends you with His might

that His arrows may go swift and far.

Let your bending in the archer's hand be for gladness;

For even as He loves the arrow that flies,

so He loves also the bow that is stable.³⁷



Keep in Mind

DIALOGUE WITH CHILDREN

Ending violence starts by empowering children to think and speak for themselves.

Empower children to ask questions and express themselves by creating a safe space for them to do so. Review the contents of children's programmes and classes in your community. Encourage parents to do the same at home. Strengthen the notion of religious institutions as a safe place for children and families.

It is crucial to listen to and value what children are saying to us. In early childhood, it is important for children to feel that they are being heard, and to receive acknowledgements and responses to the many questions they ask as a part of their process to discover the world.

Children's participation in the activities at home and communities need to be encouraged and genuinely supported. Children need to be provided with space and opportunity for 'service' and care for the other, starting from early childhood years.

³⁷ Khalil Gibran, *The Prophet*. Arrow Books Ltd. New York, 1991.



ENHANCING EDUCATION AND LIFE SKILLS THAT SUPPORT THE CREATION OF SAFE AND INCLUSIVE SCHOOL ENVIRONMENTS



Schools have an important role to play in the life of every child. In many places, children from their early years have daily interactions with teachers and staff. Schools and day care centres become a central part of the child's experiences contributing to their holistic development and character formation.

Schools and daily care centres can be a positive force for change and transformation of our societies. But, they are also places where violence and inequalities can be reproduced, as schools can also be the mirrors of the injustices in our societies.

Education and life skills refer to deliberate efforts to create safe and supportive school environments, where positive values are

nurtured, children feel protected, respected and appreciated, so they are able to build positive relationships with teachers and their peers. Building positive relationships between teachers and learners is the cornerstone of building a positive school environment and a culture of peace. Schools should be places to learn to embrace differences, respect one another, strengthen children's identities, and learn to live together with others. In the early years, children start creating the foundations of the ethical values that will guide them later in life.

Education and life skills also refer to building socio-emotional learning skills that are fundamental to foster resilience in children.

Socio-emotional skills are a set of skills that include managing emotions and anger, building positive and respectful relationships, and solving problems using non-violent means.

The active participation of children in the learning process through play, singing, the use of the arts, praying, and introspection in the early years is a central element for a learning environment that is conducive to nurturing values and spirituality. The idea is that teachers are not instructing but rather guiding and structuring the learning process by organizing learning activities and helping everyone grow together.

For instance, in the Candomblé community children are brought to nature, to the fields,

where they interact with the trees, and where all the names of gods and goddesses are worshipped. Children are taught to take care of the trees, talk to them, and ask for a blessing to receive the energy of that tree, so they learn to plant it and to nourish it. It is through the interaction with nature that they learn about the sacredness of life.

As religious leaders and communities in Brazil are engaged in providing education and day care services, they can be the drivers of change and be a catalyst of transformation, engaging with the teachers and the school administration.

The following are ideas for action that can be used by the school management or by teachers in making schools safe and inclusive:

Suggested actions for teachers to make schools safe and inclusive:





Make schools safe places for children

To make schools flourishing environments for all children, as well as safe places for them to be and develop, teachers need to have a good understanding of child development, including a deep knowledge of the impact of violence in early childhood. Research shows that corporal punishment in schools is particularly practised in the first years of primary schooling.

Efforts to raise awareness in teachers and administrators are necessary to ensure that schools are safe, engaging, and positive environments contributing to the development of thriving children.

What can be done?

- Develop a Child Protection and Safeguarding Policy, outlining the rights of children according to the Convention on the Rights of the Child (CRC). Make teachers and staff sign it.
- Train all teachers and personnel on the impact of violence in the early years, alternative forms of discipline, and examples of how to use them.
- Organize round table discussions or fora in schools about the Convention on the Rights of the Child involving all school staff, parents, and caregivers.
- Teach emotional intelligence in schools in order to learn to label feelings and manage them.
- Help children learn about 'good touch' and 'bad touch', so they are equipped to identify physical and sexual abuse.
- Have zero tolerance to bullying and violence among peers.
- Create mechanisms for reporting abuse and safe spaces for children to talk about situations of violence.





Create nurturing environments for children

Schools need to become nurturing environments for children to help them grow, develop, and thrive.

How can teachers be supported to create nurturing environments in schools to support the holistic development of the child?

- Empower teachers with knowledge, skills, and confidence to use positive discipline techniques to manage classroom behaviour. A nurturing environment is an environment free of violence and fear. Positive discipline includes setting clear expectations of behaviours in the classroom while praising and encouraging learners. Further, misbehaviour is dealt with through non-violent strategies that allow children to understand and learn from their mistakes.³⁸
- Train teachers to monitor and manage their own feelings, anger and frustration, controlling impulses, and developing positive relations with children that are respectful and mindful of children's needs. These improved relationships should not only prevent violence, but also improve children's learning, health and well-being.
- Create opportunities for teachers to reflect and examine their assumptions, bias, and beliefs about violence and violent discipline inflicted on children. This also includes guiding teachers to reflect on their own attitudes towards violence, gender, power and authority dynamics, and diversity in the classroom and in the school. These safe spaces can allow teachers moments for dialogue and discovery of alternative ways to foster and enhance learners' engagement and academic achievements.
- Equip teachers to nurture spirituality in children using methods that include observing the child to understand the natural capacities and inclinations of the child, allowing the child to have opportunities to connect with the self, the others, the surrounding environment, and the divine. This can include using meditation and relaxation techniques.

³⁸ World Health Organization, *School-based violence prevention: a practical handbook*, Geneva, 2019.



Get Inspired

MARACAJAÚ INTEGRAL EDUCATION CENTRE (CEIMAR): CREATING A NURTURING ENVIRONMENT BY RESPONDING TO THE FIVE BASIC DESIRES

The Five Basic Desires of the Human Being project is implemented at the Maracajaú Integral Education Centre (CEIMAR), established by the Great Harmony Foundation. The project focuses on building a school environment to fulfil the Five Basic Desires: to be loved, be helpful, be recognized, be praised, and be free.

The Great Harmony Foundation works with children and their communities focusing on nurturing values and spirituality for the holistic well-being of the child.

CEIMAR hosts both a kindergarten and elementary school; throughout the week, pedagogical activities are developed focusing on how to fulfil the Five Basic Desires. On Mondays, for example, the day to being praised was instituted. On this day, everyone in the school is praised and children develop activities to learn to appreciate themselves, recognizing their qualities and the qualities of their peers. Tuesday is the day to be recognized for who they are. Wednesday is the day to be helpful and children organize groups to contribute with different tasks to enhance the environment of the school, for example, by cleaning or preparing decorations. On Thursday, they celebrate the day of being loved. In the morning, each child is greeted with a greeting such as 'Good morning, beloved Son of God'. Actions are also developed and carried out with the children to express love to themselves and others. Friday is the day of being free, when outdoor activities are stimulated related to art, play, exploration of nature, and the senses.

The project focuses on creating a nurturing environment for children, giving children the possibility to express themselves, being actively involved in their learning, and contributing to create an environment of respect and appreciation.

The Notebook of Praises initiative is a project within the major programme of the Five Fundamental Wishes. The children themselves develop the notebook, with sketch sheets, clippings and drawings, and they are encouraged to write positive and sincere praises and words for themselves, their peers, their teachers, school staff, and their families. The proposed idea is that, with this action, children have time to reflect and appreciate the world around them and can become more confident and appreciative of life.



Be a role model

We all learn best by example; values cannot be taught but they need to be modelled. Teachers, educators, and caregivers in day cares and schools are key actors in children's early years in terms of fostering positive attitudes and nurturing ethical values.

In the early years, simple gestures such as having a loving and caring tone of voice, or welcoming every child by their name in the mornings, are powerful ways to boost children's self-esteem and their self-confidence.

A few tips for teachers include:

1. Demonstrate positive attitudes, behaviours, and actions.
2. Show mutual understanding, respect, and appreciation for people of different backgrounds.
3. Welcome diversity.
4. Demonstrate consistency between words, behaviours, and actions. Children imitate what they see!
5. Be reflective and conscious of the impact that, as a teacher, your behaviour and attitudes have on the character formation and sense of identity of children from the ages of zero to eight.



Keep in Mind

We need to model failures and vulnerabilities as much as we model success, since these are important parts of the human condition. Teachers can show young children that making mistakes is a normal part of learning. It is an achievement to learn from our mistakes!





Use alternative and positive discipline

If a child is not allowed to be a child, he or she will become an adult very early.

– Gaiaku Deusimar D’Lisá, Candomblé African traditional religion

Schools need to provide a safe environment where peace and non-violence are at the base of all interactions. Schools need to be a safe place to learn and strengthen children’s identities, foster inclusion and representation, and to embrace pluralism, appreciating similarities and differences across ethnicities, religious beliefs, and cultures.

Oftentimes violent practices are condoned in schools, such as corporal punishment, bullying, and other violent behaviours.

The best alternative to violent discipline is to create a respectful environment and relationship between teachers and children, where children can express their views, ask questions, feel heard and recognized, and where negative behaviours are not punished but discussed and dealt through a restorative approach that affirms children’s dignity and helps them learn to manage their emotions.

A few tips for teachers include:

- Use dialogue as an alternative to harsh physical punishment. This helps children understand what they did, why, and the impact on themselves and others.
- Ask children to create their own ground rules to deal with problems based on respect and empathy for one another.
- Examine your own assumption as a teacher and your own experiences with violence.
- Recognize and address bullying and discrimination by having a dialogue with children and helping them identify when it happens.
- Respond effectively to incidents of violence and ask children to reflect on alternative ways to solve problems without resorting to violence.



Introduce interfaith learning

A great deal of violence is taught in community schools, including the supremacy of one's own religion, and therefore of one's ethnicity, and the insignificance of others. Mutual understanding and respect can only be nurtured when diverse religious communities work together to build a more inclusive narrative that understands interdependency and embraces one another.

The curriculum at religious schools can be revised to strengthen norms and values that affirm the interconnectedness of people and foster interfaith learning. The notion that 'others are as valuable as I am' needs to be strengthened. This would mean that different religious traditions and those who follow them are acknowledged and respected in the content of what children learn, but also in practical ways in the school settings. Through learning about other traditions, children discover that there are universal values and notions such as non-violence, meditation and prayer, fasting, as well as the concept of loving our neighbours, among others, and that those are shared in all of our religions.

Some tips for teachers include:

- Encourage the interaction with people of other faiths and ethnic groups.
- Organize interfaith visits allowing children to learn about other places of worship, rituals, and religious practices. After the visit, encourage children to reflect on what they saw, heard, touched, smelled, and did. This early experience of visiting the sacred place of the other can have a lifelong mark in children's ability to embrace differences.
- Organize festivals that celebrate all religions and allow children to be exposed and participate.
- Use singing to learn songs from other religious and cultural traditions and understand what their lyrics are about.
- Use traditional games, the rituals of traditional African cultures, and play that teach children unity, gratitude, and love.
- Allow coming together to pray from different religious perspectives, as this demonstrates respect for one another, enhances children's own religious identity, and acknowledgement of the other.
- Involve parents in interfaith visits or invite them to dialogues with representatives from other religions.
- Use stories from religious scriptures to nurture ethical values.



Get Inspired

DIALOGUE WITH RELIGIOUS LEADERS AND INTERFAITH VISITS: EXAMPLES FROM CURITIBA

The *Bom Jesus* school in Curitiba has, for the last ten years, organized a dialogue bringing together representatives of different religious groups to discuss and share with children. The debates have the objective of broadening the understanding of life and promoting respect and encounters among different cultures. This event is promoted every year by the Coordination of Religious Education of the *Bom Jesus* College and is long awaited by the students. The main questions and reflections are addressed through themes such as: the value of prayer; life project according to religions; family formation; life after death; religious practices; prejudices; atheism; sexism; and politics. The dialogues are an important time for the students. They allow for interfaith learning, understanding different religions, and for practising mutual respect. Such moments lead to hope in a new humanity, willingness to listen, learning, and to living together.

Another example is from the Marists schools in Curitiba. Children from these schools regularly experience interfaith visits; they are received by religious leaders in their places of worship. Children have the opportunity to visit different places of worship, experience the sacred places, and learn about the religious practices. Children can ask the religious leader anything and learn about the religion.

Nurturing ethical values and spirituality in schools: the role of school curricula

We need religions to hold us and bring us together, not to move us away.

– Rabbi Pablo Berman, Jewish community of Curitiba, Paraná

School curricula nowadays put a strong emphasis on the cognitive development of the child and much less emphasis on core human values (kindness, empathy, respect, generosity, courage, perseverance, fairness, cooperation, open-mindedness, sense of belonging) which are critical to the quality of all our relationships.

From the early years, children are taught to read and write. The socio-emotional and spiritual development of the child, however, is often not adequately articulated and supported in the curricula for the early years.

It is of crucial importance that curricula for the early years re-focus on the human dimension and on the development of life and social skills. Life skills refer to the ability of dealing effectively with the challenges of everyday life. These include cognitive and emotional skills such as self-control, critical thinking, problem-solving, and interpersonal and social skills. Social skills can be described as the way we interact and build relationships with others. Effective programmes that develop these skills lead to prosocial behaviours, including finding violent-free ways to solve conflicts and displaying empathy towards others.

How can this be done?

- Create activities for children to practise empathy with other children and those who are less privileged.
- Embrace diversity in the school and create dialogue about differences and commonalities.
- Teach children their rights and how ethical values help them uphold their rights and affirm the rights of others.
- Organize service-learning activities for children to practice their individual and collective responsibilities.
- Create dialogue spaces for children to share their feelings and experiences and to listen to one another.
- Create spaces for silence, reflection, to be with nature, to pray, and be grateful.
- Teach children how to solve problems in non-violent ways; ask them to find solutions to the problems they face.



My own reflections

BRING THE DIALOGUE INTO YOUR COMMUNITY

Within your own religious community or in collaboration with other communities, plan a programme for reflection and dialogue on this topic. It is important that the dialogue takes place in a safe environment where everyone's views are respected, and they feel safe to be, speak, and share. This does not mean that everyone has to agree with one another.

Dialogue is the beginning of a process to build trust and for everyone to listen and to be heard without prejudices. To do so, a space where everyone can actively be involved in the experience must be provided. If helpful, invite experts from the local Child Protection Authority and other child-focused organizations as resource persons to share information about scientific evidence and other facts about violence against children. After the dialogue, build a concrete plan of action.

Ground rules for dialogue³⁹

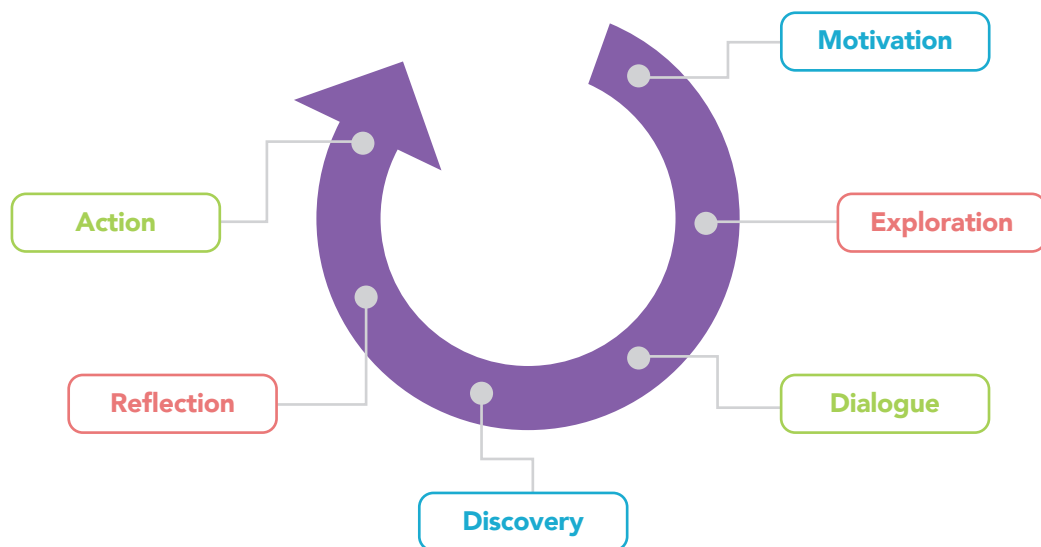
Share these points with the participants before the dialogue, so it is a safe and respectful place for all who take part:

- Respect differences in experience and perspective.
- Speak as an individual, not as a representative of a group or organization.
- Speak truthfully and from your own experience.
- Do not try to persuade or change others.
- Listen openly, respectfully, and without interruption.
- Allow time for those who are quieter.
- Honour confidentiality.
- Avoid using negative stereotypes or generalizations.
- Be willing to learn and be changed by the experience.

³⁹ Karuna Center for Peacebuilding, *A Trainer's Guide to Inter-faith Peacebuilding in Sri Lanka* (2013). http://www.karunacenter.org/uploads/9/6/8/0/9680374/_karunacenter_inter-faith-tot-guide-2013.pdf, accessed 11 Jul. 2019.

PLANNING THE PROGRAMME

The following process is suggested to ensure that the dialogue leads to deeper reflection and continued learning.⁴⁰



Motivation:

Start the meeting with a meditation or a silent prayer. Use songs, poems, religious scriptures, videos or the arts to activate participants' interest, perception, and motivation to further explore the topic. For example, listen to childhood songs everyone knows and reflect on the lyrics; think about the happy childhood memories that the song brings back and share a reflection; or ask participants to share a photo of a memory of their childhood or of their children, or reflect on a story from a religious scripture on the view of children and the sacredness of their lives.

Exploration:

Invite participants to explore ideas and gain new experience. Create an atmosphere where they can share their thoughts and feelings. You can invite a speaker to present the evidence on violence against children and the impact on brain development, the identity formation of the child, and their lives. Allow time for questions and answers and for personal reflections. You can also use case studies related to violence against children and explore the root causes, consequences, and individual and collective responsibilities. You may use religious scriptures as well to challenge violence against children and provide an alternative view of how to respond.

⁴⁰ Interfaith Council on Ethics Education for Children, Global Network of Religions for Children and Arigatou Foundation, *Learning to Live Together: An Intercultural and Interfaith Programme for Ethics Education*, Geneva, 2008.

Dialogue:

It is an opportunity to exchange ideas, share experiences, and discover the other and to challenge one's own perceptions and prejudices. For example, organize participants in groups of no more than five to eight people. Using the suggested questions below, discuss among the groups. Assign a facilitator and a note taker for each group. Refer to the section 'Ground rules for dialogue' on page 44. Use sufficient time for dialogue. The suggestion is to take about 30 to 40 minutes or more.

Discovery:

Through the process of dialogue, participants will discover new understandings and ideas. This may not come immediately or all at once. It might even come days or weeks later. For now, an adequate space is needed for sharing the ideas gathered during the group discussion. For example, reconvene the plenary and invite each group to share the main result of their discussion.

Reflection:

Invite participants to reflect on the experience and dialogue, and internalize the learning. You can give space to write down thoughts or share their main reflections with peers.

Action:

Before the meeting ends, summarise the main conclusions and suggested actions, and identify follow-up steps. Ask participants to make a commitment to improve their parenting practises and carry out the plan you made during the dialogue programme. End the meeting with a meditation or silent prayer for children.

SAMPLE QUESTIONS FOR GROUP DISCUSSION AND REFLECTION

Question 1

In your opinion, what are some of the challenges and supporting factors in nurturing values and spirituality during early childhood in the homes and schools? Please list any examples from your community.

Question 2

What social norms and beliefs that condone violence against children in early years do you think need to be challenged? And how? Please list any examples from your community.

Question 3

What can religious communities do to support families, parents, caregivers, and teachers so that young children can grow in safe, caring, and loving environments, free of violence? Please list examples from your community.

Question 4

What can faith-based organizations, civil society organizations, and schools do to challenge violence against children in the early years? How can they collaborate with religious communities? Please list any examples from your community.

Question 5

What recommendations do you have to continue this dialogue and prioritize the role of religious communities in creating loving, respectful, and empowering environments for children?



FOR MORE INFORMATION, CONTACT US

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