

INSPIREd Faith Communities:

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

KENYA



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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TABLE OF CONTENTS

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS	2
WHAT IS THIS BOOKLET ABOUT?	4
WHY IS EARLY CHILDHOOD SO CRITICAL?	6
WHAT IS THE IMPACT OF VIOLENCE IN EARLY CHILDHOOD?	11
Types of Violence Against Children	12
Violence and its Impact on the Development of the Child’s Brain	13
WHAT WE KNOW ABOUT VIOLENCE IN CHILDHOOD IN KENYA	15
HOW CAN WE NURTURE OUR SPIRITUALITY FOR THE PREVENTION OF VIOLENCE?	19
INSPIRE-ING CHANGE: STRATEGIES FOR ENDING VIOLENCE AGAINST CHILDREN	22
Challenging Norms and Values that Condone Violence Against Children	24
Supporting Parents and Caregivers	33
Enhancing Education and Life Skills that Support the Creation of Safe and Inclusive School Environments	43
BRING THE DIALOGUE INTO YOUR COMMUNITY	51

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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 Kenya round table, which took place in Nairobi, Kenya at the premises of the Hekima Institute of Peace Studies on 28 and 29 May 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 Kenya. It aspires to challenge social and cultural norms that condone violence in early childhood, learn about 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.



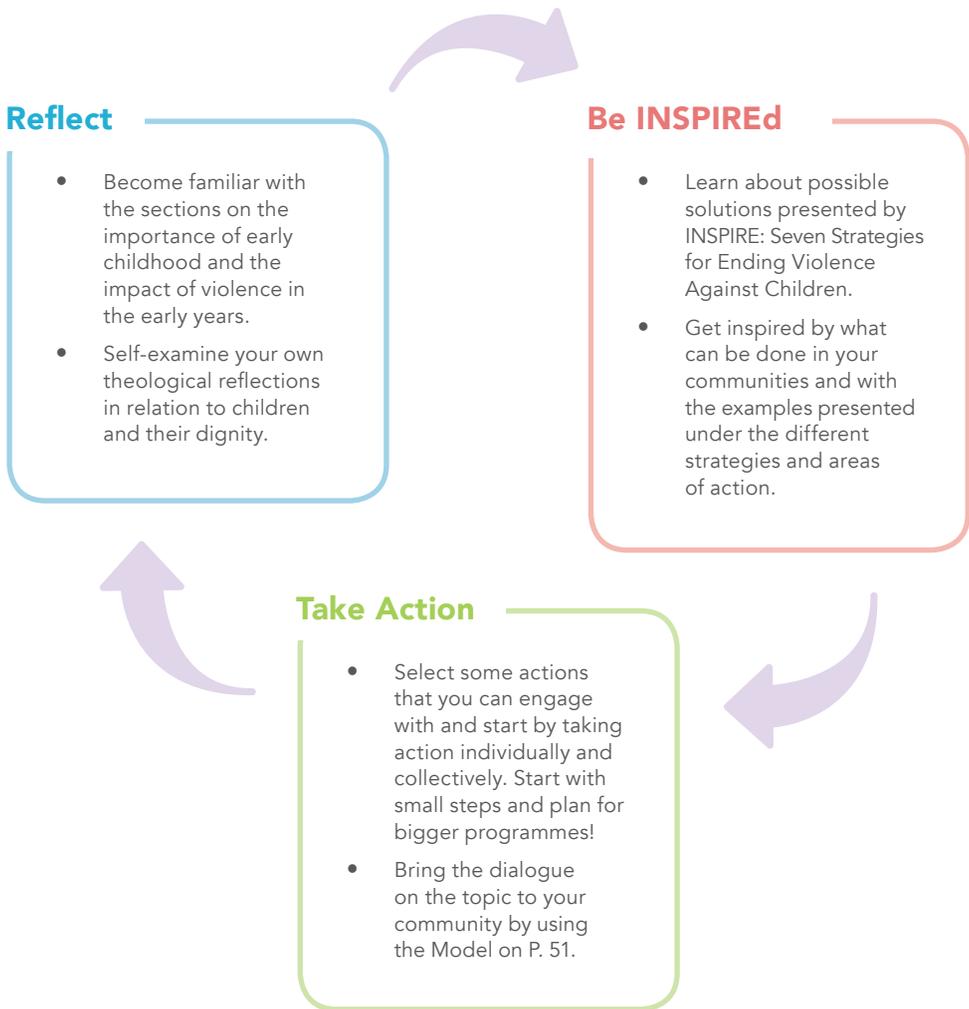
Influence the transformation of attitudes and behaviours around child upbringing that affect the dignity of the child.



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 diagram below shows how you can use the booklet 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 Islam, the Qur'an gives the utmost value to children by describing them through different words. A child is a gift from God (Hiba)², an adornment of life (Zeenah)³, a great blessing (Ni'imah)⁴, and is regarded as a protector or friend who carries legacy (Waleeh).⁵ Through these powerful words, the Qur'an reminds us how blessed we are to have children, and it sets the minds of parents and other caregivers to see them as blessings and not as a burden. In the Islamic tradition, the early years are viewed as central for the character formation of the child. For that reason, the period from conception to the first eight years of the child is particularly important. For example, the first sound a child should hear after birth is the sound of prayers (Adhan).⁶ In Islam, breastfeeding is also a spiritual

practice, nourishing the child and fostering the spiritual connection between the child and the mother. Therefore, the Islamic tradition recommends breastfeeding for two years to provide the child with a strong connection with the mother and the sense of feeling loved, protected, and secure.⁷

Sikhism teaches that the child is a constant remembrance of God and God protects and nurtures children since they are in the mother's womb. Many rituals during pregnancy and childbirth are practised to nurture the spirituality of the child. Rituals include spiritual music (Kirtan), reciting mantras, or reading words from the Sikh Holy Scriptures (the Shri Guru Granth Sahib ji) during childbirth and immediately after. Family and extended family in the Sikh tradition are the main responsible actors with regards to the upbringing of the child in the early years; it is within the family that the child learns the values and practices of the religion. From a very early age, children are encouraged to experience the connection with the Divine, as Guru Nanak, the founder of the Sikh religion, was deeply spiritual during his childhood. The spiritual nurturing of young children plays a special role in Sikhism; young children fully participate in prayers and rituals such as meditation, which teaches them to connect with themselves and the Divine.

2 *The Qur'an* 14:39.

3 *The Qur'an* 18:46.

4 *The Qur'an* 16:72.

5 *The Qur'an* 19:5-6.

6 *Sunan Abu Dawud*, Vol. 5, p. 518, Darul Yusr.

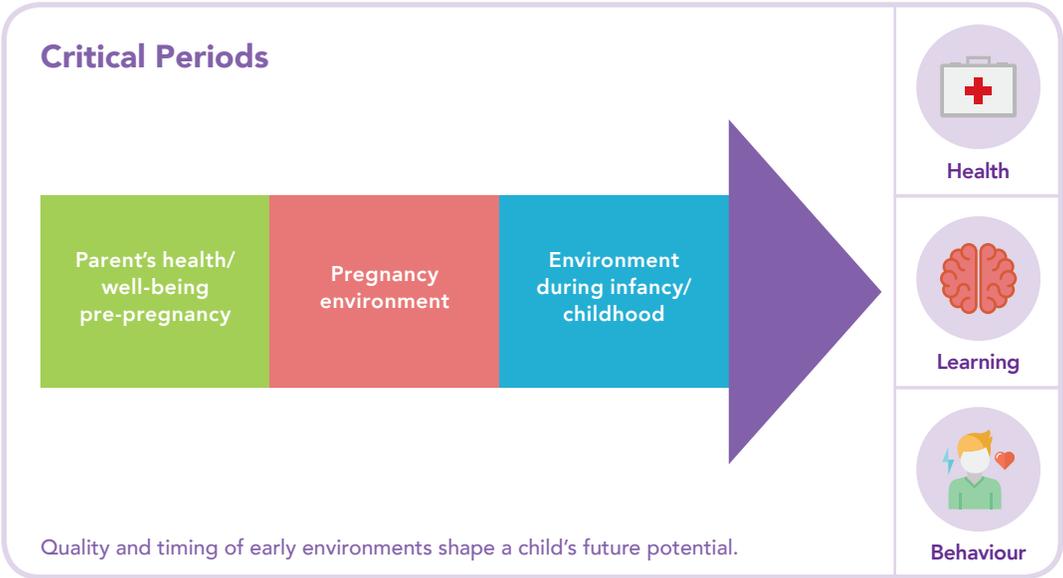
7 *The Qur'an* 2:233

In Christianity, Jesus taught his disciples that children are the most important members in the Kingdom of God. He set children as role models for adults to emulate their humility. At one point, the disciples asked Jesus, 'Who is the greatest in the kingdom of heaven?'⁸ 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.'⁹ Jesus also strongly urged his disciples not to discriminate children from receiving his blessings, and promoted their rightful inclusion into the Kingdom of God.¹⁰ As a child, Jesus himself grew in wisdom and stature, and in favour with God and man.¹¹ This

is a pointer to the intellectual, physical, social, and spiritual well-being that is necessary for the holistic nurturing of all children.

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.



8 The Holy Bible, Revised Standard Version – Catholic Edition, Matthew 18:1.
 9 The Holy Bible, Matthew 18:3–4.
 10 The Holy Bible, Mark 10:13–16.
 11 The Holy Bible, Luke 2:52.

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.

The quality of care that children receive during these early periods directly affects their lifelong health, capacities to learn, and overall productivity. This coincides with the preschool age period when children spend most of their time at home or in childcare facilities, developing a sense of self, learning about everything that happens around them, and exploring the world.

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.

The Importance of the Pre-natal Period in our Religious Traditions

The prenatal months are fundamental for the development of the child; the stimulation of the child in the uterus is essential for the healthy development. In the uterus, the development of the child's brain is mostly influenced by genetic factors as well as by neurotoxins (if any, thus the recommendation to avoid alcohol consumption during pregnancy). But we also know that from about the third month in the womb, the child is sensitive to stimulation. The child can be affected by any emotional and psychological pressure that the mother experiences before and during pregnancy.

There are many religious practices for expecting mothers, including prayers, singing, and emotional support by religious leaders. These religious practices highlight the importance and sacredness of these early moments of life.

The Holy Qur'an explains the relationship between sorrow and pregnancy in the story of Maryam, pointing out that the pregnant woman should be surrounded by a conducive environment and feel happy and pleased, as the opposite can have a negative impact on her baby.

In the Hindu tradition, the Hindu Vedas speak about the development of the senses of the baby starting at three months in the womb. For this reason, great importance is placed on the influence of prayers, music, and other stimulation of the baby in the uterus. Pregnant women are encouraged to surround themselves with soft, gentle music to help the baby develop its senses and to pray three times a day to nurture the child's spiritual development.

Pregnancy is a key symbol in Christianity with the miraculous conception of Christ and the pregnancy of Mary being the central and founding premises of Christianity.

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.¹²

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 makes us more aware of the Ultimate Reality. 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. 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'.¹³

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.

¹² United Nations Children's Fund, *A Familiar Face: Violence in the lives of children and adolescents*, UNICEF, New York, 2017, p.7.

¹³ 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 Kenya context.

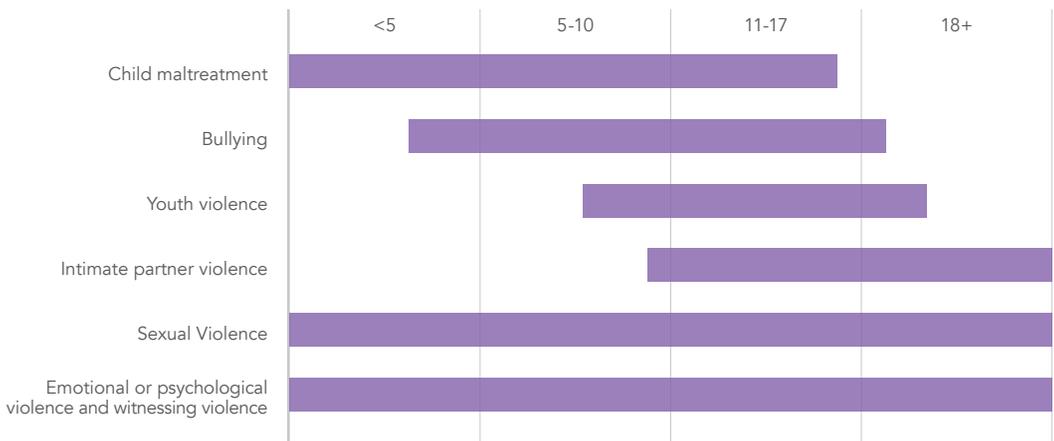
Psychological violence

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 affected¹⁴



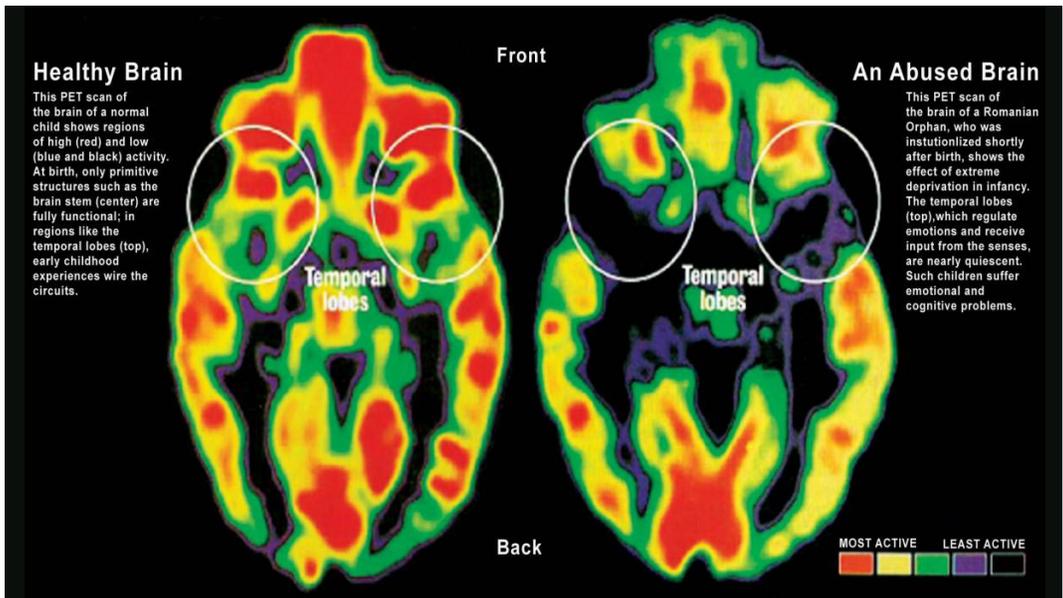
14 World Health Organization, *INSPIRE: Seven Strategies for Ending Violence Against Children*. Executive Summary, 2016, p. 4.

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.¹⁵ The severe effects of 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.¹⁶

Figure 2 PET scan of a healthy brain and an abused brain¹⁷



15 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.

16 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.

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

WHAT WE KNOW ABOUT VIOLENCE IN CHILDHOOD IN KENYA

The first national survey on violence against children in Kenya was conducted in 2010 and released in 2012. A recent survey was conducted in 2018, but the data is still to be released.

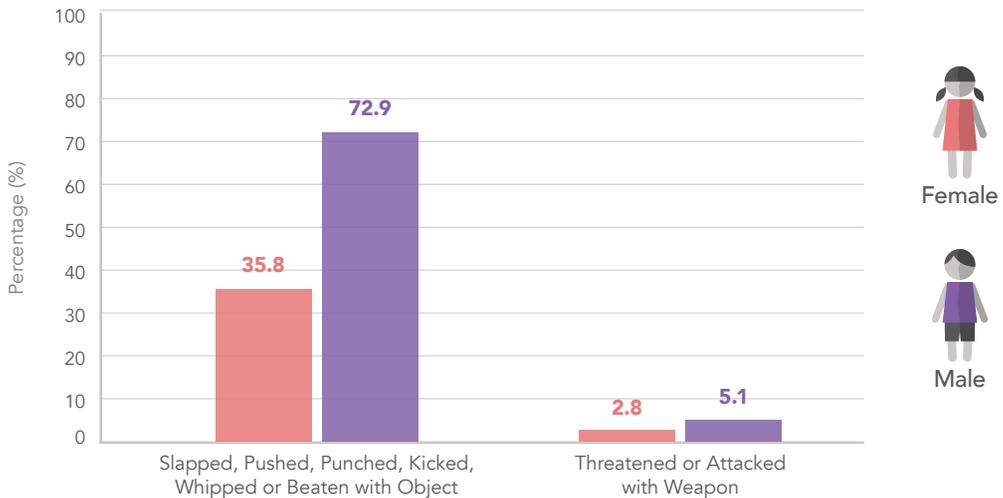
The 2010 Kenya Violence against Children Study was designed to capture lifetime and current experiences of emotional, physical, and sexual violations for female and male children from the following age groups:

- 18 to 24-year-olds who experienced acts of violence prior to age 18 (lifetime events).

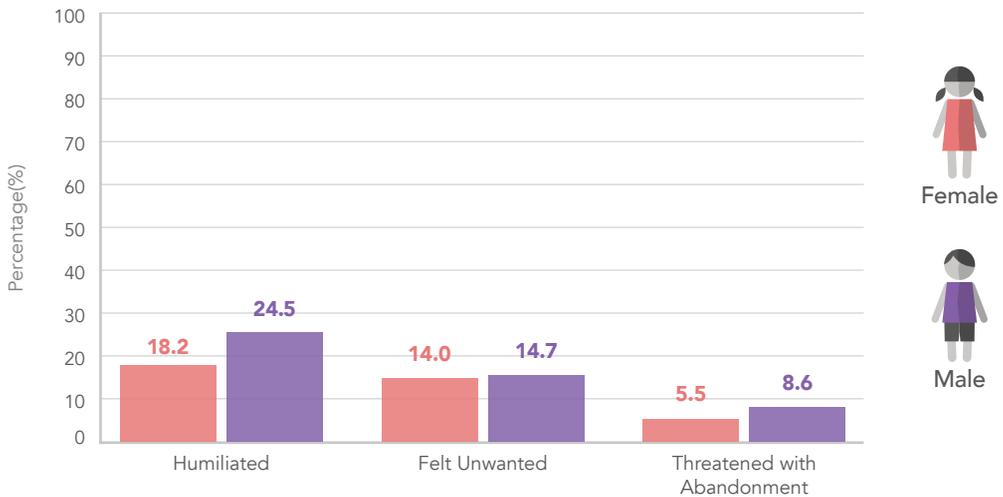
- 13 to 17-year-olds who experienced acts of violence during the 12 months prior to the survey (current events).

The findings from the survey indicate that violence against children is a serious and complex problem in Kenya. As shown in Figure 3, almost 1 out of 2 children in Kenya has experienced physical violence, while nearly 1 out of 5 Kenyan children report being subject to some kind of emotional abuse (Fig. 4).

Figure 3 Types of physical violence experienced prior to age 18—as reported by 18–24-year-olds¹⁹



¹⁹ UNICEF, *Violence Against Children in Kenya: Findings from a 2010 National Survey (2020)*, <http://evaw-global-database.unwomen.org/-/media/files/un%20women/vaw/full%20text/africa/kenya%20violence%20against%20children%20survey%20%202010.pdf?vs=1219>, 35, accessed 18 Jul. 2019.

Figure 4 Types of emotional violence experienced prior to age 18—as reported by 18–24-year-olds²⁰

Mothers and fathers were the most common perpetrators of physical violence by family members. For males, the most common perpetrators of physical violence by an authority figure were teachers followed by police. Emotional violence for both females and males was most often inflicted by parents.

These staggering numbers give us a clear understanding of the magnitude of the phenomenon of violence against children in Kenya, while also providing us with some relevant information about the context and the root causes of violence.

However, the surveys do not capture the magnitude of violence affecting children in the early years from birth to the age of eight. Although respondents are asked to report about violence before the age of 18, it is not possible to estimate the prevalence of violence in the early years from the survey. This had enormous implications in the government response, as the early years were not prioritized in terms of child protection. Legislation and policies on early childhood are either lacking or inadequate to respond to the phenomenon of violence in the early years.

²⁰ UNICEF, *Violence Against Children in Kenya*, p. 37.

Drivers of violence against children in Kenya:

Social norms condoning violence	Violent discipline is a normalized practice to raise children. Corporal punishment is practised in schools despite being illegal.
Gender discrimination	Gender discrimination towards girls contributes to the neglect and acceptance of violence against girls.
Harmful traditional practices	<p>Female genital mutilation (FGM) is still a common practice among many communities. It is seen as a sign of readiness for marriage, and generally occurs between the ages of 9 and 17.</p> <p>Child marriage affects 23 per cent of girls that are married before the age of 18 (UNICEF, 2017 Mid-Year Humanitarian Situation Report Kenya, 2017).</p>
Children exposed to multiple deprivations	All children in Kenya are potentially at risk of violence, exploitation and abuse. However, some groups are more vulnerable than others due to their gender, social status, or geographical location.
Ignorance about the long-term impact of violence	Parents and caregivers resort to violence because they lack awareness about the effects of violence in the long-term and they lack awareness about what hinders child development.
Exposure to the digital world	The most commonly reported forms of violence in the digital world include cyberbullying, online grooming, and sexting.

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

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



As parents, caregivers, and all those who are part of the upbringing of the child, we first need to nurture and keep in touch with our own spirituality and capacity to deal with contradictions in our lives. By nurturing one's spirituality as a parent or caregiver, we are preparing ourselves to provide nurturing care to children, respond in more positive manners to their needs, and to help create safe and respectful spaces for them to explore their interconnections with others.

From the Hindu perspective, spirituality is a commitment to inner self-growth, leading to a discovery of one's higher dimension and a connection with the world and the Almighty. The purpose of nurturing spirituality is to grow a sense of right values as guiding principles and

to avoid misery and sorrow on ourselves, as well as those around us. In Hinduism, divine values such as non-violence, freedom, purity, love, non-covetousness, modesty, selflessness, etc., strengthen harmony and welfare. In contrast, values such as hatred, indifference, greed, anger, violence, arrogance, etc., breed violence and other evils. Children are divinely created to be seen as blessings and opportunities for parents to grow, both physically and spiritually. Religious teachings and stories guide us to be peaceful and in harmony in our relationship with other beings, including our children.

Our religious traditions remind us of values and notions that strengthen our understanding of 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. 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 is the African idea of personhood—a person depends on other persons to be. It emphasizes 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.

These horizontal relationships are also intergenerational. Adults can also 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.'²¹ This passage reminds us to recognize that children already have a spirituality and that adults can learn from them.

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.'²² 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 an ethical care for the '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.

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 our relations with others, vocation, and social responsibility with others and the community. This, in turn, produces a rich spiritual life.

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.

21 *The Holy Bible*, Matthew 18:3.

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

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 Kenya, 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 tightly connected in the daily lives of people in Kenya and has an important 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 Kenya 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.’²³

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.²⁴ 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.

23 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.

24 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



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.

Once, when the Prophet Mohammad (PBUH) was kissing one of his grandsons, a man said that he himself does not kiss any of his ten children. The Prophet (PBUH) replied by saying, 'The one with no pity for others is not pitied.'²⁵ This calls for reconsidering the way of dealing with children based on love and compassion. When a parent kisses his child and demonstrates love, appreciation and mercy for the child,

such behaviour strengthens the relationship between the parent and the child, and the trust that children have in adults. A kiss shows that parents are kind and merciful to their children. Love and compassion are powerful elements to nourish the child's spirituality and contribute to the identity formation of the child, to their self-esteem, and sense of security.

In Christianity, multiple passages demonstrate the love of God for children and how Jesus treated children with dignity and respect. Jesus said, 'Let the children come to me, and do not hinder them; for to such belongs the kingdom of heaven.'²⁶ Another passage proclaims the highest appreciation of children, indicating how we need to treat children with dignity and to respect their divinity. It says, 'See that you do not despise one of these little ones; for I

25 Al-Bukhari and Muslim.

26 *The Holy Bible*, New International Version, Matthew 19:14.

tell you that their angels in heaven always see the face of my Father in heaven.²⁷ This passage indicates the high consideration that Jesus had for children and the special place they have in Christianity. This also considers children as a source of inspiration for the practice of religion, inviting adults to learn from them.

There is no space for violence in the Bible, and parents are invited to cherish the divinity in the child and to be guardians and role models for their children.

Regarding gender norms, scriptures and religious traditions do not differentiate between the girl child and the boy child; however, in many communities the birth of a boy is celebrated and preferred to the birth of a girl. Discrimination against girls is one of the most extreme forms of structural violence affecting children in Kenya. The prevalence of gender-based violence is the result of discriminatory values deeply rooted in society and that have no connection or foundation in religion. As these forms of violence are often normalized, it is important to challenge

the social and cultural norms condoning them in order to promote behavioural change. Abuse against girls and women is profoundly engrained and accepted in many communities; this abuse might include direct violence but also early and forced marriages. Many children in Kenya 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. In order to improve the protection of children, it is of utmost importance to strengthen prevention and protection measures to protect girls.

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?

Some practical examples of actions are presented in the following pages.

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



Mobilize against harmful traditional practices



Make religious communities child-friendly places



Transform norms through the interpretation of scriptures



Raise awareness and join advocacy efforts at regional and national levels

²⁷ The Holy Bible, Matthew 18:10.



Mobilize against harmful traditional practices

Religious leaders can take action in the following ways:

- Standing against Female genital mutilation (FGM), which, in some communities, is believed to be a religious requirement, indicating the readiness for marriage. Religious leaders can take action to disconnect this harmful practice from religion and be at the forefront condemning FGM publicly.
- Creating awareness and delegitimizing gender-based violence (GBV), which fails to recognize that every child is a gift from the Divine regardless of their gender.
- Advocating against early and forced marriages that continue to take place in Kenya.

- Advocating for the protection and well-being of children from migrant and nomadic pastoralist communities in Kenya.

To end harmful traditional practices, religious leaders can start by creating a safe space for discussion and dialogue on these topics. For example, by helping parents and caregivers understand why these practices violate the sanctity and dignity of the child. Further, they can share that there is no evidence in the scriptures that justify these practices.

Religious leaders can bring up issues of harmful traditional practices in their daily interactions with their communities, including religious activities, meetings, workshops, and sermons. They can also use social media and TV or radio to raise awareness and share narratives that challenge social norms condoning harmful traditional practices, using theological reflections that uphold the human dignity of children and the sacredness of their lives.



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.

Delinking Female Genital Mutilation and Cutting from Islam²⁸

In 2008, Sheikh Ibrahim Lethome and other Muslim scholars, came together to write an advocacy document published by United Nations. The document reviews the teachings of Islam with regards to female genital mutilation and cutting (FGM/C) with the purpose of delinking it from Islam.

FGM/C causes unjustified suffering and harm, including immediate and long-term health risks, complications during childbirth, and negatively affects the sexual life of women. It violates the rights of women and girls to live free from harm, violence, and discrimination.

The teachings of Islam provide overwhelming evidence that FGM/C are not religious practices and that Islam condemns them. Evidence cited from the Qur'an, the authentic Sunnah (traditions), ijma' (consensus of scholars), and qiyas (analogical deductions), shows no proof of these practices. These are cultural practices that are observed in some communities, and it is wrong to associate Islam with such harmful practices. Islam has clearly stipulated provisions for the protection of basic human rights, and it upholds the sanctity of the human body. Any practice that violates these rights and causes harm to the human body without any justification is prohibited.



Get Inspired

MOBILIZING RELIGIOUS COMMUNITIES AGAINST EARLY MARRIAGE

Islamic Relief Worldwide and World Vision work together with religious leaders in Kenya to find faith-centred responses to end child, early, and forced marriage. They provide a relevant religious perspective to efforts striving to end this harmful tradition, contributing to the African Campaign to End Child Marriage, launched in 2014 at the African Union.

Early and forced marriages violate human rights as well as the sanctity of marriage and family. Therefore, it is crucial to create spaces for dialogue on the role of religion in protecting the rights of girls and women, and how faith can help prevent child, early, and forced marriage and support married girls. These opportunities for dialogue and reflection on child marriage allow religious communities to come together and take a stand on ending early marriage and develop advocacy actions and campaigns to end child marriage in their communities. They are also an opportunity to create spaces for parents and caregivers to reflect on the sacredness of children's lives and the importance of upholding values and norms that affirm children's dignity.

28 USAID and The Population Council - Frontiers Programme, *De-linking Female Genital Mutilation/Cutting from Islam* (2008), <https://www.unfpa.org/sites/default/files/pub-pdf/De-linking%20FGM%20from%20Islam%20final%20report.pdf>, accessed 18 Jul. 2019.



Make religious communities child-friendly places

Nurturing ethical values and spirituality in children is very important as it contributes to the holistic and healthy development of a child. Places of worship can be spaces for children to be in touch with their inner selves and to discover themselves and others, through spiritual nourishing. Religious communities need to become safe environments for children.

Religious leaders can:

- Create spaces within the places of worship to listen to children, as this can become a form of child protection.
- Lead the development of child safeguarding policies in their places of worship, by creating measures to prevent

and report child abuse, enhance child participation, create safe spaces to talk about it, and develop mechanisms to support and protect children victims of violence. This includes creating awareness not only on the impact of violence on children but also of the consequences for parents and caregivers who use violence against the child.

- Make use of visits to homes to identify signs that a child is at risk of violence. Religious leaders often play the role of counsellors and are trusted with sensitive information around children and family. This role can be strengthened with more training to address issues of violence against children and provide support to parents and caregivers. There is a limit to the extent of such intervention by religious leaders and, therefore, it is important that they can make referrals to the appropriate support needed.





Transform norms through the interpretation of scriptures

In Kenya, parents and caregivers often use violent discipline with their children, and some people justify violence against children based on their misinterpretation of religious texts. However, every religion has an obligation to promote the rights of the child, as these rights are consistent with the scriptures that affirm the dignity of children.

In Islam, the child is a metaphor for the Kingdom of God. Based on misinterpretations of some Islamic teachings, violence against children was, at times, violence against children was, at times, justified in the name of discipline. However, today's prevailing interpretations are based on principles of child raising that include rewards and means of discipline that are non-violent. Islam punishes those who do not deal compassionately and peacefully with others; love and compassion are key elements of child raising promoted by the Islamic tradition.²⁹

In Christianity, the proverb, 'Children just naturally do silly, careless things, but a good spanking will teach them how to behave,'³⁰ has been used to justify violent upbringing. In these cases, religious leaders have an obligation to reinterpret the scriptures providing a more positive interpretation. For example, they could indicate that such verses are intended to guide parents to train a child to follow a certain path; yet, they cannot be used to justify violence.

We can find this obligation in 2 Timothy, when Apostol Paul advises Timothy to be careful and diligent in interpreting the scriptures. He says, 'Do your best to present yourself to God as one approved, a workman who has no need to be ashamed, rightly handling the word of truth.'³¹

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 in our communities 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 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

²⁹ Musnad of Imam Ahmad, Vol. 3, p. 112.

³⁰ *The Holy Bible, Revised Standard Version – Catholic Edition*, Proverbs 22:15 says: 'Folly is bound up in the heart of a child, but the rod of discipline drives it far from him.'

³¹ *The Holy Bible*, 2 Tim 2:15.

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 refrain from using violent methods such as hitting or shouting 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.



Get Inspired

GET INSPIRED: BRING CHANNELS OF HOPE TO YOUR COMMUNITY

Channels of Hope is World Vision's signature programme that mobilizes religious leaders and their communities to transform children's lives. Child protection is the newest addition to the Channels of Hope.

Channels of Hope has also been adapted by Islamic Relief Worldwide to be used with Muslim communities.

Channels of Hope is both a methodology and a mobilization process. The methodology begins with an interactive facilitated process to create a safe space for religious leaders and communities to learn, share, and debate. It reaches the root causes and deepest convictions that impact attitudes, norms, values, and practices towards the most vulnerable children and people.

The process is grounded in discussing principles from the participants' Holy Scriptures. The programme is designed to move the heart, inform, and motivate a sustained and effective response to significant issues by equipping religious leaders to apply the sacred texts to key social issues and encourage other religious leaders to do the same. The process is focused on partnering with local religious leaders, their congregations and communities to empower them to meet community needs on a sustainable basis.

Participants of the Channels of Hope Child Protection Programme expressed personal transformation related to the protection of children and its relationship with the religious ministry. The key child protection issues identified by participants included child marriage, non-school attendance, child labour (including forced labour), harsh physical punishment, and sexual abuse.



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. 35).
- 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 about 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.

A few actions to advocate for include the following:

- Ask the Kenyan government to invest more in early childhood and produce better data on violence against children in the early years (0 to 8) as current data are lacking.
- Promote and encourage the use of the child helpline, which can be reached dialling 116. The child helpline works 24 hours to stop child abuse and provide a safe environment for children in Kenya.
- Work with other partners to build coalitions of individuals and organizational supporters. This might include advocating for improving the implementation and monitoring of the current legislation and policies to protect children from child abuse and neglect, end gender-based violence, harmful traditional practices, child marriage, sexual abuse and exploitation, and to end corporal punishment.

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 the risk of child maltreatment at home, witnessing intimate partner violence, and violent behaviour among children and adolescents.

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.

Families and caregivers' awareness of children's spirituality can enrich and strengthen interaction in the family and help build a relationship that reflects a caring environment of mutual respect and learning, appreciation, and sharing.

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 they are positive role models and provide children with a safe and emotionally secured environment.

Actions to support parents and caregivers:



Promote positive, participatory, and non-violent forms of discipline



Encourage fathers' engagement in positive parenting



Stress the importance of role modelling



Strengthen the agency of the child



Promote positive, participatory, and non-violent forms of discipline



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.

The support of religious leaders to parents and caregivers is critical to foster the understanding and practice of alternative methods of parenting. Religious leaders can raise awareness about positive, non-violent ways of disciplining children, about the benefit

of effective communication between parents and children, and promoting healthy habits from the early years.

The holistic well-being and happiness of 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 and fear.

This means that parents need to undergo a process of unlearning of 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. This self-reflection by parents will also need to challenge the use of corporal punishment while looking at positive and nurturing parenting. Through this, parents will discover that positive discipline is a healthy method to deal with difficult behaviour.

It is especially important for parents to appreciate their children and to provide encouragement by showing trust and respect. This can only be done by using positive ways of raising them and refusing violence and fear.

Religious leaders can accompany parents on this journey with counselling. They can also do so through sermons and with parenting programmes that can take place in the safe spaces of worship.

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.
- 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.





Encourage fathers' engagement in positive parenting

Religious leaders can encourage fathers to be more engaged in parenting from the early years. It is important to promote a nurturing role for fathers as, often, cultural norms in Kenya assign this role exclusively to mothers. However, it is crucial that fathers become more involved in the care and parenting of young children. This involvement enables them to build deep bonds with their children and learn to know them as they grow and develop.

Parenting programmes targeted to fathers have shown that when fathers are more engaged from the early years, this contributes to reducing the incidence of intimate partner violence and abusive punishment for children.

What can you do?

- Invite fathers to a gathering in your religious communities to discuss the importance of early childhood and the impact of violence in children, and the ways they can become more engaged in their children's care and nurturing.
- Organize meetings with boys and men, 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.
- Challenge gender norms through sermons and during family visits by providing examples and reflections that foster father's role in the upbringing of children and respect for women and girls.



Get Inspired

Catholic Relief Services (CRS) has been implementing programmes to further the engagement of fathers in Kenya, Malawi, and Zambia. The SCORE EDC Project promotes the engagement of fathers in nurturing the physical, socio-emotional, mental, and spiritual well-being of children. Some of the programme's approaches to encouraging fathers' involvement in child development, especially for children ages 0–5, include the following:

Conducting father-inclusive early childhood parenting education

Fathers are advised and encouraged to (with the mother) nurture their children's development in their earliest years of life, by providing love, safety, and security, playing with the children, and supporting their nutrition. Some of the suggestions and messages include talking and singing to the child in the womb. It also includes maintaining quality time with their babies through playing, smiling, touching, talking, storytelling, sharing and reading books, and engaging in play to build neural connections that strengthen

Continue page 38



Get Inspired *(continued)*

the child's brain. The training helped fathers to establish safe and dependable relationships with their babies. They were also able to understand, guess, or read the signals and behaviour of their babies and establish trust and more harmonious relations.

- **Mentoring fathers to become early childhood development (ECD) champions:** Many fathers who joined the programme are now a point of reference in their communities. These fathers continue mentoring other fathers and caregivers on responsive caregiving, the importance of nutrition, safety and security, and early learning. Many of them have started kitchen gardens for a balanced diet for the family, and they regularly accompany their wives to prenatal and postnatal care services.
- **Training fathers on making toys for their children:** The programme included training fathers to make local play materials like toys, softballs, stuffed animals, puzzles, stringed beads, letters, and number boards. Many fathers are now spending more time playing with their babies, as they know it is important for their children's learning and development.
- **Setting up community playgroups:** This consists of involving fathers in establishing and leading 'community playgroups'. In these groups, families in the neighbourhood gather, learn and discuss their child's development, and the importance of play in the learning and development of their child. They also discuss how to engage their children in 'play-and-learn' activities such as making music, using home utensils, pots, pans, singing, dancing, storytelling, playing with sand and water, and role modelling respect. During this time, they share how they are reaching other fathers, and they also look at what is working or not working and what can be done. These meetings have resulted in many fathers encouraging their wives to be active ECD promoters in the community.

While it is true that behavioural change takes time—and the programme was also met with some resistance—many fathers have begun to engage more. Husbands and wives have improved the way they communicate with each other and the way they share childcare.

The programme has also involved grandfathers in childcare. Family tradition also holds enormous sway over young men; therefore, when grandfathers begin taking care of the children, young fathers do too.



Stress the importance of role modelling

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.

Islam underlines that parents have to be living examples since children pick up values and knowledge by imitating their elders.³² This helps create a space of mutual attention for both parents and children based on love and devotion, leaving no room for violent means to discipline children. Parents need to be role models for their children, and they cannot model violence as a way to obtain respect.

In Christianity, upholding the sanctity of life is central to the affirmation of the faith. Violence, whether physical, structural, psychological or in whichever form it expresses itself, is a denial and abuse of life and goes against the foundations of love and compassion. 'My command is this: Love each other as I have loved you. Greater love has no one than this: to lay down one's life for one's friends.'³³

One of the best ways to stop the cycle of violence is for parents to model non-violence and positive attitudes and values. Religious leaders can highlight the importance of role modelling during their sermons and their dialogues with parents.

What can parents and caregivers do?

- Practise 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 rules that have a positive influence and contribute to the child overall well-being.
- Model respect of people of different faiths and backgrounds by allowing children to mingle with those who do not practise their same religion.

³² *The Qur'an* 61:2-3.

³³ *The Holy Bible*, John 15:12 -13.



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 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, it 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.³⁴

The Qur'an teaches us to maintain two fundamental principles with regards to children: one must always approach children with the utmost respect and dignity, and one should deal with children with utmost love and care. These principles underline that children are subjects, not objects 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 are whole persons and not an extension of parents. Their individuality needs to be respected; this 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*:

³⁴ Committee on the Rights of the Child. General Comment No. 7 (2005). CRC/C/GC/7/Rev.1 20 September 2006. https://www.unicef-irc.org/portfolios/general_comments/GC7.Rev.1_en.doc.html

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.³⁵



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 needs to be encouraged and supported genuinely. Children need to be provided with space and opportunity for 'service' and care for the other, starting from early childhood years.

³⁵ 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 school staff. Schools become a central part of the child's experiences contributing to their holistic development and character formation.

Schools 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 culture of peace.

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.

Schools need to become nurturing environments for children helping them to grow, develop, and thrive. Article 27 of the Convention on the Rights of the Child recognizes the right of every child to holistic development including 'physical, mental, spiritual, moral and social development.'³⁶

As religious leaders and communities in Kenya 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 actions to support teachers in making schools safe and inclusive.

Suggested actions for teachers to make schools safe and inclusive:



36 Missing footnote information



Improve understanding of child development

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.





Manage emotions and control frustrations

Teachers need to be equipped with the ability 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.

How can this be done?

- Teacher training to equip teachers with knowledge, skills, and confidence to use positive discipline techniques to manage classroom behaviour. Positive discipline includes setting clear expectations of behaviours in the classroom while praising and encouraging learners. Further, misbehaviour is dealt with non-violent strategies that allow children to understand and learn from their mistakes.³⁷
- Creating opportunities for self-examination. Providing a safe space 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.



³⁷ World Health Organization, School-based violence prevention: a practical handbook, Geneva, 2019.



Be role models

Children learn best by example; this is especially true in the early years of life. Values cannot be taught but they need to be modelled. Teachers and caregivers are key actors in fostering positive attitudes and nurturing values during the child's 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.



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!

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.





Use alternative and positive discipline

Schools need to be safe environments where non-violence is at the base of all interactions. The school needs to be a safe place to learn and strengthen students' 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. These forms of violence in schools can be addressed with a multi-stakeholder approach that brings together religious leaders, parents, and teachers to find alternative ways to raise young children.

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.

- Mobilize the school community to adopt a culture of non-violence and help change the school environment.



Adopt participatory learning methodologies

The active participation of children in the learning through play, singing, 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 to grow together.

Learning opportunities can include the following:

- Actively encourage young children to collaborate, play, sing, and come together to pray and meditate.
- Create opportunities for conversations and open dialogues with the teachers and other children; young children need to have the space to be heard and express themselves.
- Encourage the development of positive relationships across cultures and religions.
- Allow getting to know people of different religions and cultures.

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

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.



Get Inspired

MADRASA EARLY CHILDHOOD PROGRAMME

Aga Khan Foundation's Madrasa Early Childhood Programme operates in the three East Africa countries of Kenya, Tanzania, and Uganda. Beginning as a pilot project at the request of the Muslim community in Mombasa, Kenya, it has helped establish over 200 community preschools and reach over 67,000 children. Research findings demonstrate that the Madrasa Early Childhood Programme approach makes a real difference in children's cognitive and emotional development and later success in school.

In the Islamic tradition, the example of Prophet Muhammad (PBUH) speaking of the importance of the education of morals and values is often mentioned. The Madrasa Early Childhood Programme incorporates nurturing values and spirituality as these are seen as essential elements for the identity formation of the child, to strengthen self-esteem and self-confidence, and build relationships with other children and teachers.

A central component of this programme is the pluralistic approach that accompanies every element of the programme implementation: from the learning in the classroom to the composition of the School Management Committees with the participation of parents of different religions.

What are the key successful elements of this programme?

- The curriculum has been developed taking into account local customs, traditions and cultures, and it is based on active learning that is play-based.
- The curriculum adopts a pedagogy that is transformative and gender-responsive.
- Positive discipline is a central component of the programme.
- Nurturing positive values and the practice of religious values are integrated into the curriculum.
- The curriculum is based on a strong pluralistic approach—embracing Muslim and non-Muslim children alike—and helping all of them learn important lessons about the appreciation of diversity.
- Parents and other community stakeholders are highly involved in the management of the school programme.
- Teachers undergo rigorous pedagogical training.
- The Madrasa Resource Centres, established at the country level, support each school and ensure the quality of the adapted model by helping to set goals and standards.

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, paediatricians, 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 dialogue³⁸

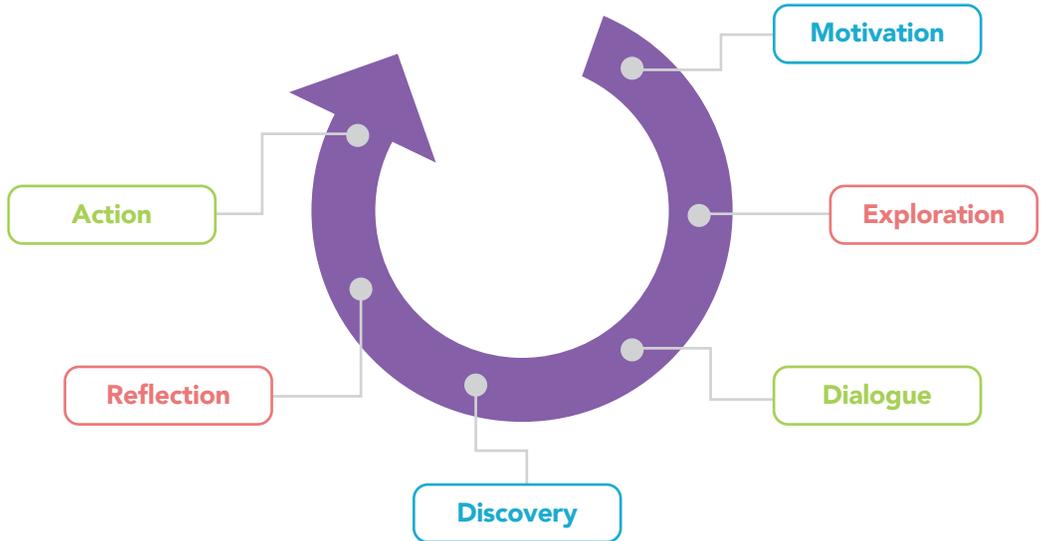
Share these points with the participants before the dialogue, so it is a safe and respectful place for all who take part:

- 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.

³⁸ Karuna Center for Peacebuilding, A Trainer's Guide to Inter-faith Peacebuilding in Sri Lanka (2013). http://www.karunacenter.org/uploads/9/16/8/0/9680374/_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.³⁹



Motivation:

Start the meeting with a meditation or 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.

³⁹ 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 'Ground rules for dialogue' section on page 51. 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 practices 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 can religious communities do to support families, parents, caregivers, and teachers so young children can grow in safe, caring, and loving environments, free of violence? Please list examples from your community.

Question 3

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 4

What can faith-based organizations, civil society organizations, and schools do to challenge violence against children in 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?



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