

Intersections

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Child protection is defined by UNICEF as preventing and responding to violence, exploitation and abuse against children. The United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child, signed 25 years ago and ratified by more countries than any other human rights treaty in history (all countries except the United States), provides a common legal and ethical international framework for protecting children.

In 2013, MCC's boards joined this international movement by approving a protection of children and youth policy framework, which aims to ensure the safety of all children and youth who interact with MCC program. In addition to giving directives for MCC's own child protection policy, the framework calls for all partner organizations who implement MCC-supported projects with direct participants under the age of 18 to develop their own policies and procedures to ensure that children and youth are safe from abuse while participating in partner initiatives. MCC assumes that partner organizations share the goal of protecting children, even if they do not yet have formal child protection policies and procedures in place. MCC is committed to supporting partners as they formalize such policies and procedures, while recognizing that robust child protection is a long-term process that engages communities and is grounded in specific contexts.

Recent research into the long-term effects of childhood abuse has only increased the urgency for child protection work. One of the most significant findings is the long-term effects of child abuse on neurological development. Child abuse at a young age impairs brain development, with lasting implications, including increased likelihood of abusive behavior later in life, criminal activities, substance abuse and negative health outcomes, including heart disease, liver disease, diabetes and depression. These individual effects translate into long-term societal costs related to physical and mental health care, domestic violence, criminal activity and strain on education systems.

The Adverse Childhood Experiences study by the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) in collaboration with Kaiser Permanente on Adverse Childhood Experiences (ACE) represents one of the largest investigations of childhood abuse and later-life health and well-being. A TED-talk by Nadine Burke Harris powerfully presents these findings and

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CDC-Kaiser Permanente
Adverse Childhood Experiences
(ACE) study
<http://www.cdc.gov/violenceprevention/acestudy/about.html>

TED Talk — Nadine Burke Harris
<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=95ovlJ3dsNk>

Child Abuse and Neglect: Risk
and Protective Factors
<http://www.cdc.gov/violenceprevention/childmaltreatment/riskprotectivefactors.html>

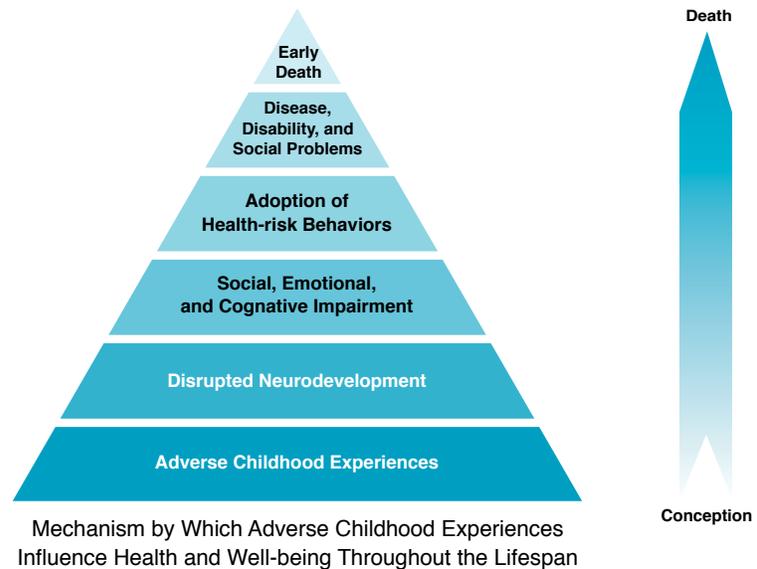
UNICEF and Convention on the
Rights of the Child
<http://www.unicef.org/crc/>

Child Welfare Information
Gateway: Long-Term
Consequences of Child Abuse
and Neglect
http://www.childwelfare.gov/pubPDFs/long_term_consequences.pdf

Child Welfare Information
Gateway: Risk and Protective
Factors for Child Abuse and
Neglect
<http://www.childwelfare.gov/pubPDFs/riskprotectivefactors.pdf>

Child Welfare Information
Gateway: Protective Factors
Approaches in Child Welfare
http://www.childwelfare.gov/pubPDFs/protective_factors.pdf

makes a moving, impassioned plea to confront childhood trauma and to support prevention and treatment efforts. The ACE study analyzes the impact of childhood abuse and other adverse childhood experiences which is summarized in the graphic below.



Many factors—at individual, family and community levels—increase the risk of child abuse. At the same time, protective factors can buffer children from abuse. Strengthening protective factors is just as important as reducing risk factors. The CDC identifies one potential protective factor as “communities that take responsibility for preventing abuse.” MCC’s current focus on working with partners to develop child protection policies is aimed at helping communities take this responsibility, with the belief that these efforts can help prevent abuse and can help children who experience abuse to be resilient. This issue of *Intersections* captures some of the lessons MCC and its partners have learned in this long-term process of ensuring the protection of all children who participate in MCC-supported programs.

Lynn Longenecker is MCC education coordinator.

Protecting children within faith communities

Humans need safety. According to Maslow’s hierarchy of needs, safety is even more important than our needs for belonging, esteem and self-actualization and second only to our most basic physical needs (i.e. food, water, shelter). Just as children feel safe during thunderstorms when caring parents are nearby, so children should feel safe at church, surrounded by adults who care about them, value them and listen to them. Leaders want their organizations to be safe. At a most basic level, this includes following codes and policies, but safety is not always straightforward. Safety is subjective. Depending on personal characteristics like age, gender and life experiences, what feels safe for one person may not feel safe for another.

When people feel unsafe they often feel powerless. They may withdraw, be paralyzed or fight back. Conversely, when people feel safe they can be curious, learn and grow—attributes that we especially want to foster in our children and youth. Pastors, teachers and leaders in churches and other faith communities need to invest time and resources into making children and youth feel safe. It takes intentionality to ensure basic child-proofing for young children, relational safety for school-age children (i.e. bullying prevention) and child abuse prevention for children and youth of all ages.

Many faith community members would like to think that child abuse does not happen and that even if it does, it certainly does not happen here. They may be blinded by the feeling of “family” in the community. However, statistics show that nearly all abused children were abused by someone they knew, quite often a parent. So the excuse that “churches are like families” and therefore we do not need to follow child protection practices does not hold up. Child abuse most often occurs within relationships. In fact, over 90% of victims know their offenders. An offender may be a parent, sibling, cousin, teacher or neighbor. While we do not want to be suspicious of everyone, we do need to keep our eyes and hearts open to all the ways that children and youth may be vulnerable.

Dove’s Nest’s offers faith communities across North America training, strategies and resources for writing, adopting and implementing child protection policies. A culture of child protection includes many components. Based on age and role, training is required on the types, risks and effects of abuse and neglect. Organizations need to look at their facilities and consider how to keep children and youth safe, e.g., windows in doors, first aid kits, safe storage of sharp objects and chemicals. Faith communities need to establish procedures to prevent opportunities for two people to be alone, especially when one of those persons is older and in a position of authority. Churches need concrete plans for responding to concerns about possible abuse. Everyone working with children should be trained on how to report child abuse to local authorities.

Dove’s Nest recommends that churches run background checks on all personnel who work with children and youth. Church leaders certainly do not want to invite someone to work with their children and youth and then find out too late that if they had only run a background check, they could have prevented a child from being hurt.

While legal background checks are important, they are not perfect (and not available everywhere). So it is also important to screen all staff and volunteers in other ways. A formal or informal reference check with previous churches or employers can tell a lot about individuals, especially if they had interactions with children and youth in those places. Those doing the screening can ask former churches or employers about what roles the persons being screened had with children and youth; how children, youth and families responded to them; and under what circumstances they left. Like the background check, such measures are not enough to guarantee safety, but they are important pieces to the overall plan.

Resistance to child protection practices is common, especially when it comes to background checks. Education goes a long way in helping faith community members understand why these practices are important. It can be helpful to explain that church leaders cannot start deciding who they will and will not screen based on subjective criteria or stereotypes. Everyone needs to be screened. Another useful approach is to liken child

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Dove's Nest:
<http://dovesnest.net>

Circle of Grace (2013). The Archdiocese of Omaha, Omaha, NE. Retrieved from <http://dovesnest.net/circleofgrace>

Let the Children Come: Preparing Faith Communities to End Child Abuse and Neglect. <http://dovesnest.net/letthekidscome>

Maslow's Hierarchy of Needs:
<http://www.simplypsychology.org/maslow.html>

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protection practices to seat belts in cars—they were not used 40 years ago, but now they are known to save lives.

Once hired, it is important to keep a watchful eye over how staff and volunteers interact with children. Are they effective in building healthy relationships with children? Do they have healthy adult relationships to meet their own needs? Do they willingly follow child protection guidelines? Above all, churches should prioritize listening to children and their parents. Churches need to take any concerns about blurred boundaries or what may look like grooming behaviors very seriously.

Dove's Nest frequently consults with churches on how to respond to possible abuse and how to balance protection and inclusion when someone is present who has or may have offended in the past. Take, for example, a recent account from a Mennonite pastor: A new attendee to a church had an interaction with two elementary school-age girls that raised yellow flags. He approached them and asked to shake hands. One of the girls refused, saying that he was a stranger. He replied that he was not a stranger, but a member of their church. Then he reached out and tickled her. This violated the church's child protection policy, which states that children should not be touched without their expressed permission and that touch with children should be handled with care.

The pastor later learned the man has a history of sexual misconduct with an adult, but no legal record of misconduct with children. The pastor took this seriously and met with the man to tell him what he learned about his past, and asked him to sign a formal covenant with the church, stating that he will not have physical contact with children, will abide by the child protection policy and will not be alone with children in the congregation. It also included the provision that the pastor would inform the parents of elementary school children in the congregation about the covenant in a parents' meeting. The man signed it and has been attending—although not regularly. When he attends, he respects the boundaries, the pastor said.

Once churches have a child protection policy in place, they need to implement and follow it, and follow it consistently. Dove's Nest offers a checklist of things to consider when writing a child protection policy, along with many concrete examples (<http://dovesnest.net/policies>). The organization also offers Circle of Grace, a Christian safe environment curriculum for preschool through high school students, along with trainings on the curriculum. My book, *Let the Children Come: Preparing Faith Communities to Face Child Abuse and Neglect* (Herald Press, 2010), is also useful for individual or group study. Another helpful book for individuals and churches looking to deepen their understanding of abuse in faith communities is Carolyn Holderread Heggen's *Sexual Abuse in Christian Homes and Churches* (Herald Press, 1993).

Churches can and must surround our children and youth with safe environments and relationships and offer them the respect, love, justice and dignity they deserve as children of God. Efforts at child protection will reap a harvest of joy, wholeness and health for many years and generations to come.

Jeanette Harder is board president and co-founder of Dove's Nest and professor at the Grace Abbott School of Social Work, University of Nebraska at Omaha.

Whole-school confrontation of child sexual abuse in Kenya

As many as 30% of Kenyan children have experienced sexual abuse, much of it in school (*Violence against Children in Kenya*). Too often, victims are blamed while perpetrators go free. Confronting this culture of impunity requires mobilization of the whole school community. One Kenyan primary school succeeded in engaging broad stakeholder collaboration to address a pattern of sexual abuse. In response, the school extended its child protection network and improved school governance.

Initially, the head teacher was isolated in his attempts to address the situation. After receiving complaints about the sexual abuse of girls by three new teachers, he investigated and reported the cases to his administrative superior and the school's board of management. They took no action. Family members and police were suborned by the offending teachers, who also intimidated another colleague involved in the investigations. One abused girl was transferred to a distant school by her family with financial support from an accused teacher. Another girl's mother asked the school to drop the investigation after the accused teacher persuaded her it would only "stress" her daughter during exams. A third girl, who with her mother's support had rejected the teachers' advances, was repeatedly told in class that she and her mother were prostitutes. Other children reported bringing money or drugs to the same teachers to avoid beatings. Letters suspending them were countermanded by the school's administrator. When the head teacher brought their cases to the board of management, the chair determined they were misbehaving to gain money and influence. Afraid of losing teachers, the board decided to appease them. The board duly voted to increase the teachers' salaries and appointed them to leadership positions.

Blocked at every level, the head teacher was at a loss until an MCC worker witnessed a girl flee the school office after a beating. Dissatisfied with the responses of the administrator and chair of the board, she approached the head teacher. He summarized the situation of sexual abuse and violence. Recognizing that the problem required whole-community intervention, the MCC worker urged the head teacher to call parents and church and board members to meet with school leadership that afternoon. (The meeting was stormed by armed bandits who were never apprehended.) She also informed her MCC supervisors.

The next day, the MCC Kenya Representative and a member of its advisory board met with church authorities. The pastor of the school's founding church then called together school leadership and asked for the immediate dismissal of the offending teachers. He led a restructuring of the board and a review of its policy documents. The head teacher advertised for new teachers and conducted background checks on qualified applicants. After they were hired by the new board, the whole staff reviewed school practices of restorative discipline and active nonviolence. A parents' meeting was held to explain the firing of the teachers, which met with strong approval.

Some of the abused girls were no longer in the school. The head teacher coordinated support for a remaining girl who was found pregnant, including medical care and family counseling so the girl could stay in school. Teachers and pupils were counseled to treat her like any other

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Violence against Children in Kenya: Findings from a 2010 National Survey. Summary Report on the Prevalence of Sexual, Physical and Emotional Violence, Context of Sexual Violence, and Health and Behavioral Consequences of Violence Experienced in Childhood. Nairobi, Kenya: United Nations Children's Fund Kenya Country Office, Division of Violence Prevention, National Center for Injury Prevention and Control, U.S. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, and the Kenya National Bureau of Statistics, 2012.

student and protect her from ridicule. She sat for the school-leaving exam at the end of the year and won a place in secondary school.

With the new board's support, the head teacher contacted the government's local Children's Officer. She began visiting the school once a week to counsel teachers and students on child protection. She also brought in local organizations to conduct programs on children's rights and safety. Teachers and parents were also trained to discuss sexuality with children. A locked concern box was installed and opened regularly by a team of teachers, resulting in early detection of problems and a sense of being heard. In developing its new three-year plan, the school set a goal of "Strong, whole-community school leadership [that] collaborates to protect children from harm."

Through engagement with senior leadership and conveying a sense of urgency, MCC played an important role in confronting a pattern of abuse. But the wisdom and will to transform the situation came from within the community. The school has since developed stronger internal communication and effective collaboration with local child protection agencies. Greater trust has led to the creation of a written financial policy and representatives from the whole community are involved in designing the school's child protection policy. Successfully confronting sexual abuse fostered this new sense of ownership and teamwork. Now that the school operates as a whole community, it can act more effectively to protect its children.

Benard Okumu is head teacher at an MCC partner school in Kenya. Jodi Mikalachki is education coordinator and advisor for MCC in Kenya.

School-based, village-oriented child protection

The mass economic migration from rural to urban areas in Cambodia requires urgent action on child protection policies in rural schools. Through their practice and outreach, rural schools can also play a critical role in facilitating broader community-wide efforts to protect children.

A variety of push-and-pull factors continue to catalyze widespread migration from Cambodia's poorest rural provinces, affecting over one-quarter of the country's population, or approximately 3.5 million people (Hing, Lun, et al, 2). A large portion of these migrants come from rural Prey Veng province, where MCC supports a number of education programs. Villagers in one district estimate that 70% of the local workforce has headed to the country's capital, Phnom Penh, or to Thailand for higher-wage, manual labor jobs. Moreover, approximately 20% of these children are being raised by elderly family members (Zimmer and Van Natta, 21). The resulting trend, where migratory parents "leave behind" children under 18, heightens children's vulnerability, as villages are stripped of the very adults that hold the community together.

When MCC first began conversations about child protection with two partner schools in the district, MCC's assumption was that the policies would govern school activities carried out on school grounds, with the design, input and monitoring performed by school staff. However, when the first facilitation meeting was proposed to school principals, both suggested inviting anyone interested from the community to the first

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meeting. The school administration's assumption was that everyone would have a stake in child protection policies and an interest in children's welfare—even if the policies would technically only be for the schools.

Approximately 10% of each village was in attendance at the first meetings. School committee members and village chiefs attended, along with students' aunts, uncles and grandparents, but in line with demographic trends, very few parents were in attendance. Most attendees came with young children—magnifying the point that they are the only adults left to provide supervision. When prompted to discuss child safety concerns, these guardians expressed a number of anxieties, including transporting children to distant clinics when sick, lack of supervision when commuting to school and difficulty following-up with school lessons and homework.

The dialogue made it clear that a reliable child protection policy, one derived from and carried out by the entirety of the child-supervising stakeholders in the village, would be the only effective means of ensuring that children were adequately protected. But was such a community-wide effort possible? At a basic policy level, MCC is focused on ensuring that its partner schools have child protection policies and procedures in place. Yet, as these community meetings made clear, a child protection strategy limited solely to school grounds falls short of community hopes for ensuring children's safety. In the wake of these community meetings, MCC is working with these village schools in developing child protection strategies with rules, regulations and preventative measures applicable to all persons and activities on school premises, while also crafting child welfare reporting procedures that would include a mandate to inform and urge action from community stakeholders.

It will take time to bring this school-based, village-oriented child protection policy into reality, as questions remain about where exactly Cambodian village schools start and end. The fluidity of the schools' jurisdiction cannot be overstated, and is exacerbated by the presence of snack vendors, villagers' grazing cows and leased-out rice fields all within the perimeter of the school grounds.

Child protection efforts in the village are moving forward in order to assist parents who have migrated to find work. By showing up en masse to discuss child protection concerns, extended family networks in the village have made it clear they want support in reducing the risks faced by the villages' children and youth. The push to develop school-based child protection policies has sparked a broader conversation about how to ensure children's well-being throughout the community.

Vincent Stange is education program facilitator for MCC in Cambodia.



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Empowering children in their own protection

While adults are ultimately responsible to keep children safe, young people can also play an active role in contributing to their own protection. As part of its commitment to ensure safe and healthy childhoods and transitions to adulthood, Justice Development and Peace/Caritas (JDPC) is in the forefront of the campaign against all forms of child abuse in Nigeria. In 2014 JDPC, an MCC partner organization, developed a five-year child protection policy to guide its personnel and volunteers in the conduct of their activities and has established a network for child protection in Plateau State in partnership with other civil society organizations.

Learn more

Peace club manuals and curricula from Zambia, South Africa, Kenya, Mozambique and Burundi available at: <http://apcc.mcc.org/home/peace-club-materials>

The Emergency Preparedness and Response Team (EPRT), a program of JDPC, focuses on establishing peace clubs in schools across Plateau State, along with other peacebuilding initiatives focused on dialogue, civic and political education, conflict mediation and conflict prevention through early warning and early response systems. EPRT has observed that the skills students learn in peace clubs are empowering students in ways that are reducing their vulnerability to abuse, even though peace clubs did not start with child protection as their primary purpose.

The primary vision for peace clubs was building a peaceful society through youth leadership training, with school-based peace clubs teaching young people strategies to face a wide array of difficulties or challenges. These strategies include: asking for help when encountering seemingly unsolvable problems; asserting one's agency; determination and continuing to work for resolutions when conflicts get difficult; listening effectively; being creative; taking care of oneself; standing for justice; and being effective and efficient peacebuilders. Secondary school students are also taught how to creatively resist teachers and other adults who may want to cause harm or abuse them sexually or physically.

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EPRT has adapted peace club manuals developed by the Peace Clubs organization, led by Issa Sadie Ebombolo, and MCC Zambia for use in Nigeria, including a module that educates children on gender-based violence and introduces them to practical strategies for addressing it. Strategies of resistance promoted in the peace club curriculum include using persuasive words, body language or behaviors that will disarm the aggressor and create the opportunity to draw the attention of parents, guardians and school or other authorities.

While children should be empowered to protect themselves, adults also have a responsibility to provide safe spaces for children, especially those who have been abused or traumatized. Through its high-profile presence across Plateau State, EPRT provides a system through which children and others can report incidences of sexual abuse, rape or other forms of abuse for onward submission to relevant authorities, thus supporting children in their efforts to protect themselves.

A major achievement of the peace clubs is that members are able to spread their skills by educating their peers in school and others in their homes and communities. Their activities are helping reduce incidences of child abuse which was rampant and growing at an alarming rate in Plateau State. EPRT hopes that the peace club model in Plateau State will help the child protection movement spread to other parts of Nigeria and beyond.

Mahatma Gandhi once said that “If we are to have real peace, we must begin with the children.” The children of the world must be empowered in their own protection, so that society may be free of traumatized children who carry unaddressed burdens from abuse by parents, relations and others. Working diligently at child protection is an essential component in creating a future in which war songs and drums of war are silenced and energies are re-directed from the wasting of selves through killings and destruction to growth and development.

Boniface Kazah Anthony is program manager for the Emergency Preparedness and Response Team (EPRT) department in the Social Justice and Human Development for Peace Initiative (JDPC Jos) in Jos, Nigeria.

Grounding protection in the local context

Child protection efforts must be shaped according to the unique challenges and opportunities of specific contexts. Eastern Europe provides many examples of how contextual realities can both facilitate and hinder the process of accompanying partners in implementing their own child protection policies. In Eastern Europe, the history of communism and socialism has left a legacy of legal frameworks, local regulations and social institutions which govern child protection policies and practices. In this context, one would imagine that these laws and institutions should facilitate the quick and simple adoption of child protection initiatives; however, this very history of imperialism complicates these efforts due community distrust of authorities and top-down policies. A history of authoritarian governance requires MCC to encourage community-driven processes for the adoption of child protection policies.

Most of the places MCC works in Eastern Europe have been the borderlands—areas conquered, claimed and held by many vast foreign empires. These empires have imported and enforced laws and regulations without fully incorporating them into the local culture, traditions or norms. As a result, the peoples of Eastern Europe can view cooperating with the ruling authority as a betrayal to one’s family, neighbors and broader community.

Another challenge is a relatively narrow understanding of protection: many authorities see protection as simply taking children out of harm’s way, without considering the value of prevention, education or sensitization. This may be partly due to lack of knowledge: for example, government departments of social work and police may not know about different types of abuse, especially emotional and psychological abuse. Another factor is simply a lack of resources in the face of many pressing social problems.

Finally, many places in Eastern Europe are dealing with the relatively new transition from a socialist and communist past. This new reality has stripped the well-ordered social organization of the past and left room for corruption, exploitation, unemployment and the erosion of social services and stability. As a result, apathy and conflict have increased. In light of these challenges, MCC East Europe has been conscious of not imposing our agenda from the outside, by allowing for flexibility and grace. At the same time, MCC has also been clear that child protection is a priority that we expect our partners to pursue.

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Working at child protection with partners begins with a series of conversations that take into account different norms and values and different understandings about how those values can be expressed. For example, one common norm in Eastern Europe is that corporal punishment is an appropriate and expected way to discipline children. Some MCC partners are connected to churches that interpret Proverbs 13:24—“Those who spare the rod hate their children, but those who love them are diligent to discipline them” (NRSV)—to reinforce the idea that corporal punishment is required.

While some partners in the region support the use of corporal punishment within certain guidelines, others denounce this form of discipline. The partners who explicitly avoid it have procedures in place for selecting staff, clear guidelines of defining acceptable and inappropriate behavior and have instituted relevant training for staff. These partners emphasize how important it was for them to generate their own procedures and guidelines and caution that standards imposed from outside funders would not be successful in sensitizing people to make a change.

Keeping in mind sensitivity to the local context, there are two possible, though non-exclusive, ways MCC’s partners can participate in effecting social change to establish meaningful protections within their societies. The first way is to integrate with strong local campaigns that include widespread sensitization involving training for police, social workers, teachers, clergy, politicians, parents and children about their role and responsibilities in this system. This model builds upon work done over the past decades in North America. It is not something one person or small group alone can fully implement, but there are some indications that Ukraine may be starting to engage in this sort of process with some assistance from the United Nations.

Another possible approach builds upon the work done by some of MCC’s peacebuilding partners, who work subversively to provoke social change when public leaders and society at large are not already onboard. These partners work on empowering individuals to be engaged citizens who question social problems of nationalism and ethnic division. A similar approach could also be used to increase protections for children, by working with adults and children to explore their values and find ways of interacting in more peaceful ways. This model sees protection not as avoidance of abuse but as building up individuals and communities: not as policing laws, but as empowering strong local people. This model runs counter to the authoritarian past in which a population’s role was to wait for solutions to come down from the top. It is a challenging model, but is also arguably an approach that leads to longer-term, more lasting solutions.

Krystan Pawlikowski is co-representative for MCC East Europe.

Vulnerability and protection in settings of violent conflict

Children in Palestine (here referring to East Jerusalem, the West Bank and the Gaza Strip) are more vulnerable than children who do not live under occupation or in conflict situations. Child protection efforts in Palestine and in other conflict settings should focus not only on safety within the walls of schools and other organizations working with children, but must also provide children support to survive the hostile world beyond and help children heal from the trauma they have already experienced.

Factors that increase Palestinian children’s vulnerability include: military detention and arraignment before military courts; violence at the hands of Israeli soldiers; home demolitions and forced displacement; restricted movement; and compromised access to education, healthcare, housing and play. Whereas Israelis and Israeli settlers fall under civil courts, Palestinian children as young as twelve years old can be prosecuted in Israeli military courts, often for crimes such as stone throwing. According to Military Court Watch, as of the end of February 2016 there were 438 Palestinian children in Israeli military detention as “security” prisoners, the youngest twelve years old. [“Child” here refers to all under the age of 18, following the United Nations definition of child.] The process of arrest, detention, questioning, trial and imprisonment violates Palestinian children’s rights and can leave them traumatized. Palestinian children are often arrested in violent, purposefully intimidating, nighttime raids. They may be physically harmed while being transported and during detention. They are interrogated without an adult present and often see a lawyer for the first time when they appear in the courtroom.

Many Palestinian children, especially in areas with heavy Israeli military or settler presence such as East Jerusalem or Hebron, must daily pass through militarized checkpoint crossings on their way to and from school. Other children in refugee camps around the West Bank experience heavy tear gas exposure from frequent, often unprovoked, incursions of Israeli soldiers into the camps. Clashes between Palestinian youth, who throw stones, and the soldiers who shoot bullets and throw tear gas, sound bombs and stink water often end in injury, death or detainment for Palestinian children and youth.

The United Nations Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs (OCHA) has reported that the demolition of Palestinian homes has dramatically increased in the West Bank in 2016. In February alone 330 people were displaced due to house demolitions, half of whom were children. Home demolition and forced transfer leave families extremely vulnerable, homeless and robbed of savings, possessions and security.

The Lajee Center in Aida Refugee Camp in Bethlehem provides a variety of educational and support programs for children, including: psychosocial support and trauma healing; opportunities to play soccer, learn music and dance dubka, the traditional Palestinian line dance; growing food on rooftop gardens; workshops on children’s and refugee rights; and more. It is a place where children are allowed to play and to dream alongside a community of supportive staff.

Last year Lajee, with support from MCC, trained its staff to work with children to learn about and heal from trauma, including daily trauma

“ Factors that increase Palestinian children’s vulnerability include: military detention and arraignment before military courts; violence at the hands of Israeli soldiers; home demolitions and forced displacement; restricted movement; and compromised access to education, healthcare, housing and play.”



Learn
more

Military Court Watch website:
<http://www.militarycourtwatch.org/>

UN Office for the Coordination
of Humanitarian Affairs (OCHA)
in the Occupied Palestinian
Territories website:
<http://www.ochaopt.org/>

East Jerusalem YMCA website:
[http://www.ej-ymca.org/rehab/
en/who-we-are/our-vision-
mission](http://www.ej-ymca.org/rehab/en/who-we-are/our-vision-mission)

No Way to Treat a Child
Campaign website:
<http://nwtac.dci-palestine.org/>

Lajee Center website:
<http://www.lajee.org/>

Defense for Children
International-Palestine website:
[http://www.dci-palestine.org/
palestinian_children_in_the_
israeli_military_detention_
system](http://www.dci-palestine.org/palestinian_children_in_the_israeli_military_detention_system)

UNICEF booklet on children in
Gaza: [http://www.unicef.org/oPt/
booklet.pdf](http://www.unicef.org/oPt/booklet.pdf)

Gideon Levy, "Israel Sentenced
a 13-Year-Old Girl to Prison,"
Haaretz (April 14, 2016).
Available at: [http://www.haaretz.
com/opinion/.premium-1.714478](http://www.haaretz.com/opinion/.premium-1.714478)

caused by the occupation. Lajee staff then asked the children about trauma in their own lives and even possible traumas or problems they were experiencing at Lajee. Based on this experience Lajee realized that children must be able to heal from trauma and get help in any situation and decided to join a pilot project with the organization Defense for Children International, Palestine (DCI). This project, implemented with 70 organizations in 12 cities across Gaza and the West Bank, including East Jerusalem, was designed to help organizations provide increased protection for their participants, both within their programs and within the children's families, schools and communities.

Each organization chose six to eight children to be trained as liaisons, mediators, advocates and mentors for their peers. These children and a few staff learned how to respond to concerns. For example, if one of their fellow participants at the Lajee Center comes to them with an issue that involves the staff or members of the Center, they should report the issue to another local area organization that participates in the project, or, in serious cases, alert DCI itself to be able to step in with more professional capacity and provide support for the child.

The trained children also help the other children learn about their rights and ways they can protect themselves from the occupation, including how to get themselves a lawyer if they are detained or arrested by Israeli forces.

The DCI project is very important because it is not common for Palestinians to accept and discuss their trauma. Often children do not want to talk with adults about trauma or problems, but they are more able to share their experiences with other children. In Aida camp one of the Lajee Center's trained children recently helped a fellow student who was being hit by a teacher at school. The child alerted DCI and was able to make sure that the teacher, who had been physically punishing children for years, was fired and not allowed back into any other schools to teach.

One challenge encountered by the Lajee-DCI initiative is that, even though children are often more willing to talk to one another about problems, many are still inclined to hide their troubles. Children also fear repercussions for speaking or standing up for themselves. This is especially true for those who have been arrested by the Israeli army because they are afraid of being detained again or that the threats made against them while they were detained will come true. The Lajee Center wants to give the children the space to speak about their traumas, but the children fear it will cause them more harm from Israeli soldiers.

The Lajee Center believes that participating in the DCI project offers children an outlet to express concerns, fears or problems within Lajee. Participation in the DCI initiative has resulted in children who attend Lajee being more open about their feelings and their opinions about the center, which in turn helps Lajee learn ways to better serve and protect these children.

Efforts to protect children in school and informal educational programs in Palestine must be supplemented by legal and political advocacy against military detention, violence and torture faced by Palestinian children. Military Court Watch, for example, acts as a witnessing presence for children in Israeli military detention and, when necessary, litigates to uphold children's rights under international law. The No Way to Treat a Child campaign calls on the United States to put all available pressure

on Israel to stop its abuses against children in Israeli military courts and prisons. MCC's advocacy office in Washington, D.C. has supported this campaign, calling on MCC's constituency to urge members of Congress to curb Israeli violations of Palestinian children's human rights.

Child protection efforts in Palestine must thus respond to the increased vulnerability of living under Israeli occupation. In this context, MCC partners are attempting to provide more hope, healing and protection for Palestinian children through social and educational programs, psychosocial support, legal protection and international advocacy campaigns.

Amani Ashad works for Lajee Center, an MCC partner. She wrote this article with Catherine Keating, a former MCC worker.

Corporal punishment and “positive discipline”

Part one (by Claire de Brun)

Multiple studies have shown that corporal punishment is injurious to students, teachers, schools and the community at large, yet many teachers fear giving it up as it is the only form of control they know. Helping teachers move toward a non-violent, positive approach to discipline is good for everyone, but takes time, hard work, determination and patience.

In 2013 we spent a year at Maphutseng Primary School in Lesotho, working with the MCC pilot project to move from corporal punishment (CP) to positive discipline (PD). We found four important ingredients that helped teachers make this shift:

- Taking time to build trust and “walk alongside” teachers;
- Helping teachers understand the negative effects of CP;
- Empowering teachers with alternative strategies for responding to inappropriate student behavior and establishing a positive classroom culture;
- Equipping teachers with more effective instructional techniques that prevent misbehavior by engaging students more successfully in learning.

In settings where CP is widely accepted and practiced, it is imperative to establish a climate of trust and openness in order to have a meaningful conversation about change. It takes time to create trust with teachers and a safe place where issues can be discussed, change can be challenged and fears and doubts can be expressed. We worked with teachers at Maphutseng for months to develop this trust. The keys were partnering with the school, leadership and vision from the school principal and bonding with the faculty (respecting, observing and listening to them and showing an understanding of the issues in their world).

One sign that teachers feel safe is when they honestly share their struggles and failures. At one meeting a teacher shared that she had thrown her punishment stick away and had been working hard to implement PD, but one day she became very angry with her students and in frustration she stormed out of the room to find another stick. When she returned the

“Corporal punishment cannot be eliminated by simply writing it into the school policy manual. Change is born from the passionate care of adults who understand the harm corporal punishment can cause.”

children were singing quietly as they waited for their punishment. She was moved to tears, threw the stick to the ground and sang with her students instead.

Corporal punishment cannot be eliminated by simply writing it into the school policy manual. Change is born from the passionate care of adults who understand the harm CP can cause children, adults who are moved to make a commitment to non-violence toward children and to respect their dignity. Change comes from talking about the harmful effects of corporal punishment, including its crushing of students' spirits and a stifling of students' desire to learn. We spent a great deal of time listening to the teachers, having open discussions and presenting research on the negative effects of corporal punishment.

To be sustainable, child protection policies must be embraced by teachers and parents. Most parents and teachers want to be seen as protectors of children. Many still use CP because they do not know another way to control students. Teachers with whom we worked were open to hearing alternative ways to deal with behavior and class management, but it was a journey for educators who desired to move from a strictly authoritarian teacher model to a shepherding one.

While CP is a violent and retributive reaction to inappropriate behavior, positive discipline is a non-violent, restorative response. PD also includes positive strategies for prevention and, when used consistently and appropriately, is highly effective. It is critical in PD that educators believe that the child who behaves badly is not inherently "bad." PD allows the educator to focus on restorative, not retributive, goals, understand the causes behind the children's behavior and hold students accountable for their actions with non-violent consequences rather than physical punishment.

Numerous PD alternatives to CP exist that teachers can use to restore and guide students rather than punish them (see, for example, the writings and videos of Doug Lemov and Harry Wong). PD is not only a method of responding to misbehavior—it is equally important to prevent misbehavior by establishing a positive classroom culture from the beginning. Procedures, expectations and consequences for not following the rules need to be made clear to learners. Specific praise, encouragement and affirmation are also key ingredients for positive classroom culture and are good deterrents for unacceptable behavior.

The most important lesson from our experience was that for educators to be in control of their classes they must use effective teaching methods first. When students are bored, confused or feeling incapable of learning they are more likely to misbehave, but when they are truly engaged in learning and feeling successful discipline issues are reduced.

There are of course very real challenges to effective classroom management, including large classes and a lack of books and other educational resources. Such challenges must be addressed to help teachers and students be more successful. However, even with those challenges, an intentional two-pronged strategy of implementing best-practice teaching strategies and introducing PD techniques can create more effective classrooms in which learning can take place without CP.

“ Positive discipline allows the educator to focus on restorative, not retributive, goals, understand the causes behind the behavior and hold students accountable for their actions with non-violent consequences rather than physical punishment.”

When PD is implemented, it leads to a more caring classroom environment and less anger. Teachers feel more empowered with a relational, restorative approach to their students based on respect, not fear. But this change is not easy: the race to stop CP is a marathon, not a sprint, and necessitates that teachers have a safe space to discuss challenges and receive specific training in PD and encouragement for their efforts.

Part two (Me MaLindle Mantle)

In 2011 our school, Maphutseng LECSA Primary, was identified as one of the pilot schools for the Child Friendly School (CFS) project. Pillars of the CFS project include safety, protection and psycho-social care and support. Positive discipline practice is one of the components of this pillar.

In 2013 when we desperately needed assistance, MCC nominated Claire and Harlan de Brun to spend a year at Maphutseng to introduce the strategies and methods of positive discipline in our school. The de Bruns organized meetings and school-based workshops to equip our teachers with various classroom management techniques to use in different situations. They also visited teachers in their respective classrooms to help implement the strategies, provide guidance and encouragement and practice patience with the process.

The teachers visited other schools that already practiced positive discipline such as The Leseli Community School in Maseru and Samuel Johnson Secondary School in Zastron. Our school in Maphutseng reciprocated and hosted the principal and several teachers from the Samuel Johnson School later that year. It was during these visits that we learned from other educators how successful they have been in administering positive disciplinary measures in their schools. We learned how records of misconduct are documented and kept for each class so that educators are able to monitor student progress and report to parents and school boards.

Thanks to MCC support, I attended a three-day parenting conference with the de Bruns. Then together we disseminated this knowledge to educators and parents in Maphutseng by conducting two all-day seminars. This training was also extended to the villagers in the seven surrounding villages in Maphutseng. The seminars helped both teachers and parents to realize how important it is for us as adults to conduct ourselves as good role models for our children. The training equipped us with skills and knowledge to nurture children so that they develop self-discipline in the long run.

We also had a large group talk with learners about the concept of a child friendly school and acceptable behavior and practices that they are expected to display in their daily studies and other activities. Claire gave reading lessons in some classes and taught composition. During her lessons she demonstrated various techniques that can be used to call learners into order. Harlan visited and modeled positive discipline and appropriate teaching methods with math, history and reading lessons.

At two different points in time learners and teachers completed questionnaires that helped gather information to see how we teachers were progressing in implementing positive discipline measures. These surveys assisted us in identifying what issues needed to be addressed and what strategies to implement to help teachers deal with those identified areas of concern.

“ Positive discipline helps us to focus on behavior rather than on viewing the child as ‘bad.’”



Lemov, Doug. *Teach Like a Champion 2.0: 62 Techniques that Put Students on the Path to College*. San Francisco: Jossey-Bass, 2014.

Wong, Harry K. *The First Days of School: How to Be an Effective Teacher*. Mountain View, CA: Harry K. Wong Publications, 2009.

We work hard to promote positive discipline in our school because we have learned that corporal punishment promotes animosity between educators and learners. Learners tend to lose trust and respect for their teachers when they are disciplined with corporal punishment. Now we look at misconduct displayed by learners with a different eye. We know what steps to take when we come across such challenges. Positive discipline helps us to focus on behavior rather than on viewing the child as “bad.” We work on changing students’ behaviors to help them grow as learners.

Children who are physically and emotionally abused become abusive and stubborn in turn. They do not have self-respect and as a result they do not respect others. Children are looking up to us for their protection and if we fail to love and protect them they get frustrated and become depressed, leading to failure in their studies and their future lives. However, the change is not easy. There are still challenges for both teachers and parents, including the risk of losing hope when a child repeatedly displays unacceptable behaviors. There are times when the adults think that a stick will prepare the child to be a more responsible being. We still educate one another and encourage one another to always opt for positive discipline regardless of challenges.

Claire de Brun taught school in the United States and Lesotho for thirty years and served with MCC in Lesotho. Me MaLintle Mantutle is principal of the LEC Maphutseng Primary School, which was awarded Child Friendly status under her leadership.

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