

# Faith Leaders and Communities are Important First Responders to Violence Against Children During the COVID-19 Pandemic



“Religious communities are uniquely positioned to prevent and respond to violence against children. There is strong consensus [agreement] across religious traditions about the dignity [value] of every child and the need to protect children from different forms of violence. The inherent [natural] rights of the child are present in the teachings and traditions of the world’s major religions.”<sup>1</sup>

## Here are FIVE WAYS faith leaders and communities can protect children from violence.



### Listen to children and find ways for them to participate.

It is important to protect children, but it is also important to listen to them and respect their independence and rights. Children feel valued when adults involve them in religious life and help them participate in their religious community. It is equally necessary to make sure that all children and adolescents can help make decisions, even the ones who are often excluded.



### Support and link the community to resources.

Religious leaders, including women and youth leaders, can link people to resources, including ensuring children can access education while schools are closed. They are around when others may have left and can encourage parents and those who care for others to take care of themselves and their children. They can help people understand how to confront violence in their homes and support communities through different stages of life.



### Enhance community capacity to effectively report and refer cases of child abuse.

Interpret child protection principles in a way that is meaningful and appropriate to their communities in order to increase awareness. Faith communities and religious leaders offer unique value reporting and referring cases of child abuse and educating communities on how they can get help.

<sup>1</sup> Religions for Peace and UNICEF. “From Commitment to Action: What Religious Communities Can Do to Eliminate Violence Against Children.” (2010).



Islamic Relief Worldwide

A third of the global population is on COVID-19 lockdown, and school closures have impacted more than 1.5 billion children. Movement restrictions, loss of income, isolation, overcrowding and high levels of stress and anxiety are increasing the likelihood that children experience and observe physical, psychological and sexual abuse at home – particularly those children already living in violent or dysfunctional family situations.<sup>2</sup>

2. Leaders call for action to protect children during COVID-19. <https://www.end-violence.org/articles/leaders-call-action-protect-children-during-covid-19-now-7-languages>



## Provide important psychosocial and spiritual support to strengthen a child’s resilience during the pandemic.

Religious practices, networks and places can have an impact on the development of the individual and collective identity and spirituality of children. Faith and religion can help people to reframe negative life events in order to cope with them more effectively. For example, turning to prayer, religion, or spiritual feelings to cope with stress. Religious leaders and faith communities can help guide people to understand how to find peace and calm. They also provide mental health and psychosocial support often through counseling and psychological first aid. These actions can help stop violence against others.



## Bridge the gap between the wider community’s formal and informal child protection systems.

Religious leaders and faith communities can help bridge the gap between national policies and grassroots practice. They can share accurate advice and validate information from public health officials. Advocate for national and local COVID-19 prevention and response plans that integrate age-appropriate and gender-sensitive measures. In particular, youth can play key roles in spreading important messages and mobilizing the community, e.g. through the use of technology. Secular and faith leaders need to collaborate to develop comprehensive, multisectoral responses that build trust and improve safeguarding approaches that act before harm occurs.



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## JLI Ending Violence Against Children Learning Hub



\*This brief is based on findings from the 2019 JLI Ending Violence Against Children Hub Scoping Study "Scoping Study on Faith actors' involvement in the prevention, elimination and perpetuation of violence against children"