

TOOLKIT

Nurturing the Spiritual Development of Children in the Early Years

A Contribution to the Protection
of Children from Violence and the
Promotion of Their Holistic Well-Being

BOOKLET II

Learning Program for Adults

CONSORTIUM

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

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for the Prevention of Violence



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Booklet II

Learning Program for Adults

Booklet II presents the suggested Learning Program for parents, caregivers, and educators — and faith actors who will facilitate the work with those groups — and other adults with an interest in fostering the spiritual development of children in the early years. It is based on the Conceptual Framework of the Toolkit and comprises three modules with a total of ten sessions, each of which includes two to four activities. The sessions for adults can be conducted in either of two ways: by a trainer with a group of facilitators who will then work directly with parents, caregivers and educators, or by facilitators working directly with a group of parents, caregivers and educators. The activities include tips for customizing for different types of participants, as well as references to materials such as the Flipbook, which are used during the sessions.

This booklet is part of a series of 7 Booklets that together form the Toolkit “Nurturing the Spiritual Development of Children in the Early Years — A Contribution to the Protection of Children from Violence and the Promotion of Their Holistic Well-Being.”

Make sure to refer to the Conceptual Framework in Booklet I, as it contains important information that will strengthen your understanding of the topics and provide more substance for the customization of activities.

While the Learning Program for Adults may be used independently, it is recommended that they be integrated as part of an existing program — whether for trainers, facilitators, or parents, caregivers, or educators participating in sessions on parenting or ECD. Please refer to the respective booklets when developing your own programs.

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Introduction

This booklet provides the suggested Learning Program for parents, caregivers and educators and faith actors that will be facilitating the program with these groups who are interested in fostering the spiritual development of children in the early years, based on the Conceptual Framework of the Toolkit presented in Booklet I.

The Learning Program for Adults is comprised of three modules, which are each built on a premise.

Module 1: Importance of Children’s Spiritual Development for the Protection of Children from Violence and for the Promotion of Their Holistic Well-Being

Premise 1: Each adult involved in supporting the spiritual development of children, either as a facilitator, educator, parent or caregiver, needs to be equipped to understand and internalize why spiritual development is critical for children’s holistic development and well-being, and how it contributes to the protection of children from violence in early childhood.

Module 2: Nurturing One’s Own Spiritual Development

Premise 2: Nurturing the spiritual development of children requires that adults work on their own spiritual development.

Module 3: Conditions for Nurturing the Spiritual Development of Children in the Early Years

Premise 3: Children’s spiritual capacities are fostered and flourish by promoting positive and nurturing relations with caregivers; creating an environment for children that is safe, free of violence and empowering; and creating opportunities and experiences for children to develop prosocial behaviors and nurture ethical values and reflections that allow them to connect with themselves and others in empathic and respectful ways, and develop their sense of belonging, community, purpose and interconnectedness with others.

The modules include learning objectives that are adapted for either training facilitators (See Booklet V, Guide for Trainers) or for working with parents, caregivers and educators (See Booklet VI, Guide for Facilitators). Each module is complemented by suggested activities for trainers and facilitators to use with the adults they are working with (found here in Booklet II), or for parents, caregivers and educators to use with children (found in Booklet III). The Activities for Children are categorized for three different age groups — 0-3, 3-5 and 5-8 years old — with some overlap in age built in to allow for flexibility. Tips are provided for further tailoring for the diverse needs of children of different ages, and for group settings.

The Learning Program for Adults is based on methodologies that support reflection, dialogue, experience and internalization, leading to action.

An overview of the modules, learning objectives and activities is presented below. Full details about how to implement the sessions are in Booklet V - Guide for Trainers, and Booklet VI - Guide for Facilitators.

Module 1: Importance of Children’s Spiritual Development for the Protection of Children from Violence and for the Promotion of Their Holistic Well-Being

Module 1 provides participants with an overview and understanding of how the spiritual development of children in the early years supports their holistic well-being and contributes to the protection of children from violence.

Module 1 includes two sessions with learning objectives and corresponding activities (found here in Booklet II).

SESSION	LEARNING OBJECTIVES At the end of the session participants will be able to:	ACTIVITIES
Session 1. Child Dignity and Child Rights	<p>Analyze child rights and the Convention on the Rights of the Child and name methods of securing an environment that enables the realization, protection and development of children’s rights and dignity in order to ensure their holistic well-being and spiritual development.</p> <p>Identify and reflect on the importance of the dignity of the child as a fundamental principle found in all religious and spiritual traditions, and understand how religious and spiritual traditions can help with protecting and affirming children’s dignity.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> › P.17 The Sacredness of Life: Upholding Children’s Dignity › P.19 Discovering and Exploring Child Rights › P.22. Children in Action: Contributing to Children’s Agency
Session 2. Early Childhood and the Holistic Development and Well-Being of Children	<p>Identify the critical importance of the early years for the development of children and for their spiritual and holistic well-being.</p> <p>Describe the different aspects of holistic development and well-being and the central role that the spiritual development of children plays in their holistic development.</p> <p>Identify the role of parents, caregivers, educators and the community.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> › P. 24 The Critical Importance of the Early Years › P. 27 The Holistic Development and Well-Being of Children › P. 30 Holding the Lives of Children in Our Hands

SESSION	LEARNING OBJECTIVES At the end of the session participants will be able to:	ACTIVITIES
Session 3. Spiritual Development of Children	Understand the spiritual development of children, why it is important, and how it contributes to children's well-being.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> › P. 32 Moving Beyond › P. 36 Why Is Spiritual Development So Important? › P. 38 Nurturing Seeds
Session 4. Violence against Children	<p>Analyze the types of violence that children face and how those affect children's holistic development and well-being.</p> <p>Identify how fostering children's spiritual development contributes to the protection of children from violence and their holistic well-being.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> › P. 40 Protecting Children from Violence › P. 44 Violence Against Children: Prevention and Protection › P. 46 Violence Affecting Children – Using Role Playing

More details on spiritual development in early childhood and the protection of children from violence can be found in Booklet I of this Toolkit.

Module 2: Nurturing One's Own Spirituality

Adults' own spiritual development is a contributing and crucial factor in promoting children's well-being. To be able to support children in their spiritual development, adults need to take time and create spaces to connect with their inner selves, reflect on their relations with others, connect with the transcendent in their lives and with nature and that that sustains life. These spaces can help adults to enhance their ability to listen and empathize with children, respond positively to children's demands and needs, and understand the impact of their words, behaviors, and actions on children's well-being.

As adults give time and space for this essential facet of their lives, they will also be setting an example for all the children around them.

Module 2 includes two sessions with learning objectives and corresponding activities (found here in Booklet II).

SESSION / SUPPORT	LEARNING OBJECTIVES At the end of the session participants will be able to:	ACTIVITIES
Session 5. My Understanding of Spirituality	<p>Explore and reflect on their own understanding of spirituality, and the practices and factors that foster its development.</p> <p>Identify how their own religious and spiritual beliefs and practices contribute to their spiritual development.</p> <p>Show a greater understanding of different religious and spiritual beliefs and new insight into their own and others' spirituality.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> › P. 50 Exploring My Spirituality and Spiritual Well-Being › P. 53 Exploring My Spirituality Through Religion › P. 55 Interreligious Visits
Session 6. My Spiritual Well-Being	<p>Identify how, by fostering their own spiritual well-being, adults can enhance their parenting practices and relationships with children, foster positive environments and experiences for children, and contribute to their well-being.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> › P. 57 Encouraging the Heart and Creating a Spiritual Space › P. 59 Learning How to Handle Emotions in Parenting › P. 61 Religion, Ethics and Well-Being

Module 3: Conditions for Nurturing the Spiritual Development of Children in the Early Years

Fostering children's spiritual development involves creating a supportive environment for children and providing opportunities that enable them to safely pursue and nourish their own spirituality. The child's learning process begins even before birth and develops in **relationships with caregivers**, through the **environment** they live in, and through the **experiences** that they go through and that are offered to them. These three areas are interrelated and together form the basis for building a sound spiritual foundation for children's holistic development and ensuring a childhood free from psychological and physical violence.

Module 3 is organized in three parts. Part 1 has only one session — "Introducing Module 3" — which is for trainers to do only with facilitators-in-training; it focuses on the relevance of Module 3 and how to work through it with parents, caregivers and educators. Part 2 consists of sessions 7, 8, and 9, and it is for all participants. These sessions cover positive relationships between parents, caregivers, educators and children; environments that are respectful, safe, and violence-free; and empowering experiences. Part 3 consists of session 10, which is also for all participants. It introduces the Activities for Children provided in Booklet III.

This module allows for reflection and understanding of the factors that can either hinder or foster children’s spiritual development and holistic well-being, and it provides practical tools for developing the skills needed to support the spiritual development of young children.

All of the sessions of Module 3 include activities (found here in Booklet II). The suggested activities provide a practical understanding of how to foster the spiritual development of children and offer skills and tools for supporting children.

SESSION	LEARNING OBJECTIVES At the end of the session participants will be able to:	ACTIVITIES
Session: Introducing Module 3. (for Trainers to Do with Facilitators-in-Training Only)	Demonstrate understanding of the conditions for nurturing the spiritual development of children and articulate how they are critical for the unfolding of spiritual development and the nurturing of spiritual capacities in children.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> › P. 65 Conditions for Nurturing the Spiritual Development of Children in the Early Years
Session 7. Nurturing Positive Relationships between Parents, Caregivers, Educators and Children	Identify the benefits of positive and respectful relationships between parents, caregivers, educators and children. Identify concrete ways to build positive relationships with children that support their well-being and spiritual development. Show awareness of the importance of modeling values and behaviors that benefit children through example.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> › P. 67 Why Are Play and One-on-One Time So Important? › P. 69 Building Positive Relationships › P. 72 Being a Role Model
Session 8. Safe Environments	Identify the factors that either hinder or support the creation of environments for children that are safe, respectful and free of violence to enable their spiritual development. Describe how the family and community, including religious and spiritual communities, contribute to children’s spiritual well-being. Explore and understand children’s rights and name methods of securing an environment that enables the realization, protection and development of children’s rights and dignity in order to ensure their holistic well-being and spiritual development.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> › P. 74 How to Create Environments That Are Safe, Respectful and Free of Violence › P. 76 It Takes a Village to Raise a Child – The Role of Religious and Spiritual Communities in Fostering Spiritual Development in Children › P. 78 Creating Safe Spaces for Children

SESSION	LEARNING OBJECTIVES At the end of the session participants will be able to:	ACTIVITIES
Session 9. Empowering Experiences	Identify what experiences enhance children’s ability to develop prosocial behaviors, ethical values and capacity for reflection.	› P. 81 Appreciating Diversity
	Describe and understand the importance of using play to nurture children’s spiritual development, and how you can do it.	› P. 83 Protecting and Connecting with Mother Earth
	Analyze how the experiences children go through support them in developing their agency and sense of belonging, community, purpose and interconnectedness with others.	› P. 85 Nurturing a Playful Spirit
Session 10. Exploring the Activities for Children	Demonstrate familiarity with the Activities for Children and how to use them.	› P. 87 Introducing the Activities for Children
	Identify and reflect upon diverse spiritual capacities.	› P. 89 Discovering the Spiritual Capacities

Tips to reinforce learning

This Learning Program for Adults is complemented by several pauses that are carried out throughout to inspire participating adults — trainers, facilitators, parents, caregivers or educators — to nurture their own spiritual well-being.

TYPE OF PAUSE	PURPOSE	RESOURCES
Ongoing – Use of Learning Log	Provide a tool for individual reflection and introspection on the role of adults in the spiritual development of children.	› Refer to Booklets V and VI for further guidance.
Ongoing – Meditation/Prayer and Silence	Provide spaces throughout the program for each participant to disconnect from the worries of the day and connect with self.	› Refer to Booklets V and VI for further guidance.
Learning Circles	Foster dialogue and sharing about practical ways to support the spiritual development of children. Learning circles can take place at the end of each module or as part of one of the sessions.	› Refer to Booklets V and VI for further guidance. › References are also given in some of the activities here in Booklet II on how to organize learning circles.

Guidance and Considerations for Implementation

General considerations as you explore this booklet

- It is recommended to follow the modules and sessions as proposed; however, there is flexibility in selecting the order of the sessions and activities you find most appropriate for the context and group you are working with.
- Even though specific activities are proposed, you are welcome to use others that, based on your experience, will work just as well to address the topic at hand.
- The time you spend on each activity will depend on the size of the group and local constraints. Below you will find some recommendations and guidance regarding time management.
- Some activities may be implemented via home visits. Guidance is provided below on how to do this.
- The instructions for the activities generally assume that participants are parents or caregivers. However, trainers using the activities should feel free to customize the instructions when they are working with facilitators, educators, or with other groups of adults who are not all themselves parents or caregivers.

Adapting the Activities for an Online Setting

Most of the activities in the Learning Program for Adults can be adapted for an online setting, though it is recommended that, where possible, the sessions are conducted in person.



For sessions to be conducted online, make sure that all participants have access to a stable internet connection and ideally a laptop instead of a phone, as some functions may not work when using a phone. It is recommended to provide a variety of materials and online tools and diversity in activities to keep the participants engaged and to make the experience as enjoyable as possible. Below are a few tips to support trainers and facilitators in planning online sessions.

Start with dynamic and engaging ice-breaker activities

Conducting sessions online can be dynamic and fun! If participants are meeting for the first time online, try to use an ice-breaker activity to ensure everyone gets to know each other and feels comfortable participating. Some suggestions are:

- **“Show & Tell”:** Some participants may be familiar with this game, as it is a common preschool activity. Give everyone in the group one minute to find an object from their environment and then to share what it is and why they chose it with the group.
- **My Hopes:** Using an online tool such as Jamboard (see below for further details) ask participants to add something that they hope to learn from this training.
- **Drawing Freely:** Ask participants to find a piece of paper and pencil. Give everyone one minute to draw something that describes them. Ask everyone to show their drawings and to explain what they did.

Use the “Breakout Rooms” function

If you are facilitating a session with more than five participants, using breakout rooms is a great way to ensure everyone can participate and to deepen conversation. When returning to the plenary session, ask each group to share what they talked about in the breakout rooms. You might give each breakout group a different question to discuss and then ask them to share about their discussion with the rest of the group.

Include different online tools in the meeting

There are many different online tools available that can be shared with participants so that they can contribute to the sessions in more ways than verbally. You could try using:

- The chat box function: It might seem simple, but use the chat box function! You can ask simple questions with one-word answers, and request that participants add this into the chat box for a change in delivery.
- Google Jamboard (<https://jamboard.google.com>): Create the Jamboard in advance, change the settings so anyone can edit your slides, and then share the link in your meeting chat box or via email. Participants can add their inputs on virtual post-it notes and comments. This is also a great way to review the session after it is finished.
- YouTube videos (<https://youtube.com>): Some of the activities require physical experiences, such as taking a walk in nature. If this isn’t possible, replace the outside experience with a virtual one. Find a calming nature video on YouTube, ask participants to sit in a quiet place with headphones on, and to imagine they are in nature for five minutes. Make sure it doesn’t portray any biases and is sensitive to the group you have in front of you.
- MentiMeter (<https://mentimeter.com/>): This tool helps to collect the opinions of participants anonymously. As with Jamboard, share the link in your meeting chat box or via email, and ask participants to add their answers. You can share the MentiMeter screen so that participants can see what other people are adding, too.
- Kahoot! (<https://kahoot.com>): Create an online virtual quiz to test participants’ knowledge before or after a session. For example, in Module 1 on child rights, you could see how much the participants know about the Convention on Child Rights before you start!

Customizing Frequency, Intensity and Duration to Local Context

The Toolkit consists of two basic pathways for implementation: The Learning Program for Adults, which is designed for training facilitators on how to implement sessions with parents, caregivers and educators; and the Activities for Children, which are meant to be implemented by parents, caregivers and educators to nurture the spiritual development of their children.

What is the frequency, duration and intensity needed to effect change?

A meta-analysis of parenting programs found that to achieve outcomes, a 12-month duration was needed, and programs lasting over two years had more consistent effect on child outcomes.¹ Other studies of programs that specifically aimed to improve parenting practices and reduce violence found that programs needed to be 11-14 sessions long and run for about two hours each in order to change people's behavior.² On the other hand, low dosage programs — meaning low frequency, low duration and low intensity (example: programs with 1 to 9 sessions) — had no impact on child outcomes.³ Longitudinal studies of programs showed that sessions/engagement need to occur at least once a week in frequency.⁴

For this reason, each session in Booklets V and VI, Guide for Facilitators, is designed to last 90 to 120 minutes and to be conducted, ideally, weekly. However, sessions may also be conducted at different intervals, or with a shortened duration spread over longer time periods, as needed to address contextual factors or fit into existing programs. In the event that participants need a session of only 60 minutes, consider dividing each session into two. This would allow for sessions that are shorter and less intense. This strategy may be particularly useful for participants with very young children, so that children are not separated from their caregivers for lengthy periods of time. When separating sessions into two, conduct the sessions according to the descriptions in the Guide for Facilitators.

Each of the children's activities in Booklet III is designed to last about 30 minutes. Depending on the children's ages and concentration levels, this can be extended, or shortened, by dividing the sessions in two.

Home Visits

The Learning Program for Adults can be adapted for implementation via home visits, ideally as part of existing programs. Home visits are periodic visits to the home, featuring one-on-one interactions between facilitators and parents/caregivers.

During these visits, the facilitator visiting the home engages with the parents and caregivers (and oftentimes other household members) around caregiving practices. It is recommended, as much as possible, to integrate the activities for parents and caregivers in this program into already programmed visits related to other aspects of child development. Decades of work have shown that home visits have one of the most powerful impacts in bringing about long-term change in a child's life.⁵

Additional benefits of home visits include allowing for a chance to understand the home environment, caregiver mental health and well-being, and assess the need for linkage to other services and resources.

The Guide for Facilitators includes guidance about how sessions can be conducted with a group of local parents and caregivers. However, the activities in each session can also easily be utilized in one-on-one interactions during home visits. Print the visual Flipbook, to serve as a conversation aid in your visits to households. Focus on engaging the primary caregiver of the child, but also welcome all other members of the home environment who wish to participate in your visits. Encourage elders or authority figures in the household, who may set standards of behavior, to participate.

If your organization chooses to do home visits – a standard mechanism in ECD or parenting programs – be sure to conduct a solid training program with the facilitators who will conduct the visits. In your training, familiarize them with what they should cover in each session, how to interact with community members, and how to accompany and support parents and caregivers as they expand their capacity to nurture children's spiritual development. Highly trained, well-prepared home visitors can have a significant impact.

Activities

For trainers, facilitators, parents,
caregivers and educators

Module 1

Importance of Children's Spiritual Development
for the Protection of Children from Violence and
for the Promotion of Their Holistic Well-Being

Session 1

Child Dignity and Child Rights

ACTIVITY 1

The Sacredness of Life: Upholding Children’s dignity

 OBJECTIVES	Identify and reflect on the importance of the dignity of the child as a fundamental principle found in all religions and how religious traditions can help protecting and affirming children’s dignity.
 MATERIALS AND PREPARATION	Flipchart, markers in different colors, Flipbook cards on “The Dignity of the Child” and “Child Rights”
 HOW YOU CAN DO IT:	<ol style="list-style-type: none">1. Welcome participants to the session and explain its objective. Create a calm atmosphere for the session; you can use music, play an instrument or invite participants to play.2. Share that the respect for human life and dignity of the child, as expressed in the Convention on the Rights of the Child, is a fundamental principle found in all major religions and spiritual traditions. Share a sacred scripture/theological reflection where this is showcased (check the Consortium website for some examples).⁶ Make sure to be inclusive of all participants’ religions when selecting the scriptures/theological reflection.3. Invite participants to:<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Share other scriptures/theological reflections they recall that uphold children’s dignity, life and protection.• Reflect on how diverse religions and spiritual traditions see the child and what their guiding principles are when it comes to how they should be treated.4. Ask participants: What kind of activities, practices and rituals from your religious or spiritual tradition support creating safe environments for children, where their rights are protected and their dignity is affirmed? See if beliefs or practices are mentioned that participants can reflect about in small groups, and then share about their discussions with the larger group.5. Conclude the session by sharing the following with the participants:<p>Respect for the human life and dignity of the child is a fundamental principle found in all major religions and spiritual traditions. The belief that all human beings, including children, deserve to be respected and treated with dignity — without discrimination on the basis of race, ethnicity, ancestry, gender, socioeconomic status or other status — exists across traditions.</p>

The dignity of the child is inherent, intrinsic and sacred. It is not dependent on the child's age, sex, mental or physical development, or any other factor. This calls adults to treat children with the utmost reverence and love, to express this in interactions with them and in the care, respect and nurturing provided for their sound and holistic development.

The inherent dignity of the child is also embedded in the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child (CRC), which recognizes children as individuals in their own right.



RECOMMENDATIONS FOR TRAINERS

Invite Facilitators to...



Read: The section in Booklet I on "The dignity of the child and child's rights"



Check: The resources available on the Consortium website



Reflect: How would you do this activity with parents, caregivers and educators? How can you support parents, caregivers and educators so they can understand why the dignity of the child is so important?

Session 1

Child Dignity and Child Rights

ACTIVITY 2

Discovering and Exploring Child Rights

 OBJECTIVES	Analyze children’s rights and name methods of securing an environment that enables the realization, protection and development of children’s rights and dignity in order to ensure their holistic well-being and support their spiritual development.
 MATERIALS AND PREPARATION	Video on the Convention on the Rights of the Child (https://youtu.be/6F7ie1Z07aM), paper, markers in different colors, text of the Convention on the Rights of the Child (https://www.unicef.org/child-rights-convention), Flipbook cards on “The Dignity of the Child” and “Child Rights”
 HOW YOU CAN DO IT:	<ol style="list-style-type: none">1. Start the session with a short, animated video connected to Child Rights. You can use the video that is provided in the link above. Once it finishes, share with participants what the session is about.2. Introduce participants to the Convention on the Rights of the Child (CRC): What it is and what makes it so special, why it was developed, and how it is relevant for parents and caregivers to learn about it.3. Explain that the CRC establishes that States Parties (national governments) must ensure that: all children — without discrimination in any form — benefit from special protection measures and assistance, including protection from all forms of violence; have access to services such as education and health care; can develop their personalities, abilities and talents to their fullest potential; grow up in an environment of happiness, love and understanding; and are informed about their rights and have access to opportunities to participate actively in securing them.4. Organize participants in groups of 3-5 each. Give each group a flipchart sheet and each participant a printed version of the Convention on the Rights of the Child. <p>Share the following instructions:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Explore the Convention on the Rights of the Child.• Draw a house and add any details — people or objects you find relevant — and place inside it the rights that children have and that you think are very important from your perspective. You can represent them in words, using the numbers, or drawings.

Make sure that in each group there is someone with a good literacy level that can write and that everyone contributes with ideas and drawings.

Give an example: on the roof of the house you can add Article 24. Read it: Children have the right to the best health care possible, clean water to drink, healthy food and a clean and safe environment to live in. All adults and children should have information about how to stay safe and healthy.

5. Bring small groups back together in the main group, and let participants share about their houses and take note of the rights they have identified. Ask them to explain why they chose the ones they did.

Explain that, even though the point of the exercise was to identify some important rights from their own point of view, Article 2 underlines that all children have all these rights, no matter who they are, where they live, what language they speak, what their religion is, what they think, what they look like, if they are a boy or girl, if they have a disability, if they are rich or poor, and no matter who their parents or families are or what their parents or families believe or do. No child should be treated unfairly for any reason.

6. Conclude the session by sharing the following:

Children have rights that cannot be overlooked, limited or negated. The Convention on the Rights of the Child stresses that the family is the natural environment for the growth and well-being of children. In the family, children learn the foundations of respect, empathy, solidarity, and trust. Children develop fully and soundly when their rights are protected, they are raised with trust and respect, and they can grow up in a safe, loving environment that affirms their human dignity. These foundations help them develop appreciation and respect for others, find a sense of purpose, and build the capacity to serve others and their broader communities, contributing to positive change. Only when children are respected and treated with love and care, are they empowered to believe not only in themselves but also in others.



RECOMMENDATIONS FOR TRAINERS

Invite Facilitators to...



Read: The section in Booklet I on "The dignity of the child and child's rights"



Check: The resources available on the Consortium website



Reflect: How would you do this activity with parents, caregivers and educators? How can you encourage parents, caregivers and educators to further explore children's rights and how they are reflected in their lives on a daily basis?



TO SHARE WITH PARTICIPANTS

The Convention on the Rights of the Child is an international agreement that most countries around the world have ratified and therefore are legally bound to implement. It recognizes the fundamental human dignity of all children and the urgency of ensuring their well-being and development. It has 54 articles that set out the civic, political, cultural, economic and social rights that all children have, regardless of their race, religion or abilities.

Two articles in particular are important to share with the participants.

Article 27, Paragraph 1. States Parties recognize the right of every child to a standard of living adequate for the child's physical, mental, spiritual, moral and social development.

This means that the CRC sees children's development holistically, not just in terms of their physical and cognitive development; it also considers children's emotional, social, moral and spiritual well-being.

Article 12 sets out the right of the child to express their views in all matters affecting them, and to have their views considered and taken seriously. This principle recognizes children as actors in their own lives and always applies throughout a child's life.

You can also share that the participation of children is one of the General Principles of the Convention on the Rights of the Child (<http://www.unicef.org.uk/UNICEFs-Work/UN-Convention/general-principles/>), as it plays a fundamental role in realizing all the other rights.

Session 1

Child Dignity and Child Rights

ACTIVITY 3

Children in Action: Contributing to Children's Agency



OBJECTIVES

Analyze children's rights and name methods of securing an environment that enables the realization, protection and development of their rights in order to ensure their holistic well-being and spiritual development.



MATERIALS AND PREPARATION

Flipchart, markers in different colors, squares of paper



HOW YOU CAN DO IT:

1. Welcome participants to the session and explain that this activity builds on the previous two and brings together the reflections they have had around child dignity and children's rights.
2. Share that creating positive relationships and experiences with children is an important way to build on their agency and participation. Introduce the concept of children's agency, what it means and how it is connected to children's right to participation.
3. Organize participants in groups of 3. Distribute several squares of paper (an A4 sheet of paper cut in 4 equal pieces) – at least 8 pieces to each group. Share with participants that they are going to create a story using the pieces of paper. Explain how it works:
 - Together, you will think of an activity that a child aged 0-8 can do on their own (such as touching a fluffy toy, throwing a ball, setting the table or creating their own toy)
 - Then, you will use the paper to draw the story, piece by piece, and write a description of the piece.
4. Give participants 20 - 25 minutes to agree on and make their storyboard.
5. Back in the main group, ask each group to share their storyboard, and how it illustrates children's participation and agency in the early years. Ask the group to reflect on how each story can be customized for diverse age groups: 0-3, 3-5 and 5-8.
6. Conclude by reflecting about how children of these ages like to do things that have visible, concrete results, and how this is part of their rights and contributes to strengthening their sense of belonging. Point out that encouraging children

to do small things not only builds their sense of shared responsibility, and their ability to contribute, but also their autonomy and initiative.

By listening to children's voices, creating a safe space for them to express their views, and respecting their ideas, adults show trust and respect, which in turn helps children develop their capacity to decide and their ability to shape their own lives and contribute to their communities.



RECOMMENDATIONS FOR TRAINERS

Invite Facilitators to...



Read: The section in Booklet I on "The dignity of the child and child's rights"



Check: The resources available on the Consortium website



Reflect: How would you do this activity with parents, caregivers and educators? How can you encourage parents, caregivers and educators to further explore children's rights and how they are reflected in their lives on a daily basis?

Session 2

Early Childhood and the Holistic Development and Well-Being of Children

ACTIVITY 1

The Critical Importance of the Early Years

 OBJECTIVES	Identify the critical importance of the early years for the development of children and for their holistic well-being.
 MATERIALS AND PREPARATION	Paper and pen/crayons for participants and Flipbook card on “Early Childhood Development”
 HOW YOU CAN DO IT:	<p>Welcome participants to the session, introduce the objectives, and invite participants to sit comfortably.</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none">1. Invite participants to imagine they are back in their childhood. Ask them to recall an experience or feeling from their childhood: a special moment, or a moment they felt safe, in awe, joy, sad, connected to nature, something they did or saw that they will never forget. This moment will set the tone for exploring the topic of this activity. Note what the participants say about their recollections in a flipchart. Summarize what participants have shared and acknowledge the diverse experiences and situations.2. Invite each participant to draw a big tree on a sheet of paper. The tree should have, at least, roots, trunk, leaves, and branches.3. Instruct each participant to think about and write/draw:<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Roots: Think about the spaces/people/experiences that contributed to who you are today. For instance, living with your grandparents, attending a specific school, a particular teaching from your parents, a religious or spiritual community you were part of, or even some challenges you faced.• Trunk: How did experiences in early childhood contribute to your physical, mental, social, emotional and spiritual development and well-being? For instance, stories that your parents or an adult close to you read to you, interaction with neighbors, support received by the community, etc.• Leaves: Think about experiences from your early childhood that helped you to be connected with yourself and with others, nature or with that which people refer to as God, the Divine, the Transcendent, or Ultimate Reality. For instance, a community activity that you were part of, a game you played with friends or siblings, times that you spent with your family, a religious ritual or practices.• Branches: How did your religious or spiritual traditions influence your first years of life?

Invite participants to share about their trees in pairs.

4. In the main group, ask participants to share the highlights of their discussions and create some space for them to reflect and exchange ideas on:
 - How did your own experiences from early childhood influence who you are today, and how now you see the world and see children? For those who are parents or work with children, how did those experiences influence the way you raise and work with children?
 - What do you think communities, including religious and spiritual communities, need to be do differently, better or continue doing to support the holistic development of the child?

Invite the participants to share their reflections on some of the questions and identify some commonalities and key aspects of the reflections.

5. Share with participants that, as seen from the discussion before, the first years of a child's life have a significant influence on physical, intellectual, emotional, social and spiritual development, and capacities in all these areas, which are important prerequisites for success in school, and later, in the workplace and community.

Show the Flipbook card on "Early Childhood Development" that shows human brain development. Ask participants: How do you think children's brains develop during this period?

Did you know that during this period there are 1 million neural connections formed per second in the brain? This is the most rapid growth period for the brain. Science tells us that, while our genes, passed on to us by our biological parents, establish the basis for later development in life, the environment where we grow up dramatically affects our development.

6. End the session by sharing that, after understanding the experiences we went through as children — positive and negative — and the impact those had on us, we can understand how infants and young children need many positive and nurturing experiences at this time when their brain is developing so rapidly.

This is why toxic stress in the early years of life, caused by extreme poverty, repeated abuse, or neglect due to severe maternal depression, for example, damages the developing brain architecture, which can lead to lifelong problems in learning, behavior, and physical and mental health.

The quality of experiences and care that children receive during the early years heavily influences their lifelong health, capacity to learn, and overall productivity. The first two years of a child's life have an important influence on their physical, intellectual, emotional, social and spiritual development. This is why infants and young children need positive and nurturing experiences at this time when their brain is developing so rapidly. Parents and caregivers have a critical responsibility, since this vital period is spent mostly with them.



RECOMMENDATIONS FOR TRAINERS

Invite Facilitators to...



Read: The sections in Booklet I on “Early childhood development – The foundation of lifelong capacities” and “Violence and its impact on child development and well-being”



Check: The resources available on the Consortium website



Reflect: How would you do this activity with parents, caregivers and educators? How would you explore the topic in ways that not only enhance understanding about the topic but also support and motivate parents, caregivers and educators to create positive spaces and experiences for children that are free from any form of violence?



KEEP IN MIND:

What you can do when a topic in a session causes a participant emotional distress

This is a simple exercise, but it could bring out some emotions as participants reflect on childhood experiences. Here are some recommendations and options:

1. Allow time to listen to the participants’ feelings if they want or need to share them with.
2. Talk privately to the participant experiencing emotional distress and let them know that it is all right to feel emotional about the topic. Ask them what is causing the distress and what makes this memory a painful one.
3. If a participant expresses emotional distress during the middle of a session, respond with empathy. Ask what is happening, allow the participant to express their feelings if they wish, and ask the other participants to listen and to try to understand the participants’ emotions.
4. Help the participant(s) find calm by using deep breathing, chanting, singing, or by just letting them lie down.
5. You can also encourage the participant to seek out someone later they can speak with about their feelings, or later privately give them a referral to a therapist.

Session 2

Early Childhood and the Holistic Development and Well-Being of Children

ACTIVITY 2

The Holistic Development and Well-Being of Children

 **OBJECTIVES** Describe the different aspects of holistic development and well-being and the central role the spiritual development of children plays.

 **MATERIALS AND PREPARATION** Paper and pen/crayons for participants and Flipbook card on “Holistic Child Development” projected or displayed in a room, or copies distributed to participants, and Flipbook card on “A Whole-Community Approach.”

-  **HOW YOU CAN DO IT:**
1. Create a welcoming atmosphere and invite participants to find a comfortable position. Introduce them to the activity and its objective.
 2. Show a short video/PowerPoint that showcases voices and images of young children, their laughter, awe, crying, talking, etc. Invite participants to relax and let their mind and emotions flow as they listen and see the images/sounds of children.
 3. On a flipchart/big paper, explore with participants:
 - When you think of child/children, what words or images come to your mind?
 - When you think of the holistic development of children, which ideas and words come to your mind?
 - When you think of their spiritual development, which images, words, experiences or ideas come to your mind?
 4. Introduce the diagram on “Holistic Child Development” from the Flipbook and explain what each domain means and then open up the space for participants to share their reactions, ideas and questions in connection with step 3. Ask them:
 - What does it take for a child to develop holistically?
 - How are the different areas interrelated?
 - Why do you think spiritual development is placed at the center?
 5. Introduce participants to the definition of “holistic development of the child” (provided in the box below), making connections with what participants have shared.

Ask participants, who are the people responsible for ensuring children’s holistic development? Then, introduce the ecosystem of the child.

Use the Flipbook card that shows the ecosystem of the child entitled “A Whole-Community Approach” to explain that a holistic approach to child development needs to consider the different people and systems that affect the child and the context in which the child grows up, including religious and spiritual communities.

Early learning and development can be seen as a “complex ecosystem” of relationships that are affected by multiple levels of the surrounding environment, from the immediate settings of family and school to broad cultural values, laws, and customs. The immediate settings — microsystems — are the most influential level, and therefore, the main focus of this Toolkit.

6. Conclude the session by sharing that parents and caregivers have the most influence on the child in the early years of life, firstly by the genetic contribution and experience of the child in the womb, and then through the experiences within the family. Also note that, as children grow, they gradually have more interactions in other settings as they start attending daycare centers, befriend their neighbors, perhaps become involved in their religious and spiritual communities, and engage with the broader community.

Caring for young children, and consequently the nurturing of their spiritual development, is not solely the role of parents, caregivers or educators, nor it should be thought of as solely a role for women. Religious and spiritual communities, as part of the microsystem, and as an important setting for many children in the world, can contribute significantly to children’s development. These are spaces where children get exposed to religious and spiritual practices and rituals, as well as to social and cultural norms accepted by their communities, which shape their identities in relation to others.

When young children are welcomed, accepted and respected in their religious and spiritual community, and they are known, cared for and loved by its members, they develop a sense of belonging and identity that helps them grow socially, emotionally and spiritually.



RECOMMENDATIONS FOR TRAINERS

Invite Facilitators to...



Read: The sections in Booklet I on “Early childhood development – The foundation of lifelong capacities” and “Violence and its impact on child development and well-being”



Check: The resources available on the Consortium website



Reflect: How would you do this activity with parents, caregivers and educators? How would you explore the topic in ways that enable participants to understand the different aspects of holistic development and well-being and the central role the spiritual development of children plays?

Holistic Development of the Child

Holistic child development is an approach that values all aspects of a child's well-being and responds integrally to their physical, cognitive, social, emotional and spiritual needs. It engages a broad spectrum of support systems, including family, school, and community, to ensure children reach their full potential.

The holistic development of the child considers:

1. **Physical development.** Children's physical growth and development of motor skills.
2. **Social development.** Children's ability to interact with others and learn to build relationships.
3. **Emotional development.** Children's ability to understand their own and others' feelings, express and regulate their emotions and develop empathy for others.
4. **Cognitive-language development.** Children's ability to think and reason, make sense of the world, and perceive, understand and use language.
5. **Spiritual development.** Children's awareness of themselves and search for meaning and transcendence, which involves their capacity to connect with themselves, others, nature and and that which people refer to as God, the Divine, the Transcendent, or Ultimate Reality.

Session 2

Early Childhood and the Holistic Development and Well-Being of Children

ACTIVITY 3

Holding the Lives of Children in Our Hands

OBJECTIVES Describe the different aspects of holistic development and well-being and the central role of parents, caregivers and educators, and the community.

MATERIALS AND PREPARATION Paper and pen/crayons for participants, Flipbook cards on “Holistic Child Development”, “Nurturing Care Framework”, and “Religious Rituals in Early Childhood”, silhouettes of children

- HOW YOU CAN DO IT:**
1. Create a welcoming atmosphere and invite participants to find a comfortable position. Introduce them to the activity and its objective. Revisit the last session and the diagram of holistic development domains and how they are connected.
 2. Prepare in advance small silhouettes of children, one for each participant. You can use the sample provided on this page. (Fig. 1)
 3. Ask participants to look at the child and think:
 - As caregivers, we hold the lives of our children in our hands. What do you think is our main responsibility as parents and caregivers to support their holistic well-being?
 - What is the role of the community in supporting the holistic development of children? How can community actors be more engaged in providing the needed nurturing care?
 - How can our religious or spiritual traditions support parents and caregivers in nurturing children’s spiritual well-being?

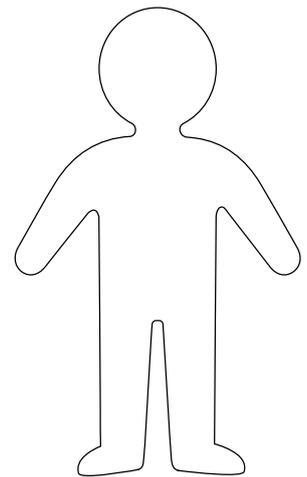


Fig. 1 - Silhouette

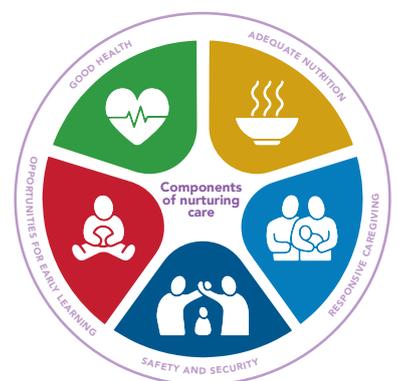


Fig. 2 - Nurturing Care Framework

4. Introduce the Nurturing Care Framework as an enabler of holistic development and share with participants how it prioritizes attention to good health, adequate nutrition, safety and security, responsive caregiving and opportunities for learning.

5. Conclude the activity by reflecting with participants on how different sectors can help to address the needs of children in all the developmental domains, including their spiritual development.

Share that, in the first years of life, parents, intimate family members and caregivers are the closest to the young child and thus the best providers of nurturing care. This is why secure family environments are important for young children. Appropriate policies and community services must be in place to ensure caregivers have the time and resources to provide nurturing care.

Addressing the spiritual development of children as part of their holistic development is an integral part of responsive caregiving. Religious and spiritual traditions play an important role in fostering children's spirituality through community life, religious practices, service to others, and other means. Communal religious or spiritual participation in rituals and practices, reinforced by social ties and norms, helps people thrive.



RECOMMENDATIONS FOR TRAINERS

Invite Facilitators to...



Read: The sections in Booklet I on "Holistic child development" and "Nurturing care as a facilitator of holistic development"



Check: The resources available on the Consortium website



Reflect: How would you do this activity with parents, caregivers and educators? How would you explore the topic in ways that enable participants to understand how different sectors can help to address the needs of children in all the developmental domains, including their spiritual development?

The Holistic Development Approach

A holistic development approach supports children as they seek to reach their full potential and helps create the foundations for lifelong learning and well-being. For children to develop holistically, attention must be given to good health, adequate nutrition, safety and security, responsive caregiving and opportunities for learning. These five areas are set out in the Nurturing Care Framework, which offers key strategies for supporting the holistic development of children from pregnancy up through age three. The framework supports the conditions for keeping children safe, healthy and well nourished, paying attention and responding to their needs and interests, and encouraging them to explore their environment and interact with caregivers and others.

Session 3

Spiritual Development of Children

ACTIVITY 1

Moving Beyond

-
-  **OBJECTIVES** Understand the spiritual development of children, why it is important, and how it contributes to children's well-being
-
-  **MATERIALS AND PREPARATION** Flipchart, markers in different colors, paper and Flipbook cards on "Towards an Understanding of Spirituality", "Spirituality..." and "A Spirituality of 'Moving Beyond' is..."
-
-  **HOW YOU CAN DO IT:**
1. Welcome participants to the session. Explain that during this activity they will reflect on what spiritual development is and its importance and contribution to children's well-being.
 2. Start with a poem, or a sacred scripture you find appropriate and that is inclusive of the diverse participants in the room.

Proposed poem from Khalil Gibran from *The Prophet*:

And a woman who held a babe against her bosom said, "Speak to us of Children." And he said:

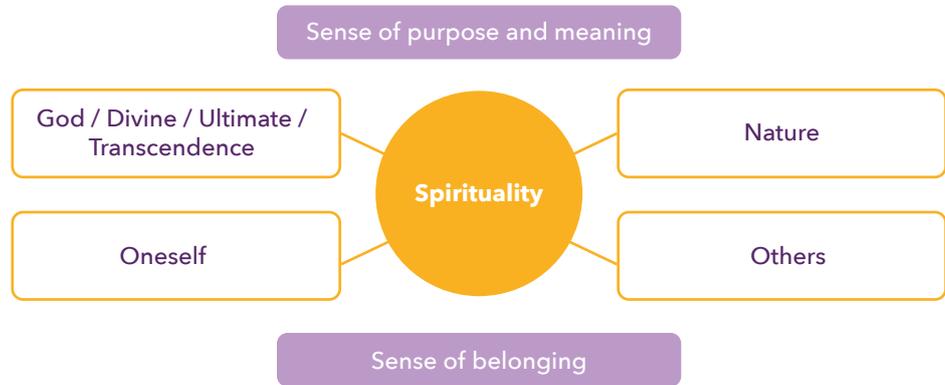
*Your children are not your children.
They are the sons and daughters of Life's longing for itself.
They come through you but not from you,
And though they are with you, yet they belong not to you.
You may give them your love but not your thoughts,
For they have their own thoughts.
You may house their 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 ...⁷*

Create some time for reflection and encourage participants to share freely.

3. At the center of a flipchart write "Children's Spirituality" and ask participants to share what it means to them. Write on the flipchart the words that participants express. Emphasize that there is no right or wrong answer; the objective is to

collect the group's perceptions and ideas, from their religious or spiritual beliefs, childhood, from the country/community they have grown up in. Open up the space for participants to further share, and build on their ideas.

4. Share the diagram on "Towards an Understanding of Spirituality" and "Spirituality..." that you can find in the Flipbook that outlines the Toolkit's approach to children's spiritual development:



Nine propositions for the group to explore are given below. Organize participants in small groups, distribute the phrases below among the groups – two or three to each group.

Instruct each group to read them and then share their ideas, questions and reflections. Make sure there is at least one person with a good literacy level in each group.

The understanding of spirituality in this Toolkit is informed by the following propositions.

Spirituality is innate. We are inherently, genetically spiritual. There is strong evidence that demonstrates that biologically, neurologically, and psychologically, spirituality is part of human nature and is foundational for thriving. Spirituality is integrated with our biological capacities for perception and detection — the senses, the intellect, the emotions, and consciousness itself. Natural or innate spirituality exists as a human capacity. The innate spiritual attunement of young children is biological and developmental. Children enter the world prepared to have a spiritual life, and at the same time their spirituality needs to be cultivated and sustained.⁸

Spirituality is an intrinsic part of being human. To be human is to be spiritual; it is an intrinsic human capacity. Throughout history and across all societies, forms of spirituality have become part of human experience, and spirituality has remained a robust force in life for both individuals and societies. Spirituality is understood and manifested with great variety across cultures and religious traditions.⁹

Spirituality is multi-dimensional. Spirituality is about interconnectedness with oneself, with others, with nature, and with that which people refer to as God, Divine, the Transcendent, or Ultimate Reality. Those four aspects are all closely linked and overlap with each other, providing wholeness to people's lives.

Spirituality cannot be imposed. Spirituality is not something that one thrusts upon or even gives to the child. The process of nurturing the spiritual development of children cannot happen through imposition or vertical teaching, it takes place through role-modelling, positive relationships, and experiences. It is by creating safe, loving and respectful spaces for children to connect with themselves and others, nature and that which people refer to as God, the Divine, the Transcendent, or Ultimate Reality, that the child develops their own spirituality.

Spirituality is related to but not confined to religion. Spirituality is not the same as religiosity, nor is it the same as religious development. The emphasis of spirituality is on one's connectedness with others and nature, and with a sense of meaning and purpose, rather than focused on the organized structure and moral rules and laws of religion, per se. Spirituality may be cultivated both within and outside traditional religious and spiritual frameworks.¹⁰

Spirituality is embedded in relationships and community. Spirituality is closely allied with human bonding and is relational, inspired by the experience of transcendence in relationship with one another, nature, God, the Divine, the Transcendent, or Ultimate Reality, and within oneself. Brain scans have shown that the part of the brain that activates when people feel spiritual is the same part that allows people to bond and see dignity and value in other people.¹¹ Spirituality is shaped through the community, religious and spiritual narratives, beliefs and practices, as well as by the broader forces in society and culture.¹² A relational spirituality allows people to see the sacred in the other — it fosters interconnection with other human beings beyond the categories of gender, religion, beliefs, ethnicity or culture.

Spirituality is expressed in ethical behavior. Spirituality focuses on both inner and outer life and is manifested through ethical behaviors and actions. It fosters a distinctive core of values that shape people's relations with others, helps strengthen respect for diversity, empathy and compassion for other human beings and individual and collective responsibilities toward others, community and mother earth. Spirituality, when actively and intentionally nurtured, is a life-shaping force, not only for the individual but also for the larger community.¹³

Spirituality is transmitted intergenerationally. Studies designed to learn how children's earliest relationship with God or a universal spirit develops show that a child's first and formative experience of the transcendent relationship very often is through their parent's love. The intergenerational transmission of spirituality occurs through its practice, whether in personal prayer, religious observance, or other spiritual practice: an ongoing shared awareness of spiritual presence in the world. The child sees a parent's or caregiver's experience of spirituality,

and then follows suit, while being immersed in the love of the parent. A child's innate natural spirituality becomes a powerful lifelong capacity through the unconditional love of the parent-child relationship. How parents and caregivers raise their children for spirituality from birth through adolescence can open this developmental pathway from them — or shut it down.¹⁴

Spirituality supports interreligious learning and respect for other religions or beliefs. In the early years, nurturing the spiritual development of children can help them to become familiar with different religious and spiritual beliefs, to build a foundation for their growing capacity to respect others, show compassion through appreciation of diversity, and develop a spirituality that is inclusive of the other. Nurturing spiritual development strengthens the child's family religious beliefs when nurtured in an environment of freedom and respect for the child's capacity to question and create meaning; as the child grows, this nurturing strengthens their capacity to understand other people's religions and beliefs, make their own decisions, and exercise their right to freedom of religion or belief.

Back in the main group, let each small group share their phrases and talk about what they mean and their reflections on them.

5. Conclude the session by saying that spirituality is innate, part of being human and needs to be nurtured to flourish.

Ask participants to form a circle and share one or two words that capture what they have learned during the session about what spirituality means to them. Underline that there are no right or wrong answers and that each person experiences spirituality in diverse and unique ways.

RECOMMENDATIONS FOR TRAINERS

Invite Facilitators to...



Read: The section in Booklet I on "Spirituality and children"



Check: The resources available on the Consortium website



Reflect: How would you do this activity with parents, caregivers and educators? How would you explore the topic in ways that enable participants to reflect about their own spirituality and why the spiritual development of children is important for their holistic development?

Session 3

Spiritual Development of Children

ACTIVITY 2

Why is Spiritual Development so Important?

-
-  **OBJECTIVES** Understand the spiritual development of children, why it is important, and how it contributes to children's well-being
-
-  **MATERIALS AND PREPARATION** Flipchart, markers in different colors, paper
-
-  **HOW YOU CAN DO IT:**
1. Welcome participants to the session and explain its objective. Recap the previous session on spirituality and briefly review the topic through a short discussion together.
 2. Organize four tables, each with a large sheet of paper and one of these questions for reflection:
 - Why is children's spirituality so important for their development?
 - How does the spiritual development of children contribute to their well-being?
 - How do religious traditions contribute to children's spiritual development and well-being?
 - What kind of tools and experiences — from our religious/spiritual/cultural/family/community traditions — can we use to nurture children's spirituality?
 3. Organize participants in four groups to spend 10-15 minutes at each table, or let them randomly rotate, making sure they visit all tables available. Ensure a balanced number of people at each table.
 4. Back in the main group, ask each group to share their main reflections and insights, and present the three conditions for nurturing the spiritual development of children: safe environments, positive relationships, and empowering experiences. Connect participants' reflections to these conditions.
 5. As a conclusion, share with participants that the spiritual development of children in the early years benefits their holistic well-being for years to come. Research has shown that older children whose parents have nurtured their spirituality have a higher chance to be happier, enjoy greater mental, physical and emotional well-being, and feel interconnected with others and connected with themselves as well, with who they are and want to be. Studies also show that youth who, as younger children, were exposed to spiritual development demonstrate less aggressive behavior, less substance use, fewer high-risk behaviors, and less risk of depression



RECOMMENDATIONS FOR TRAINERS

Invite Facilitators to...



Read: The sections in Booklet I on “Understanding spiritual development” and “Spiritual development as a central aspect of holistic development”



Check: The resources available on the Consortium website



Reflect: How would you do this activity with parents, caregivers and educators? How would you explore the topic in ways that enable participants to understand the relationship between spiritual development of children, its benefits, and its contribution to children’s well-being?

Session 3

Spiritual Development of Children

ACTIVITY 3

Nurturing Seeds

 OBJECTIVES	Understand the spiritual development of children, why it is important, and how it contributes to children's well-being
 MATERIALS AND PREPARATION	Seeds, vase and soil, Flipbook card on "Children's Innate Spiritual Capacities" (optional)
 HOW YOU CAN DO IT:	<p>Ask participants in advance to bring a vase or a simple pot or jar and some soil. Select some seeds of plants or flowers that you can bring to share with participants. Make sure to bring seeds of plants that require human care, such as beans or corn. Encourage participants to use recycled vases made from bottles, or other containers they have in the home.</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none">1. Welcome participants to the session and explain its objective. Share that today you will plant a seed. Follow all the steps with the participants: select a vase, place the soil in it, plant the seed, and water it.2. As you conclude the planting, or as you go through it, engage in dialogue about the following:<ul style="list-style-type: none">• What is needed for a seed to grow? — water, soil, sun, etc.• What does it take for this particular plant to flourish? — Someone to care for it, protect it from animals and extreme weather, watering, an appropriate environment, etc.3. Share that children are born with an innate spirituality, but that, just like seeds, their spirituality needs to be cared for and nurtured to flourish. Ask them why they think we need to nurture children's spirituality? Ask what happens if we don't?4. Conclude the session by sharing that children's spiritual development is supported by nurturing environments and caring relationships, as well as actions that foster the growth of capacities in children that are still to be discovered or explored. While the potential for expression of capacities already is within the child, it is the role of parents, caregivers and educators to bring them out by providing experiences and environmental stimulation.



RECOMMENDATIONS FOR TRAINERS

Invite Facilitators to...



Read: The section in Booklet I on "Spirituality and children"



Check: The resources available on the Consortium website



Reflect: How would you do this activity with parents, caregivers and educators? How would you explore the topic in ways that enable participants to reflect on how the spiritual development of children in the early years benefits their holistic well-being for years to come?

Session 4

Violence Against Children

ACTIVITY 1

Protecting Children from Violence

 **OBJECTIVES** Analyze the types of violence that children face and how those affect children's holistic development and well-being

Identify how fostering children's spiritual development contributes to the protection of children from violence and their holistic well-being

 **MATERIALS AND PREPARATION** Appropriate materials needed to make a line down the center of the room or playground, e.g., chalk, adhesive tape, a roll of cloth; two large signs marked "I agree" and "I disagree"; Flipbook cards on "Direct Violence", "Structural Violence" and "Violence and its Impact on Child Development"

 **HOW YOU CAN DO IT:**

1. Introduce the activity and explain that it is about some of the things they see or experience in their own or others' lives; that there is no right or wrong answer; and that the point of this activity is for everyone to share their opinions, hear those of others, and exchange ideas and points of view.
2. Draw a line down the center of the room and put the two signs on the ends of the line — "I agree" on one end and "I disagree" on the other. Ask participants to line up along the center line facing you. Instruct them to respond to a series of statements by moving closer to the sign that matches their opinion, agree or disagree.
3. Read out a few statements. Make sure the first statement is a simple one just to help participants feel at ease with the activity, such as "All adults like coffee or tea." Here are some examples that you can choose from or further elaborate:
 - Families always do their best for their children
 - Families know best how to take care of their children
 - All children should live with their families
 - All children live in families that respect their rights
 - Children need to have clear boundaries from very early years
 - Yelling is not violence
 - Neglect is violence
 - Sometimes corporal punishment is needed when nothing else works
 - Corporal punishment in the early years teaches children to respect adults
 - Children as young as one or two years old won't remember or be affected by being scolded
 - Violence can alter the developing brain's structure

- Loving environments are essential for children to grow
- Children exposed to violence are more likely to be victims of violence later in life
- We should always speak up when we see violence against children
- It is safe to report any violence I see

These statements are phrased so that adults may find themselves in different places along the line than others, which should encourage dialogue and reflection. As you read the statements, make sure to collect the opinions of participants on that statement and ask further questions that allow them to see the situation from diverse angles, using open-ended questions such as “why, how, when, and what...?”

When you have finished, have the participants sit in a circle and ask some of them to talk about the activity: what challenged them, what surprised them, what led to their agreement or disagreement with statements, what was confusing etc.

4. Share with participants the following. You could use the Flipbook cards here.

Did you know that....

the term “violence against children” includes all forms of violence against people under the age of 18, whether perpetrated by parents or caregivers, relatives, educators, peers, romantic partners, other people closest to the child as a religious or spiritual leaders, coaches, or strangers.

Did you know that....

the most common forms of violence for younger children are neglect, maltreatment, sexual violence, emotional or psychological violence, and bullying?

Did you know that ...

some types of violence are seen as normal? Verbal or physical punishment remains the norm for many children around the world, even though it causes fear and stress in children, negatively affects their emotional, mental, physical, and spiritual health, and can lead them to express their fear and stress via aggressive behavior toward others, to mistrust others, or to withdraw socially. Consequently, these children will be at risk of falling behind in their academic life, social relationships, and other opportunities for learning, which can also hinder their potential to thrive in later life.

Did you know that...

structural violence also harms children? Many families face difficulties in providing nurturing care for children due to the extreme conditions they live in, including poverty, political unrest, humanitarian crises, situations of food insecurity, harmful effects of toxic stress, or communities plagued by violence. These circumstances limit the availability of and access to social services and impair the capacity of caregivers to engage positively with and be responsive to the needs of their children.

Did you know that...

climate change is a major factor negatively impacting young children's development? Almost every child on earth is exposed to hazards related to climate change. Natural disasters have intensified child poverty and vulnerability and are directly causing migration and displacement due to extreme weather events. As rural communities face climate stress, families relocate to informal urban settlements, which increases children's exposure to violence, abuse, and exploitation, including child labor, extreme poverty, and reduced access to critical health, education, and psychosocial support services.

5. Back in the main group, show the Flipbook card on "Violence and its Impact on Child Development", which shows a healthy brain and an abused brain. Explain in simple ways the impact of violence on brain development and explore some of these questions with participants:
 - What do you think are the main consequences and impact of violence against children in their development? What other alternatives to violence can be used?
 - When children show challenging behaviors, what may they be trying to say/transmit? How can those behaviors be addressed?
 - What does your spiritual/religious tradition say about violence against children?
 - Are there any social and cultural norms in your community that condone violence against children? How can those be challenged?

6. End the session by sharing with participants that all violence against children is preventable, and none of it is justifiable. Every year, children worldwide experience physical punishment from their caregivers, including parents, teachers, and other adults who are supposed to be there to love and care for them. Around the world, it is estimated that close to 300 million children between the ages of two and four (three in four children in this age range) experience violent discipline. This causes fear and stress in children, negatively affects their emotional, mental, physical, and spiritual health, and can lead them to express their fear and stress via aggressive behavior toward others, to mistrust others, or to withdraw socially. Consequently, these children will be at risk of falling behind in school and their learning process, social relationships, and other opportunities for learning, which can also hinder their potential to thrive in later life.



RECOMMENDATIONS FOR TRAINERS

Invite Facilitators to...



Read: The sections in Booklet I on “Violence and its impact on child development and well-being” and “The ethical demand to end violence against children”



Check: The resources available on the Consortium website



Reflect: How would you do this activity with parents, caregivers and educators? How would you explore the topic in ways that enable participants to reflect on and identify ways to challenge violence as you work with parents, caregivers and educators?

Session 4

Violence Against Children

ACTIVITY 2

Violence Against Children: Prevention and Protection

 **OBJECTIVES** Analyze the types of violence that children face and how those affect children's holistic development and well-being

 **MATERIALS AND PREPARATION** Several old newspapers and magazines, scissors and glue, about two meters or more of paper or cloth (the reverse of a roll of wallpaper or a couple of large sheets joined together), colored pens or markers, non-toxic colored sprays, Flipbook cards on "Direct Violence", "Structural Violence", "Violence and its Impact on Child Development", and "The Ethical Demand"

This activity is designed to create a chance to discuss the current realities of violence against children (VAC) in the early years and to reflect on ways violence can be prevented or stopped. You can use materials that you find online or in local newspapers to illustrate the issues.

 **HOW YOU CAN DO IT:** 1. Put the long piece of paper or cloth on the floor. With a black marker, draw bricks and other details on the paper so that it looks like a street wall.

On several different tables, place pictures, newspapers or magazine clippings, or other printed materials that portray several types of violence against children aged 0 to 8 — emotional, neglect, corporal, verbal, etc., including structural violence such as poverty, children in conflict areas, discrimination against children due to their origins or beliefs.

2. Invite participants to make a collage about the VAC in their communities today — homes, street, etc. — that no one talks about or addresses, as participants see it. Participants can put up words, images, draw their own pictures or graffiti — whatever they think expresses it. Give ample time for this and join participants around the tables to help them expand their understanding on the topics raised through open-ended questions.

When they have finished the collage, gather around it together and look at it for a few minutes. Then ask participants reflective questions such as:

- What captures your attention the most?
- What are the different types of violence children face from early years in your communities?
- Why is violence against children normalized in many settings?
- Which ones are not talked about or are taboo in your community? Why?

- How does this impact children’s lives?
 - What consequences does violence have on children’s development, and particularly on children’s holistic well-being?
3. Ask the participants as a group to select one concrete example from the previous discussion about what captured their attention the most and discuss:
- Why does this happen (root causes)?
 - How does it affect children’s lives and future as adults? What can we do about it? How?
 - What can be done to protect children who are victims of this kind of violence?
 - How can religious communities challenge social and cultural norms that condone violence against children and equip parents to affirm norms that are respectful and affirming of children’s dignity?
4. Finish by sharing that, when children experience neglect, violence or fear, their brain recognizes and reacts to these as threats to their well-being. Violence can alter the developing brain’s structure and the way it works, which means that it can affect language and cognitive functioning (thinking), resulting in social and emotional problems and generating fear, anxiety, depression, and the risk of self-harm and aggressive behavior. Studies show that children exposed to violence are more likely to be victims of violence later in life and to become perpetrators, using violence as adults against domestic partners and their own children, and to be at increased risk of engaging in criminal behavior.



RECOMMENDATIONS FOR TRAINERS

Invite Facilitators to...



Read: The sections in Booklet I on “Early childhood development — The foundation of lifelong capacities”, “Violence and its impact on child development and well-being”, “The ethical demand to end violence against children” and “Spiritual Development of Children in the Early Years and Its Contribution to Protecting Them from Violence and Promoting Their Holistic Well-Being”



Check: The resources available on the Consortium website



Reflect: How would you do this activity with parents, caregivers and educators? How would you explore the topic in ways that enable participants to feel motivated to create environments free from violence?

Session 4

Violence Against Children

ACTIVITY 3

Violence Affecting Children – Using Role Playing

 OBJECTIVES	Identify how fostering children’s spiritual development contributes to the protection of children from violence and their holistic well-being
 MATERIALS AND PREPARATION	None needed
 HOW YOU CAN DO IT:	<ol style="list-style-type: none">1. Organize participants in groups and ask each group to think of a situation they have seen or heard where children 0 to 8 years old are subject to violence — physical, verbal, emotional, cognitive or spiritual.2. Encourage the participants’ creativity by giving examples of possible situations such as: yelling, corporal punishment, humiliation, diminishment of the child, neglect, problems between family members where children are involved, etc.3. Ask each group to prepare to role play the situation up to the moment where it could escalate to a violent response, while ensuring everyone stays safe. Give them time to plan and read through their lines and practice before presenting their enactments in front of the other groups. Give ample time for their presentations. Tell the participants presenting that, at the end, they also share an alternative response that could positively transform the situation by:<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Having the parent or caregiver connect with the child in respectful and loving ways• Transforming the environment and removing the violence in ways that affirm the dignity of the child; and/or• Creating an experience for the child that helps them to develop a sense of meaning, purpose and belonging.4. When the presentation of each group ends in the whole group and alternatives are presented, ask the participants from the other groups also to think of a way to transform the situation, looking at the relationships, the environment and the experiences, and then to role-play it. Have a brief discussion after presenting the solutions by asking the participants:<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Was this a good solution? Why?• How could creating safe environments free from any form of violence, and creating positive connections and experiences with the child, transform the

situation?

- Is this possible in a real situation?
5. Tell the participants that violence against children not only violates their physical and emotional wellbeing but also their spiritual development. The nurturing of children's spiritual development is accomplished in secure relationships with caregivers, in safe, respectful and loving environments where children can grow, and through experiences that empower and inspire children.

It is important for parents and caregivers to consider who they can reach out to and what they can do when feeling overwhelmed or don't know how to handle the challenging behaviors of a child in assertive ways. It is helpful for them to look to their spiritual tradition/religious teachings or leader, someone they trust, for support.

When children feel safe, accepted, understood and supported by adults, they begin to accept themselves, too. This positive reinforcement is reflected in their behaviors and can strengthen their mental health. There is a strong correlation between how children feel about themselves and how they act. A self-accepting, mentally healthy child grows to be an adult who embraces respect for others, has empathy, upholds his or her individual and collective responsibilities, and knows how to deal with conflict in non-violent ways.



RECOMMENDATIONS FOR TRAINERS

Invite Facilitators to...



Read: The sections in Booklet I on "Spiritual Development of Children in the Early Years and Its Contribution to Protecting Them from Violence and Promoting Their Holistic Well-Being"



Check: The resources available on the Consortium website



Reflect: How would you do this activity with parents, caregivers and educators? How would you explore the topic in ways that enable participants to internalize the importance of listening to the needs of the child, fostering the child's agency, and promoting the development of the child in an overall ethical context of care and affirmation for their dignity and life?

Learning Circle

As you come to the end of Module 1, we recommend that you offer some time for the group to dialogue, as a way to support their reflections upon what they have learned and experienced in the first four sessions.

How you can do it:

1. Create a welcoming atmosphere for participants; you can play music, have someone play an instrument, sing, read a poem, or share a theological reflection on the topic.
 2. Share coffee/tea; if appropriate you can invite participants to bring traditional snacks/food from their communities. Foster an informal environment and open up the conversation about the topics addressed in Module 1. Here are some questions you might use:
 - What have you discovered? What would you now do differently than what you normally do?
 - What did you discover about religious and spiritual principles, teachings and practices and how they affirm the dignity of the child and can challenge norms that can be used to condone violence against children in early childhood?
 - What challenged you?
 - How can you nurture the spiritual development of children in the home?
 3. Close the learning circle with a symbolic moment that allows all participants to feel connected. You can invite participants to form a circle and share something they feel grateful to have learned, share a feeling, or share ideas about how they can support each other in this journey of nurturing children's spiritual well-being.
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Activities

For trainers, facilitators, parents,
caregivers and educators

Module 2

Nurturing One's Own Spirituality

Session 5

My Understanding of Spirituality

ACTIVITY 1

Exploring My Spirituality and Spiritual Well-Being

 **OBJECTIVES** Participants will explore and reflect on their own understanding of spirituality, and the practices and factors that foster its development

 **MATERIALS AND PREPARATION** Colored paper, crayons, materials for the journey, Flipbook card on “Nurturing One’s Own Spirituality Through Religious and Spiritual Traditions”, Annex I “Characteristics of Spirituality/Spiritual Needs and Spiritual Tools”

 **HOW YOU CAN DO IT:** 1. In advance, prepare 4 different physical spaces — each with a different theme — that will allow participants to explore different senses, emotions, and thoughts.

Space 1. Myself — Use a mirror hidden inside a book or magazine and invite participants one by one to, in silence, go and see a very important person in their lives. Once each of them sees themselves in the mirror, spread on the floor/wall papers that contain the following questions: how do you care for this person’s well-being? Did you ever face a situation when your human dignity was not respected? How did you feel? What helped you to remain centered?

Space 2. Relationships with Others — Prepare hearts drawn on red paper, one per participant, that can fit in their hands. Participants write the name of a person they cherish the most in their life. Then they are asked to crumble it into a ball and thereafter to try to restore it. Ask them to reflect: Can you put it back in the original shape? How easy/difficult are relationships? How difficult or easy is it to amend relationships that were broken, to forgive and reconcile? What does it take? Is it possible to be open to the possibility of forgiveness, even if someone really hurt me or someone I love and care about?

Space 3. Nature — Go to a place in nature — a garden, any place outside that invites participants to use their senses. You can prepare papers with questions: How does the sun feel on your skin? How does the wind feel? What do you hear? What do you see? What does nature transmit to me? What is my responsibility for caring for our planet? What do you feel grateful for?

Space 4. God/Divine/Transcendent/Ultimate Reality — Prepare a place with a warm and quiet atmosphere, with soft music or sounds, with some poems written on paper about life and its mysteries, several religious scriptures selected with sensitivity to the religious diversity of participants. Share the invitation for participants to take a moment to connect with that which people refer to as God, the Divine, the Transcendent, or Ultimate Reality, in the way they feel most comfortable.

They can do this through prayer, meditation, silence, reading and reflecting upon the poem, reflecting upon the religious scriptures, etc.

2. Once participants are gathered for the activity, introduce this silent journey. Share with participants that they will be invited to explore several spaces, each with a unique experience. Tell them to trust that no harm will be caused to them. Explain that, for this experience, there are four different spaces, each with a unique invitation with something to think, do, share or reflect. The common thing in all spaces is an invitation to be in silence.

Begin the journey in silence with participants, guiding them from space 1 through space 4. Participants move between 4 different spaces, spending 10 minutes in each space.

3. Once participants explore all 4 spaces, return to the main room, still in silence, and take time to reflect together upon the experience. For this, bring some objects from each of the spaces to the main room and distribute the sheet: "Characteristics of Spirituality/Spiritual Needs and Spiritual Tools" (found in Annex I)
4. Have participants share their experience and reflections while in a circle using the following questions as a guide: How was your experience? What was difficult? What touched you?

Let participants explore the sheet "Characteristics of Spirituality/Spiritual Needs and Spiritual Tools," and identify the ones they relate to regarding the experience and how they relate to themselves, nature, others, that which people refer to as God, the Divine, the Transcendent, or Ultimate Reality, and invite them to share. Reassure them that there is no right or wrong — that each unique individual lives their own spirituality differently.

Ask the following questions: Is spirituality something that one experiences individually; or is it in relation with the other; with the world around? Is it innate? Acquired? How can we foster it/which tools do we have for doing so? How does doing this contribute to our well-being?

5. Close the session by reflecting on the fact that each person lives their spirituality and nurtures their spiritual development in a unique way — for some people it is through their religious community and practices; for others it is through the arts; for others through music, going to the ocean, serving the community, or doing things that makes them feel happy and fulfilled, dealing with dilemmas and contradictions, meditation, playing, prayer.

When working with parents and caregivers, encourage them to create, together with the child, a special space in the home for them to nurture their spirituality. It can have colors, drawings, music, images that prompt the child's imagination, calm and wonder.



RECOMMENDATIONS FOR TRAINERS

Invite Facilitators to...



Read: The Annex to Booklet I on “The Importance of Adults Nurturing Their Own Spirituality in Various Religious and Spiritual Traditions”



Check: The resources available on the Consortium website



Reflect: How would you do this activity with parents, caregivers and educators? How would you explore the topic in ways that encourage participants to prepare themselves to provide nurturing care to children, to respond in a more positive manner to their needs, and to help create safe, respectful spaces for them to explore their interconnectedness with others?

Session 5

My Understanding of Spirituality

ACTIVITY 2

Exploring My Spirituality through Religion

	OBJECTIVES	Participants identify how their own religious and spiritual beliefs and practices contribute to their spiritual development
	MATERIALS AND PREPARATION	Paper, crayons, theological reflections/religious scriptures from the Consortium Website, Flipbook card on “Nurturing One’s Own Spirituality Through Religious and Spiritual Traditions”
	HOW YOU CAN DO IT:	<ol style="list-style-type: none">1. Welcome participants to the session by reading a theological reflection connected to how religious and spiritual practices and beliefs contribute to spiritual development.2. Ask participants to share their impressions and reflections on their own religious or spiritual practices, and how they contribute to their spiritual development. To support the dialogue, pose some of the following questions:<ul style="list-style-type: none">• What/who influences your beliefs?• How do you think your values and religious/spiritual beliefs contribute to your spiritual development and well-being?• How do they help you deal with your dilemmas and conflicts and to reconcile differences?• How do they support you in connecting with others and with your community?3. Ask participants how nurturing their own religious and spiritual beliefs and practices can, in turn, benefit children.4. Conclude the session by sharing that our religious traditions remind us of values and principles that strengthen our understanding of each other. Practicing religion and nurturing our own spirituality means that we are developing relationships, not only with ourselves or vertically with that which people refer to as God, the Divine, the Transcendent, or Ultimate Reality, but also horizontally with peers within and outside of our immediate community. <p>Explain that these horizontal relationships are also intergenerational. By interacting with peers and elders, children learn how to be active participants and critical thinkers. This feeling of interconnectedness enables us to have a sense of belonging; to understand universal values that are common to all religious and humanistic traditions such as respect and empathy; to have a sense of self-control and the patience needed to find peaceful solutions to challenges;</p>

and to embrace a sense of social responsibility that encourages us to address problems that affect others.



RECOMMENDATIONS FOR TRAINERS

Invite Facilitators to...



Read: Annex I in Booklet I on “The Importance of Adults Nurturing Their Own Spirituality in Various Religious and Spiritual Traditions”



Check: The resources available on the Consortium website



Reflect: How would you do this activity with parents, caregivers and educators? How would you explore the topic in ways that encourage participants to nurture their own spiritual development as a key factor facilitating the spiritual development of children? How can you support participants in reflecting on how and why the nurturing of values is connected to spirituality and spiritual development?

Session 5

My Understanding of Spirituality

ACTIVITY 3

Interreligious Visits

 **OBJECTIVES** Show a greater understanding of different religious and spiritual beliefs and new insight into their own and others' spirituality

 **MATERIALS AND PREPARATION** Materials and objects from diverse religious and spiritual traditions, learning logs

 **HOW YOU CAN DO IT:** **Getting ready for the visits**

1. In preparation for the visits, prepare information about considerations to take into account when visiting the sacred place of the other.
2. Introduce the interreligious visits that will take place and the different places participants will visit. Ask participants what they think it is important to do in each place to ensure they are respectful and caring. Explain the different considerations in terms of clothing and logistics.
3. Reflect and explore with participants on the Conceptual Framework, particularly on "Towards an understanding of spirituality" and the "The Importance of Adults Nurturing Their Own Spirituality in Various Religious and Spiritual Traditions", as a rationale for the visits. Open up space for participants to share any questions or concerns they may have.

Select the sacred sites to visit so that all participants have their religious or spiritual tradition represented.

During the visits

4. Religious and spiritual leaders should be previously informed about the visit and be given brief information about the group, the learning objectives, and the visits, and requested to be available for a dialogue with the participants.
5. During the visits, religious and spiritual leaders should guide participants around the place of worship, followed by a dialogue where they can pose questions.

Reflection after the visit

6. After the visit, it is important to dedicate some time to reflect about it. To do it, on a flipchart, organize three circles and a larger area: (1) Senses — What did you

see, hear, taste, touch (2) How did you feel? (3) Commonalities and differences with my own religious or spiritual tradition or on how I experience my spirituality. In the larger area participants write general ideas on: What was difficult? What surprised me? What touched me? What did I learn?

7. End the session by reflecting with participants on how religious and spiritual beliefs and practices contribute to their spiritual development.

When working with parents or caregivers, encourage them to take children to their own sacred spaces and to other sacred spaces and use all opportunities for children to use their senses to explore the spaces. As such a visit ends, encourage them to dialogue with their child: What did you smell? What do you see? What did you touch? What did you hear? What surprised you? How did you feel?



RECOMMENDATIONS FOR TRAINERS

Invite Facilitators to...



Read: The sections in Booklet I on “Towards an understanding of spirituality” and the “The Importance of Adults Nurturing Their Own Spirituality in Various Religious and Spiritual Traditions”



Check: The resources available on the Consortium website



Reflect: How would you do this activity with parents, caregivers and educators? How would you explore the topic in ways that encourage participants to further reflect on the importance of religious and spiritual beliefs to their spiritual development and how they contribute to it?

Session 6

My Spiritual Well-Being

ACTIVITY 1

Encouraging the Heart and Creating a Spiritual Space¹⁵

 **OBJECTIVES** Identify how by fostering their own spiritual well-being, adults can enhance their parenting practices and relationships with children, foster positive environments and empowering experiences for them, and contribute to their well-being

 **MATERIALS AND PREPARATION** Prepare a space for participants to sit or lay down; it can be an outside quiet space in a park or a garden, in a library, or any other space that invites quietness and calm; also prepare a small bag or box

-  **HOW YOU CAN DO IT:**
1. Welcome everyone to the session. Use a symbolic bag or box and invite participants to put in it all the things from that day that worry them — tasks to do, something they have heard or did that is troubling their mind or heart, anything that can take them from the “here and now.”
 2. You can play soft music or have someone play an instrument. Then invite participants to lay down or find a comfortable position. Ask them to just listen to the music/instrument and let emotions and thoughts pass, to listen to their heart without judgment, just letting time flow, slowly breathing in and out. Do this for a length of time you find most appropriate.
 3. Next, ask participants:
 - How was the experience for you? How did your heart and mind feel?
 - How often do you take time to take care of your heart and mind, to connect with your own and your child’s heart and mind?
 4. When working with parents or caregivers, share with participants the following techniques for protecting and encouraging the creation of a spiritual space:

Set your own inner space

Days can at times be difficult. Find time daily to, even if briefly, connect with yourself so you can calm your own heart, and thus connect better with the children in your life. You can do it through time in nature, gardening, prayer or meditation.

Walk the talk

It is through you and your example that children experience the world. When you nurse or feed your baby, change a diaper, bathe, feed, play and be with them, you embody love, compassion, trust, and connection with the whole universe.

Cultivate the capacity for quiet contemplation

Silence can be powerful. When you are in silence, connected to your spirituality and your child, you create the opportunity for you and your child to be in attunement with one another. You can do it by simply being in silence, or you can share a cozy-chair time, sharing a book, playing gently, drawing or simply lying down.

Welcome nature as your co-parent and your children's teacher

Contact with nature is very important. Spend time outdoors. Hug a tree, play in the grass, go to a park and explore its plants and animals, care for your garden, animals or plants you have at home. In doing so, you are showing the sacredness in all living beings and the spirit that permeates all of nature.

Use your words

The words you choose will set the tone for spiritual perception. Speak kindly, use words that are connected to your values when talking about people, animals or the world — the generous, kind, loving, gentle, etc.

5. Conclude the session by sharing that we are deeply connected: to nature, animals and to the people we love, particularly to our children, and that, because of this, our children can sense how we feel, how we are and how we care for ourselves, them and nature. By fostering our own well-being, we enhance parenting practices and relationships with children.



RECOMMENDATIONS FOR TRAINERS

Invite Facilitators to...



Read: The section in Booklet I on "Towards an understanding of spirituality" and Annex I in Booklet I on "The Importance of Adults Nurturing Their Own Spirituality in Various Religious and Spiritual Traditions"



Check: The resources available on the Consortium website



Reflect: How would you do this activity with parents, caregivers and educators? How would you explore the topic in ways that encourage participants to nurture their own spiritual well-being?

Session 6

My Spiritual Well-Being

ACTIVITY 2

Learning how to Handle Emotions in Parenting

 **OBJECTIVES** Identify how, by fostering their own well-being, particularly by managing their emotions, participants can enhance their parenting practices and relationships with children, foster positive environments and empowering experiences for them, and contribute to their well-being

 **MATERIALS AND PREPARATION** Paper, crayons, paper, short animated video, images or story

 **HOW YOU CAN DO IT:**

1. In advance, prepare a short, animated movie, or images from magazines/newspapers, or a story or role-play customized to the audience that portrays a situation where caregivers and parents run out of patience and respond to children in violent ways.
2. Organize participants in small groups of five each so everyone can participate. Once you show the situation, ask the groups to dialogue using the following questions:
 - Which types of violence did you see?
 - Why do you think adults responded using violence?
 - Which emotions did you see? Can difficult emotions trigger violence?
 - What can you do, when you feel these difficult emotions, to respond in a non-violent way instead?
3. Explain to participants that everyone goes through difficult emotions, and that it is important to attend to and find positive ways to manage those emotions. Nurturing our capacity to connect with ourselves, others, nature and that which people refer to as God, the Divine, the Transcendent, or Ultimate Reality can help improve our capacity to handle difficult emotions and responses.

Share the following techniques to manage emotions:

Step 1 - Breathe and stop

Instead of reacting immediately, focus on your breathing and on what is going on inside you.

Step 2 - Give it a name

Give a name to what you are going through, are you sad? Are you mad? Are you out of patience? How is your body reacting?

Step 3 - What can you do?

Now that you have taken some time to figure out what exactly it is that you are feeling, think of what you can do to make yourself feel better, to find calm again.

Step 4 - Act

Never let a negative emotion grow without doing something to help yourself feel better.

4. Using the example of the situation presented before, invite participants, in pairs, to think and go through the steps proposed above and see how it would transform the situation. Introduce it step by step so all participants can follow it.
5. As a conclusion, share some positive examples of how to manage emotions: go for a walk or sit down in a place you feel safe, listen to a song from your spiritual or religious tradition, read a story or fragment from a religious or spiritual tradition that speaks to you, talk to a friend/another parent or someone you trust, write down your feelings in your learning log, listen to music, draw your feelings, focus on your breathing until you feel calmer, etc. Share how important it is to learn to manage emotions, since children will learn from what they see. Responding with violence is resorting to a quick fix that will have repercussions for the lifetime of the child on how they see and relate with themselves, others, and the world.



RECOMMENDATIONS FOR TRAINERS

Invite Facilitators to...



Read: The section in Booklet I on "Towards an understanding of spirituality" and Annex I in Booklet I on "The Importance of Adults Nurturing Their Own Spirituality in Various Religious and Spiritual Traditions"



Check: The resources available on the Consortium website



Reflect: How would you do this activity with parents, caregivers and educators? Since emotions flow through us all the time, the way we handle them in our lives is what makes the difference. What are some non-violent alternatives to handle challenging behaviors in parenting situations?

Session 6

My Spiritual Well-Being

ACTIVITY 3

Religion, Ethics and Well-Being

 **OBJECTIVES** Identify how, by fostering their own well-being, particularly by strengthening the sense of interconnectedness, participants can enhance their parenting practices and relationships with children, foster positive environments and empowering experiences for them, and contribute to children's well-being

 **MATERIALS AND PREPARATION** Flipchart, paper, crayons

-  **HOW YOU CAN DO IT:**
1. Start the activity by inviting participants to think about who has contributed to their day today, from the moment they woke up, until the present moment. Give some examples: who baked/prepared/produced the food you ate today, the newspaper you read, the clothes you are wearing? How did you get here? Let participants draw/write about it.
 2. On a flipchart, write "I am because you are" and ask participants to share what comes to their mind when they hear this sentence. Build on what participants share.
 3. Then introduce the concept of Ubuntu and share some of the questions below for reflection.

Ubuntu is an African philosophy that emphasizes that what makes us human is our interconnectedness with other people.

Ubuntu places emphasis on the values of human solidarity, empathy, human dignity, and the humanity of every person, all of which are central to the spiritual development of children.

The spiritual development of children is very closely related to their ethical development.

Ethical development is understood as their capacity to positively relate to themselves and others, from a perspective of an ethics of care that considers caring for other human beings as if they held the life of the "other" in their hands.

- What is the message that Ubuntu conveys?
- What is the responsibility we have in the relationships we have with ourselves and others?
- How and how often do we express gratitude and compassion towards others?

- Do we put ourselves in the shoes of others? What does it mean to do that?
 - What do your religious and spiritual traditions and teachings say about the interconnectedness of life?
4. As a conclusion, share that at the center of the Ubuntu philosophy are interconnectedness and respect for all people. Similar teachings about our interconnectedness are found in all major religions.

When working with parents and caregivers, encourage them to create a moment in the home where both children and adults can reflect about how they relate to themselves and others, and who contributed to their day today, and then express gratitude for it — through prayer, or simply by sharing gratitude in their own words.



RECOMMENDATIONS FOR TRAINERS

Invite Facilitators to...



Read: The section in Booklet I on “Understanding spiritual development”



Check: The resources available on the Consortium website



Reflect: How would you do this activity with parents and caregivers? How would you create spaces to strengthen their awareness of the importance of nurturing interconnectedness on a daily basis, as a way to enhance their parenting practices?

Learning Circle

As you come to the end of Module 2, we recommend that you offer some time for the group to dialogue, as a way to support their reflections about practical ways to nurture their own spirituality as adults.

How you can do it:

1. Create a welcoming atmosphere for participants; you can go to a park, a garden, a quiet place, or a sacred place which is appropriate and inclusive of all, any place that transmits a sense of calmness and connection.
2. You can invite participants to play an instrument or sing a song. Foster an informal environment and open up the conversation about the topics addressed in Module 2. Here are some questions you might use:
 - What have you discovered about your spiritual development and well-being?
 - What do you want to do, or do differently that you didn't do before, to create spaces and opportunities to connect with yourself and your child?
 - What challenged you during this module?
3. Close the learning circle with a symbolic moment that allows all participants to feel connected. You can invite participants to form a circle and share something they feel grateful to have learned, share a feeling, or share ideas about how they can support each other in this journey of nurturing children's spiritual well-being.

Activities

For trainers, facilitators, parents,
caregivers and educators

Module 3

Conditions for Nurturing the Spiritual Development
of Children in the Early Years

MODULE 3 IS ORGANIZED IN THREE PARTS

Part 1 has one session for trainers to do only with facilitators-in-training to help them get acquainted with the conditions for nurturing the spiritual development of children and how they are critical for the unfolding of spiritual development and the nurturing of spiritual capacities in children. The activity aims to create spaces for facilitators to reflect on the concepts in this module and why they are so important.

Part 2 contains three sessions (7, 8, 9), with three activities each, designed for all participants, on what they can practically do to create the conditions for the spiritual development of children. (Trainers: See the box on page 66 about which activities to focus on when working with facilitators-in-training.)

Part 3 contains one session (10) with two activities designed to acquaint participants with the Activities for Children, including their content, the related spiritual capacities, and how to implement them.

Part 1: Introducing Module 3 (for Trainers to Do with Facilitators-in-Training Only)

ACTIVITY

Conditions for Nurturing the Spiritual Development of Children in the Early Years

 **OBJECTIVES** Demonstrate understanding of the conditions for nurturing the spiritual development of children and articulate how they are critical for the unfolding of spiritual development and the nurturing of spiritual capacities in children

 **MATERIALS AND PREPARATION** Paper, crayons, flipchart, Flipbook card on “Conditions to Nurture Children’s Spiritual Development”

 **HOW YOU CAN DO IT:**

1. Introduce facilitators to the activity and its objective. Explain that Module 3 is exclusively dedicated to the conditions for nurturing the spiritual development of children, which are: positive relationships, environments that are safe, respectful and violence-free, and empowering experiences.
2. Organize three tables, each with the wording of one of the conditions and two questions to discuss.

Positive Relationships

- How can the kind of relationships children have with their caregivers hinder or foster their spiritual development and impact the relationships they have with others?
- How can parents and caregivers build those?

Safe, Respectful and Violence-free Environments

- Why do we affirm that the fostering of ethical values and the nurturing of spirituality of children can only be done in an environment free of violence?
- How can parents and caregivers build this environment?

Empowering Experiences

- Why is child participation seen as a significant protective factor against forms of violence, and a factor empowering them to develop their own sense of being, belonging, and becoming?
- How can parents and caregivers create these experiences?

Facilitators can choose which table to join, as long as there is a balanced number of participants at each table. Each group stays at the table for 15 minutes and then rotates to the next one until three rounds are complete.



One representative from each group presents the main highlights of the group's discussion on the topic.

3. Back in the main group, prompt participants to reflect about the image that portrays the model and reflect:
 - How are the three elements connected?
 - Can we nurture spiritual development if one of them is missing? Why or why not?
4. Conclude the activity by sharing with participants how these three conditions are interrelated and together form the basis for a sound foundation for children's spiritual development and well-being. Indicate that, for this reason, it is paramount that facilitators feel fully confident to introduce the conditions to parents and caregivers when using Module 3. There are three sessions (7, 8, 9) on this topic for use with all participants, and each session has 3 activities focusing on one of the three conditions. Make sure to go through all the conditions so that participants can, by the end, see how the three are interconnected in practical ways with their children.

Activities from Module 3 for trainers to do with facilitators-in-training, in addition to the previous activity:

We encourage trainers to go through at least one activity each from session 7, 8 and 9 with facilitators-in-training. The activities we recommend are:

- **Session 7:** Activity 1: Why Are Play and One-on-One Time So Important?
- **Session 8:** Activity 2: It Takes a Village to Raise a Child — The Role of Religious and Spiritual Communities in Fostering Spiritual Development in Children
- **Session 9:** Activity 3: Nurturing a Playful Spirit

Part 2: Sessions and Activities for Implementing with All Participants on the Conditions for Nurturing the Spiritual Development of Children

Note: For trainers working with facilitators-in-training, see the box on the previous page regarding which part 2 activities to focus on, since time may not allow doing all of them.

Session 7

Nurturing Positive Relationships between Caregivers and Children

ACTIVITY 1

Why Are Play and One-on-One Time So Important?

 **OBJECTIVES** Identify the benefits of positive and respectful relationships between caregivers and children and concrete ways to build them, specifically through play, to support their well-being and spiritual development



MATERIALS AND PREPARATION

Paper, crayons, Flipbook card on “The Importance of Play”



HOW YOU CAN DO IT:

1. Welcome participants to the session and begin with a prayer, song, poem, or whatever practice is common from one of the religious traditions or spiritual perspectives represented in the group. Music may help the session begin in a joyful way. You might also want to pause for a few moments of silent contemplation before beginning. Make sure to be sensitive to the diverse religious traditions that might be present in your group.
2. Organize participants into groups of five each. Invite each group to engage in a form of play they recall from their childhood, something they can play together; the most important is that they go through the experience of play. You can also propose some options: jump rope, hide and seek, etc. Give participants ample time to play together. Make sure the proposed games are culturally sensitive. When participants have played the game, ask them: How did you feel while playing? What did you enjoy the most?
3. Create space for participants to think about what they believe may hold them back from playing with children or from fully enjoying a moment of play.

Is time a concern? You can share that, around the world, time is an issue for parents and caregivers. Many are busy making ends meet, and play seems like a luxury. However, we can incorporate a playful approach in whatever we do. We can integrate play in indoor spaces, in our daily activities, and daily routines. If

we are preparing food, we can involve our children, and make it a game. If we need to walk to the market together, we could play an imaginary game, playing hopscotch, or counting things of different colors along the path.

4. Conclude the session by sharing the information below on why play is so important and using the Flipbook to illustrate the importance of play in building positive relationships.

Why play? Play is one of the main tools for spiritual development in the early years, which takes place through interaction and relationship with others. Children all over the world, everywhere, play naturally. Without any training or instructions, they just play. The brain is built to play. Children learn through play. Play is how they explore the world. It is the way they develop important skills. Through play, they develop their imagination. Imagination and a playful spirit are deeply connected to children’s spiritual development and their capacity to explore. Play can help to develop the spirituality of the child —promoting connection with their inner selves, their sense of purpose, and others in one-to-one or group interactions.

The development of a playful spirit is also key to building resilience, the capacity to bounce back during difficult times and situations, which helps to deal with stress or a sense of failure.



RECOMMENDATIONS FOR TRAINERS

Invite Facilitators to...



Read: The section in Booklet I on “The importance of play for children’s spiritual development and holistic well-being”



Check: The resources available on the Consortium website



Reflect: How would you do this activity with parents, caregivers and educators? How would you create spaces for caregivers to fully explore the importance of play and how they can keep playing with their children on a daily basis in simple ways?



TO SHARE WITH PARTICIPANTS

Share with parents, caregivers and educators the activities for adults to do with their children (in Booklet III), which include many good examples of playful activities.

Create a symbolic flipchart paper to serve as a “toolbox of games,” where parents and caregivers can add suggestions for games that all can use. Invite all participants to contribute to it.

Session 7

Nurturing Positive Relationships between Caregivers and Children

ACTIVITY 2

Building Positive Relationships

 **OBJECTIVES** Identify concrete ways to build positive relationships with children that support their well-being and spiritual development

 **MATERIALS AND PREPARATION** Large body-sized sheets of paper (use several sheets of paper from a flipchart, the back of a roll of wallpaper or equivalent), colored pens or markers, soft music, Flipbook card on “Conditions for Nurturing Children’s Spiritual Development”

 **HOW YOU CAN DO IT:**

1. Welcome participants with a story, music, or something else that helps participants to focus and relax from the stress of the day, and then introduce the activity. Organize participants in pairs. Each participant gets a sheet of body-sized paper. As an alternative, you can use an A4 sheet and draw a hand (one question will be written on each finger).

One person lays down on the paper on the floor, and the other draws his/her silhouette with a pen. When the first person is laying down, share the invitation for them to go back to the early years of their lives, the places they felt safe, people who made them feel loved and cared for, their family, home, etc. When ready, switch to make the other person’s silhouette. Share the same invitation.

2. When they have completed the silhouettes, each participant is asked to write/draw on their own silhouette the following information:

- Heart: A moment with your parents or caregivers that made you feel loved, cared for, protected, happy or confident.
- Head: Something you have experienced with your parents or caregivers — from seeing them, or doing something with them, something they said — that made an impact on you.
- Stomach: An experience with your parent or caregiver that was difficult for you.
- Hands: One thing you enjoyed doing with them as a child/or something you would have liked to do.
- Legs: Something you have discovered with your parents or caregivers.

3. After completion, each person shares the information with their partner along with their reflections. Once they have both shared what is written on the silhouettes, encourage them to lie down in each other’s silhouettes. You can ask them to close their eyes if they want and imagine that they are the other person for a moment. If you are using a hand instead of a full silhouette, let participants touch the hand and follow along as proposed. The facilitator can play soft music and initiate some reflection by asking the participants to “leave yourself behind

for a few minutes and see if you can imagine being your partner as a child," to try to think the other's thoughts, to feel the other's needs, to want what the other wants.

4. Back in the main group, ask participants how the experience was for them. What was difficult? What did they enjoy?

Discuss together:

- How do experiences from our past, from our own upbringing, and relationships with our parents and caregivers affect our way of seeing our children and raising them? Is there anything we would like to strengthen or to change in our upbringing practices?
 - What kind of experiences help us connect with our children, build trust, nurture love, be respectful, empower them?
 - What kind of attitudes and experiences can discourage children from speaking with us openly? Why?
 - How can our religious or spiritual traditions support us with building positive connections with children?
5. Conclude the session by reflecting on the importance of trying to understand what children feel, think, want and need, from the moment they are born.

Science highlights the importance of positive parenting and provides much evidence that early stimulation, caregiving, attachment, and bonding, as well as the creation of safe contexts, can positively influence brain development and help children grow, learn and thrive. By creating these positive relationships, caregivers foster a trusting relationship with children, so they can feel confident to be vulnerable and open even in the most challenging circumstances.

Share with participants that, if they sometimes share their own stories with children, becoming vulnerable themselves, it can help children feel that they too can be vulnerable and that sharing about troubles, weaknesses and fears is okay and a part of life.

Share some traditional stories or stories from your religious community that showcase this.



TO SHARE WITH PARTICIPANTS

While discussing together with parents and caregivers the proposed questions on their experiences and attitudes involving connecting with children, share these ideas of what they can do with children:

1. Ask your child: How did you feel during the day? Was there anything particularly hard or especially good for you?
2. Create spaces for children to express their emotions, particularly the hard ones, in a safe and compassionate environment, and help them navigate through them in assertive ways
3. Share about your own day – what went well, what was difficult
4. Encourage children also to share with the family how they feel, how their day was, to build a trusting relationship with them
5. Share stories from your childhood and moments you had to have courage, had to make a difficult decision, felt scared, got injured, felt hurt, felt happy, etc.
6. Share stories from your spiritual tradition that showcase examples of courage and fear, resilience, vulnerability, compassion, etc.
7. Create rituals with your child that allow them to feel closer to you: a hug before leaving or coming home, a prayer together, a blessing, or any other gesture that allows them to feel connected with you
8. Listen and value what children have to say from the early years. Show them that you have heard them, share your own views, and always try to understand what they share from their own viewpoint.
9. Let children decide, according to their evolving capacities — about the clothes they wear, the places they go, games to play, food to eat, etc. This will give them confidence and empower them in their autonomy, building trust and closer relations as you mirror their growing autonomy and assertiveness.

Session 7

Nurturing Positive Relationships between Caregivers and Children

ACTIVITY 3

Being a Role Model

-
-  **OBJECTIVES** Show awareness of the importance of modeling values and behaviors that benefit others through example
-
-  **MATERIALS AND PREPARATION** Poem
-
-  **HOW YOU CAN DO IT:**
1. Create a calm atmosphere, and share with participants that today you will start the session with a poem entitled, "Children Learn What they Live":

*If children live with criticism
They learn to condemn;
If children live with hostility
They learn to fight;
If children live with ridicule
They learn to be shy;
If children live with shame
They learn to feel guilty;*

[But]

*If children live with tolerance
They learn to be patient;
If they live with encouragement
They learn confidence;
If children live with praise
They learn to appreciate;
If children live with fairness
They learn justice;
If children live with security
They learn to have faith;
If children live with approval
They learn to like themselves;
If children live with acceptance and friendship
They learn to find love in the world.¹⁶*

2. Create the space for participants to share openly any thoughts or reflections from the poem. Ask some questions to support the exchange:

- What did you enjoy the most about this poem?
 - What challenged you?
 - What do you think this poem is telling/teaching us?
3. The poem emphasized the word “live” instead of words like listening or seeing. Why? How do children learn? Why?
 4. Spiritual traditions and religious leaders are examples of role-modeling that inspire us and invite us to do the continuous inner work of becoming good role-models. Ask: How do religious and spiritual traditions and leaders help you with this work? What other role models do you have in your lives? Summarize participants’ ideas on a flipchart.
 5. Conclude the activity with the invitation for parents, caregivers and educators to become great role models. A lot of what children learn from is implicit (cannot be seen) — for example, behavior by adults which is discriminatory, violent or unwelcoming. For instance, if they are treated with harsh attitudes and violence, this shapes how they see themselves. If they see unequal gender relations or other forms of lack of appreciation and respect for others, this can influence the way they behave toward others. Parents, caregivers and educators nurture ethical values through the way they demonstrate positive behavior and model dignity for children, how they deal with disagreements, their relationships with others, and the way they interact with children.

Session 8

Safe Environments

ACTIVITY 1

How to Create Safe, Respectful and Violence-free Environments

 **OBJECTIVES** Identify the factors that either hinder or support the creation of environments for children that are safe, respectful and free of violence, and enable their spiritual development

 **MATERIALS AND PREPARATION** Paper, crayons, flipchart, Flipbook card on “Conditions for Nurturing Children’s Spiritual Development”

 **HOW YOU CAN DO IT:** 1. Welcome participants to the activity and share the objective. Organize participants in smaller groups and invite them to show what a safe home is — free of any form of violence — using any method they like.

The home will have to be safe and free of violence for children to grow and fully develop their spirituality at these levels:

- Physically (Body)
- Emotionally (Heart)
- Environmentally (Space in the house and around)
- Cognitively (Brain)
- Spiritually (Spirit)

Participants are encouraged to use their imagination and represent the home however they like: with a role play, a drawing, a poem, etc. Reassure them that there is no right or wrong way to do this; the idea is just to find out how they imagine what a safe home is.

2. Ask each group to share about its idea of a safe home, and ask someone to volunteer to make a written summary of the main points they share on a flipchart. Then open up the space for dialogue:

- Why are these elements so important?
- What can hinder or foster positive and respectful environments? Who can do it?
- What do religious teachings and practices say about the kind of environments we should create for our children?
- How can the community around you — particularly your religious community — help to create safe, empowering environments?

3. Conclude the session by reflecting with participants on how the spiritual development of children is supported when they grow up in safe, respectful loving environments with no violence.

When working with parents and caregivers, let them know they can better provide this kind of nurturing when they internalize the importance of listening to the needs of the child and promote the child's development in an environment of care and love. Environments like this protect against violence.

Session 8

Safe Environments

ACTIVITY 2

It Takes a Village to Raise a Child – The Role of Religious and Spiritual Communities in Fostering Spiritual Development in Children

 **OBJECTIVES** Describe how the family and community, including religious and spiritual communities, contribute to children’s spiritual well-being

 **MATERIALS AND PREPARATION** Paper, pens, cardboard, crayons, scissors, glue, reusable material such as newspapers, theological reflections/religious scriptures from the Consortium Website, Flipbook card on “A Whole-Community Approach”

-  **HOW YOU CAN DO IT:**
1. Welcome participants to the activity and share the objective. Organize parents and caregivers in small groups according to the communities/areas they come from. If participants all come from the same community, it is still important to organize them in smaller groups so all can actively participate. Place the materials on each table.
 2. Ask participants to represent their communities as they see them on the cardboard, and to include the spaces they and their children frequently attend and know, such as: workspaces, community spaces, school, home, religious facilities people they meet, roads, etc.
 3. Once the community is drawn, it is time for participants to identify the following, using colored stickers or markers:

Green: Places that make your family and children feel safe

Red: Places that make your family and children feel unsafe/or in danger

Yellow: In your community — people/organizations that keep families and children safe and help to nurture their spiritual development

Some participants in the same group may use green and others red in the same places. Make sure that they know that this is okay, that there is no right or wrong, as each person has a unique experience that is important to share. This diversity will be acknowledged and explored during the following discussion.

4. In groups, participants then explore the following according to the colors:

Green: What/who makes your family and children feel safe in these places?
Why?

Red: What makes you feel unsafe? Why do you think it happens? What happens to your community and to people living there because of it?

Yellow: How can communities, particularly religious communities, contribute to creating safe spaces and to children’s spiritual well-being?

Ask the small groups to share their representation and reflections with the main group.

5. Once they conclude, and building on the yellow, share a theological reflection/religious scripture about how religious communities encourage the spiritual well-being of children and the creation of safe environments for children. Let participants share their reflections.
6. Conclude the session by opening up space for the group to reflect on why “it takes a village to raise a child.” Caring for young children, and consequently the nurturing of their spiritual development, is not solely the role of parents or caregivers, nor it should be thought of as solely a role for women.

Children need holistic nurture from the full range of adults that inhabit their world. Community involvement in raising children produces long-term benefits in children’s lives, helping them to develop their sense of belonging and build their identity.



RECOMMENDATIONS FOR TRAINERS

Invite Facilitators to...



Read: The section in Booklet I on “A whole-community approach — “It takes a village to raise a child””



Check: The resources available on the Consortium website



Reflect: How would you do this activity with parents, caregivers and educators? How would you create spaces for caregivers to fully understand how community involvement produces long-term benefits in children’s lives, helping them to develop their sense of belonging and build their identity?

Session 8

Safe Environments

ACTIVITY 3

Creating Safe Spaces for Children

 **OBJECTIVES** Explore and understand children’s rights and name methods of securing an environment that enables the realization, protection, and development of children’s rights and dignity in order to ensure their holistic well-being and spiritual development.

 **MATERIALS AND PREPARATION** Prepare your own case studies or use the ones proposed, adapting them to your context. The case studies should portray actions and behaviors that inhibit or support the nurturing of children’s spiritual well-being. You can use one case study for all participants if you have a smaller group, or a number of case studies for breakout groups, but have them all based on the same theme.

Flipbook cards on “Child Rights”, “The Dignity of the Child” and “The Spiritual Development of Children in the Early Years”, child-friendly version of the Convention on The Rights of the Child (CRC) (<https://www.unicef.org/child-rights-convention/convention-text-childrens-version>)

 **HOW YOU CAN DO IT:**

1. Organize the participants in groups, and give each group a case study and the child-friendly version of the Convention on the Rights of the Child. Ask a few questions to spur their discussion:
 - How is the situation either impeding or supporting the creation of safe spaces that foster children’s spiritual well-being?
 - What impact does it have on children?
 - How could the community, particularly religious communities, support the family addressing or preventing the situation?
 - Which child rights are not being respected?

Give groups time to read the case study and to discuss its implications.

2. Back in the main group, discuss the same questions.
3. Which child rights in the CRC say children should always be able to grow up in an environment free of violence, where they are protected and can develop fully?
4. Conclude the session by sharing that the CRC stresses that the family is the natural environment for the growth and well-being of children. In the family, children learn the foundations of respect, empathy, solidarity, and trust. Children develop fully and well when they are raised with trust and respect, and can grow up in a safe, loving environment that affirms their human dignity. These foundations help them develop appreciation and respect for others, find a sense of purpose, and

build the capacity to serve others and their broader communities, contributing to positive change.

One important right that is often overlooked is the child's right to spiritual development, as stated in Article 27 of the CRC: "Every child has the right to a standard of living adequate for their own physical, mental, spiritual, moral and social development, and parent(s) or others responsible for the child have the primary responsibility to secure, within their abilities and financial capacities, the conditions of living necessary for the child's development."¹⁷ The spiritual development and well-being of children are foundational for them to develop to their fullest potential.

We all know this is not always easy when parents and caregivers feel overwhelmed by their daily lives and circumstances. It is paramount for adults to look for support in these situations, such as from their religious community or other family members, and to nurture their own spirituality so they can remain calm and centered when challenging situations arise and handle them in ways that are positive and cause no harm to children.

Case Study 1:

A family has three children of ages six, three and four months. The father normally leaves for work early and comes back really late. He also works long hours during the weekend. This family lives with the children's grandmother, who is very ill. The six-year-old walks to school every day by himself. The children's mother takes care of the grandmother, the kids and the chores at home.

Today, the mother is feeling more tired than usual because she was awake feeding the baby most of the night. When preparing breakfast before the six-year-old boy goes to school, the boy refuses to get ready. He starts playing with his younger brother and doesn't want to go to school. The mother is getting really impatient as she is tired, the baby is crying and today she needs to take the grandmother to the hospital for an exam.

She then shouts at the six-year-old boy to get ready, but he gets more resistant and starts screaming. The mother is feeling frustrated; she is overtired and unable to cope well with the situation.

She tries to calm the baby and give breakfast to the three-year-old, who is very energetic, but the six-year-old becomes more resistant, starts shouting and hitting his younger brother. In the heat of the moment, the mother grabs the six-year-old boy and beats him harshly with a whip. She continues shouting and tells him that if he doesn't get ready she is going to hit him even harder. He is not screaming any more, but he is crying. They leave for school.

Case Study 2:

This family has three children ages six, three and four months old. Recently, the elder son has been playing football with some of the older children outside their house after school. Today is no different; he asks the parents if he can go. They agree but remind him that he must be home before 6 o'clock.

A few hours pass and it is almost dark. The parents are worried about where the son is because they can't see him outside. While the mother stays indoors with other children, hoping and waiting for the elder son to walk through the door, the father goes looking for him. The longer he looks, the more anxious and worried he becomes.

It is now dark and the son is nowhere to be seen. The father has asked the neighbors, checked the surrounding streets, and returned home to consider calling the police if his son does not come home soon. After sharing this with the mother, she starts to cry and feels sick with panic. The father feels angry that his son didn't listen to him or his mother about coming back by 6 o'clock, but he also feels the mother is to blame for spoiling him all the time.

Just then, the son walks through the door with a smile on his face. He apologizes for being late, saying that he didn't know what time it was. The father, overwhelmed with anger, shouts at his son and begins beating him with his belt.

Session 9

Empowering Experiences

ACTIVITY 1

Appreciating Diversity

 **OBJECTIVES** Identify what experiences enhance children’s ability to develop prosocial behaviors, ethical values and capacity for reflection

 **MATERIALS AND PREPARATION** A set of 8-10 pictures representing diverse foods and traditions, houses, people and landscape present in the community

In advance, invite participants to bring musical instruments, foods or objects that portray their roots, culture and traditions

-  **HOW YOU CAN DO IT:**
1. Welcome participants to the session with music from the diverse communities in the room. If the environment is conducive, invite participants to dance. If participants have brought musical instruments, you can invite them to play for everyone, so they can sing or dance together. Those who brought food or objects that represent their culture and traditions can share them, too.
 2. On the flipchart, write Food/Music/Traditions and invite participants to share about the traditions, food or music they recall from their childhood and from their community — things that are connected with who they are and their roots. Let participants explore and see how some traditions, foods and music are similar and others diverse.
 3. Have a conversation about the diversity present in the community and its diverse ways of living, as well as the different ways of connecting with that which people refer to as God, the Divine, the Transcendent, or Ultimate Reality; share how our roots influence who we are and how, despite living in diverse ways, we have shared needs and are all interconnected and interdependent.

Open up the space for participants to reflect about divides in the community, how at times a person can be discriminated against because of who they are — for example for being a refugee, migrant, or a woman, or due to origin, gender, religion, beliefs or traditions.

- Ask participants to, in pairs, share some examples of how they can create spaces for children to nurture ethical values such as respect, empathy, compassion and others that enhance their interconnection with the community and foster positive relationships with others.

Some examples that you can share:

- Share stories, short films and music from your and other communities that are connected to your roots, traditions, or ways of living
 - Cook together traditional foods from your diverse communities
 - Join community festivals where your and other traditions are showcased, and where you can experience diversity
4. Conclude by reflecting that it is in the family, and in the experiences created for children and the example adults show, that children learn the foundations of respect, empathy, solidarity, trust and appreciation of diversity.

It is through this relational consciousness — awareness of inter-relations with other beings — that children develop their sense of belonging and capacity to be grounded in their own sense of who they are.

Underline that children start forming their identity — their view of themselves and the world — and building relations with others even before birth, and that how this unfolds depends on how they are nurtured and the experiences they have. Children learn by interacting with adults, other children, and the world around them, through play and exploration, and by observing what others do and say.

Session 9

Empowering Experiences

ACTIVITY 2

Protecting and Connecting with Mother Earth

-
-  **OBJECTIVES** Analyze how the experiences children go through support them in developing their agency and sense of belonging, community, purpose and interconnectedness with others
-
-  **MATERIALS AND PREPARATION** Ask participants to bring comfortable clothes and shoes.
-
-  **HOW YOU CAN DO IT:**
1. Welcome participants to the session. Share with them in advance that during this session there will be a walk and so it is recommended to wear comfortable clothes and shoes. Find a quiet place in nature where participants can explore and be.
 2. Prepare participants for going out on a walk. Invite them to speak during the walk only when absolutely necessary. Share with participants that it is going to be a time to observe all that is happening around us. Give the participants a few examples of what they might be able to observe — the heat from the sun, the shadows of things, the feel of the breeze, the different shades of green from the plants, the colors of things, drought, cutting of trees, etc. While giving examples, do not limit the possibilities of the experience.
 3. As the group starts walking, you can also model how to observe in silence without interacting too much.
 4. Once participants have had enough time to explore the place, end the walk by asking them to sit down together, and ask:
 - What did you smell/touch/see/hear? What feelings did it bring up? What thoughts did you have?
 - How did you feel being in nature? What did you notice?
 - Did contact with nature help you to connect spiritually?
 - Why is it so important to care for and protect nature in spaces like this?
 5. Ask participants why it is so important for children to be provided with opportunities to explore, care for, and appreciate nature. Help them understand how to give children these opportunities. Share some tips:
 - When walking back from the nursery or school, pause and let children touch and observe trees, the river, warmth of the sun, the wind, and then ask them share what they see and how it makes them feel

- Talk about how animals live freely in nature and reflect how nature sustains us all
 - Pick fruits from trees and reflect on how nature helps sustain us
 - Do a walk or a picnic in a park and see life happening around, talk about how nature gives us shade, protection, allows beings to grow
 - Observe plants in the garden and talk about how they grow and how nature helps them grow
 - Pick up garbage on the streets and talk about the importance of taking care of the environment
 - Let children “just be” in contact with soil, observe ants or butterflies or birds, and see life happening, then asking them about the experience: what they enjoyed the most, what they thought of or felt
 - Lay down under a tree or in the grass together and let them feel the sun and wind caressing their skin, how it feels to touch the ground, how their body and mind feels when they are in contact with nature
6. End the session by reflecting about the importance of children being in contact with mother earth.

Children’s innate curiosity and playful spirit are nurtured by experiences that allow them to care for and explore nature around them, feel gratitude for life, and ask questions. They are nurtured by taking moments to pause, use their senses, and reflect on the experiences they go through, so they can make connections with their inner selves and their sense of awe.

Nature offers the child an opportunity to take time to be with themselves, and at the same time to engage with the natural world. Being in nature is often a calming experience for children. When they find it difficult to be indoors, bringing them outside changes the dynamic. Being outdoors helps children appreciate that the world is bigger than the four walls of the home. This is not just about physical space; to foster the ability to imagine a world that is big and grand, the real experience that a nature walk offers is vital. Being in front of a large tree, being under vast skies, standing at the beach and looking out at the ocean — experiences like these can give children a vision of the magnificence of the earth. When they build their identity as a part of life on mother earth, it also helps to put their own life in perspective as they grow older.

Session 9

Empowering Experiences

ACTIVITY 3

Nurturing a Playful Spirit

 **OBJECTIVES** Describe and understand the importance of using play to nurture children’s spiritual development, and how to do it

 **MATERIALS AND PREPARATION** Ropes, balls paper, crayons, Flipbook card on “The Importance of Play”

 **HOW YOU CAN DO IT:** Find a quiet place where participants will not be disturbed and where they can reflect. You can ask participants before starting how they feel at this moment, to stimulate an introspective mood.

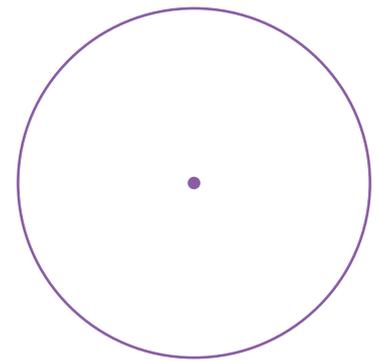
1. Welcome participants to the activity by having available ropes, balls, and other games that connect with participants’ childhood. Without many instructions, just encourage participants to freely play with whatever they feel attracted to.

Once they finish, ask participants to sit down, breathe and observe how they feel in their body, mind, heart and spirit.

2. Once everyone is calm and relaxed, distribute to each a paper and crayons and invite them to draw a circle and mark the center of their circle with a small dot. Tell them that they will make a mandala. Explain briefly what a mandala is and its meaning (see the description below).

Starting from the center they can now fill the circle with “drawings” — objects or abstract pictures, marks, words, geometric shapes, etc., in any way they want. Invite participants to just let it flow without much thinking.

3. When participants finish drawing and coloring, ask them:
 - What is your mandala about?
 - How did you feel and what did you think about while doing the mandala?
 - To which places did you go? What did you imagine?
4. Conclude the session by sharing that children are inherently spiritual and filled with wonder and curiosity about themselves, others and the world they live in.



Play, in whatever form, is critical for children’s physical, emotional, cognitive and spiritual development. Through play — freely invented or guided — in a safe environment, children can deeply immerse themselves in a joyful set of experiences, exploring their senses, making sense of the world, expressing and coping with emotions, and engaging with others.



MANDALA:

The word “mandala” is from the classical Indian language of Sanskrit. Loosely translated to mean “circle,” a mandala is far more than a simple shape. It represents wholeness, and can be seen as a model for the organizational structure of life itself — a cosmic diagram that reminds us of our relation to the infinite, the world that extends both beyond and within our bodies and minds.



RECOMMENDATIONS FOR TRAINERS

Invite Facilitators to...



Read: The sections in Booklet I on “A whole-community approach — “It takes a village to raise a child”” and “The importance of play for children’s spiritual development and holistic well-being”



Check: The resources available on the Consortium website



Reflect: How would you do this activity with parents, caregivers and educators? How would you create spaces for caregivers to fully understand the importance of using play to nurture children’s spiritual development, and how to do it?

Part 3: Session and Activities for All Participants on the Activities for Children Found in Booklet III

Session 10

Exploring the Activities for Children

ACTIVITY 1

Introducing the Activities for Children

 OBJECTIVES	Demonstrate familiarity with the Activities for Children and how to use them
 MATERIALS AND PREPARATION	Printed copy of Booklet III: Activities for Children for each participant, Flipbook card on “Children’s Innate Spiritual Capacities”
 HOW YOU CAN DO IT:	<ol style="list-style-type: none">1. Welcome participants to the activity and distribute a copy of Booklet III: Activities for Children to each participant.2. Explain that Booklet III is designed especially for parents, caregivers, and educators to implement with children to nurture their spiritual capacities through a series of playful, focused activities designed to strengthen children’s holistic well-being. Explain that a spiritual capacity is like a “building block” — many little blocks together make up “spiritual development” — just like many bricks build a house. You can use the Flipbook card to demonstrate this. Share with parents and caregivers that, by implementing the activities in the Toolkit, they can build closer, stronger relationships with their child, and that these relationships, in turn, will serve as the “foundation of the house” as the family explores a variety of spiritual capacities. Tell the parents and caregivers that, as they strengthen their understanding and awareness of spiritual development, this will help create the conditions for the spiritual capacities of their child to flourish.3. Explain how the Activities for Children are organized and explore them together with participants.<ul style="list-style-type: none">• The first part, the Introduction, explains what the activities are about and introduces the ten spiritual capacities that they are designed to nurture in children. It then describes how to adapt the activities when working with groups of children from multiple families (when used by educators, etc.), or with children with disabilities, and how to be sensitive to gender.

4. The second part, Daily Interactions with Children, is a set of simple ideas that can help with nurturing children's spiritual capacities. They are not meant to be done just once as an activity. Rather, they are attitudes, routines and rituals meant to be strengthened intentionally over time.

Choose one or two examples to read to the participants and clarify any questions or concerns around what the daily interactions are for. Consider modelling or briefly role-playing how the suggested interactions might look in real life at home, to help participants get a feeling for how to do them. If there is time, let them practice the suggested behaviors.

5. The third part, Guided Activities with Children, is a set of special activities for parents, caregivers and educators to do with children.

Turn to the activity pages and explain that here, participants can find 22 activities to do with their child. The activities are very simple and easy to do, but they may require some extra planning and time.

A few notes to share about the guided activities:

- The time you dedicate to each activity is defined by you. There is a suggested time, but it is just for ease of reference.
 - There is no set order; you decide and select the activities you want to try.
 - You can adapt them to your child and context — change the stories proposed, materials, etc.
 - The activities are organized for different age groups. Adapt to the age of your child.
 - In some activities there is a box saying, "Why is this activity important?" This box gives more information about how the activity links to the development of spiritual capacities. There are also some "Keep in mind" boxes — these are only suggestions or recommendations for you to take into consideration.
 - At the end of each activity, there is a box with suggestions on how to adapt the activity when working with groups of children from more than one family.
6. Give participants time to explore the booklet fully and pose any questions or concerns they may have about it.

Session 10

Exploring the Activities for Children

ACTIVITY 2

Discovering the Spiritual Capacities

 OBJECTIVES	Identify and reflect upon diverse spiritual capacities
 MATERIALS AND PREPARATION	Printouts of each of the spiritual capacities (Annex IV), Flipbook card on “Children’s Innate Spiritual Capacities”
 HOW YOU CAN DO IT:	<ol style="list-style-type: none">1. Explain that, during this activity, participants will discover diverse spiritual capacities.2. Organize participants in groups of a maximum of five. Distribute the printed names of the spiritual capacities and the separately printed definitions among the groups. Distribute the capacities among the diverse groups. Ask the groups to try to match the names with the definitions. Give ample time for the groups to read and match. Make sure each group has at least one person who has a good literacy level.3. Back in the main group, let each group share their matches, while explaining their understanding/reflection about each spiritual capacity.4. Conclude the session by explaining that the spiritual capacities are not developed all at once; rather, they are nurtured and flourish as a result of fostering positive relationships, creating caring and respectful environments, and providing children with experiences for them to develop those inner capacities in relation to others and the environment around them. The three areas — relationships, environments, and experiences — are all connected and form the foundations and pillars of spiritual development. When working with parents and caregivers, remind them to focus on these three areas as they go through the activities with their child. This will really help their child’s spiritual capacities to develop. Spiritual capacities do not develop overnight; they require intentional nurturing and the involvement of adults who can help by modeling those capacities.

Learning Circle

As you come to the end of the Module 3, we recommended that you offer some time for the group to dialogue and share their take aways from the module.

How you can do it:

1. Create a welcoming atmosphere for participants; you can go to a park, a garden, a quiet place, or a sacred place that is appropriate and inclusive of all — any place that transmits a sense of calmness and connection.
 2. You can invite participants to play an instrument. Foster an informal environment and open up the conversation about the module. Here are some questions you might use:
 - What have you discovered?
 - What do you want to do, or do differently that you didn't do before, to create safe environments, assertive/positive relationships, and empowering experiences that foster children's spiritual capacities and development?
 - What did you discover about religious principles, teachings and practices that help to nurture children's spiritual development, as well as the kind of environments, spaces and relationships they encourage us to create?
 - What challenged you?
 3. Close the learning circle with a symbolic moment that allows all participants to feel connected. You can invite participants to form a circle and share something they feel grateful to have learned, share a feeling, or share ideas about how they can support each other in this journey of nurturing children's spiritual well-being.
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Annex I. Characteristics of Spirituality¹⁸

immortality
love
eternity
self
heart
natural events, e.g. birth death, setting sun
awareness of the non-material world
power and majesty of nature
religion
something unseen
super power
miracles
after life
joy

Characteristics of Spirituality

sense of wonder
feeling alive
conscience
mystery
respect for others
release
creativity
from the physicality of the body
basic human goodness
deepest truths
search for happiness
inspiration

Annex II. Spiritual Tools¹⁹



Annex III. Spiritual Needs²⁰



Annex IV. Spiritual Capacities

Self-Awareness

Children are innately aware of their own inner voice or wisdom, which guides them to respond to situations and to others, to find truth and meaning, and to express their moral and ethical judgment. Even in very young children, the self reacts to social and environmental cues.

Wisdom

Children have an inner sense of what is true or right. They express their views genuinely and through the heart. Children have an inner guidance that brings together heart, mind, and spirit and allows them to perceive interconnectedness and recognize interdependence.

Compassion

Children have an innate sense of caring relationship with all other living beings. They feel concern over the suffering of others and can sense other people's joy and calmness, as well as their stress and sadness.

Empathy

Children are born with a sense of oneness with others. They are acutely aware of their interconnectedness with other people and can enter into and share the suffering of others.

Love

Children have an innate capacity to love regardless of a person's race, gender, religion, ethnicity, etc. Love is a capacity that children express in their relations with others. They find joy in giving and receiving, and delight in interacting with others.

Awe and wonder

Children have the innate capacity to experience moments of awe and wonder. These moments involve the whole self, connecting the body, senses and mind. Awe and wonder lead to joy, preserve excitement and enthusiasm, and feed energy and hope.

Mindfulness

Children have the innate capacity to be present in the here and now. They can be fully absorbed in the moment with a sense of timelessness and are fully alert to life.

Curiosity

Children have an innate capacity to seek what can expand their knowledge and uncover mysteries. Their natural curiosity moves them to ask questions and openly imagine alternative possibilities.

Imagination

Children rely on their innate capacity to imagine in order to create meaning and make sense of the present moment. To process their reality, children use transcendent thinking and dreaming. For them, these are developed and fully realized ways of knowing.

Wondering

Children are born with an innate capacity that drives them to want to know more and ask why. This allows them to create meaning as they discover new things and helps them make sense of their environment.

Endnotes

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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 protection of children from violence and the promotion of their holistic well-being.

CONSORTIUM

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