TOOL**KIT**

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

FLIP**BOOK**

CONSORTIUM

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

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How to Use this Flipbook

This Flipbook is designed to support sessions led by facilitators with parents, caregivers and educators on the building blocks of the Toolkit.

It begins with a brief introduction to the Toolkit and outlines each section of the Conceptual Framework in a simple but detailed way.

On one side of the card is an infographic for parents, caregivers and educators to look at. On other side, there are notes and tips for the facilitator to use to guide the session, if they wish to use them.

The facilitator may customize the content according to their context. The Flipbook is a flexible resource that can be adapted to the needs of the sessions.

Each area of the Conceptual Framework is covered in the Flipbook, but not all infographics need to be shown if the facilitator sees that it is not necessary.

Introduction to the Toolkit

Introduction to the Toolkit

You can use this card before starting Module 1 in the Learning Program for Adults found in Booklet II.

See the Introduction & Rationale Booklet for more details.

The Toolkit aims to help equip faith actors to engage actively in the protection of children from violence in early childhood and the promotion of children's holistic well-being by supporting parents, caregivers, educators and communities to nurture children's spiritual development and take an active role in addressing violence in early childhood.

The Toolkit has 3 specific aims:

1. Create spaces for faith actors, parents, caregivers and educators to reflect on the spiritual development of children and identify how it benefits children.
2. Encourage self-examination of religious and spiritual principles, teachings and practices that affirm the dignity of the child and challenge those that can be used to condone violence against children in child upbringing.
3. Provide tools for building caregiving practices and skills for nurturing spiritual development of children.

The Toolkit addresses the importance of the spiritual development of children for their protection from violence and for the promotion of their holistic development and well-being.

Who is the Toolkit for?

ORGANIZATIONS

FAITH ACTORS / RELIGIOUS AND SPIRITUAL COMMUNITIES

PARENTS, CAREGIVERS AND EDUCATORS

CHILDREN UP TO 8 YEARS OLD

Those interested in fostering children's spiritual development to contribute to the protection of children from violence and the promotion of their holistic well-being.

Who is the Toolkit for?

You can use this card before starting Module 1 in the Learning Program for Adults found in Booklet II.

See Introduction & Rationale Booklet for more details.

Religious and spiritual leaders and faith actors have a unique role in many communities around the world. They are guided by their sacred texts and have a historic presence in many societies. They hold a powerful role which can be used to create change and to challenge traditions that may be harmful to children.

Parents, caregivers and educators also have an important role in children's development and well-being. Children grow best in loving, trusting relationships, however, it is within the family that sadly most abuse occurs.

This Toolkit focuses on children in the early years because of the important changes that they go through during this period.

The Toolkit is also for anyone interested in the spiritual development of children and its contribution to the protection of children from violence and the promotion of their holistic development and well-being.

Module 1

Protection of children from violence

Child dignity and child rights
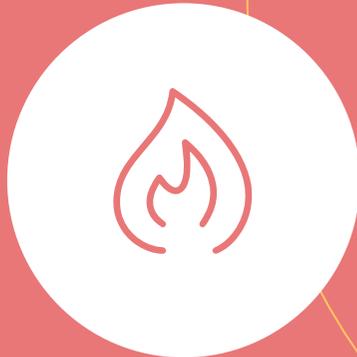
Spiritual development of children

Early childhood and the holistic development and well-being of children

Module 1

See Module 1 in the Learning Program for Adults found in Booklet II for more details.

Keep in mind that some parents, caregivers or educators may have been victims of violence. Some of the discussions in this module may be triggering, so be prepared to support participants. If necessary, by contacting your local support services or having a mental health care professional present during the sessions.

What to do if this happens:

- Allow time to listen to participants if they want or need to share with others.
- Talk privately with the participant about what is causing them distress and that it is okay to feel emotional about a topic.
- If a participant feels emotional distress during a session, be empathetic. Ask what is happening, allow them to express their feelings and ask other participants to listen and to try to understand the participant's feelings.
- Help the participant to feel calm through deep breathing, chanting, singing or by letting them lie down.

Module 1 provides the participants with an overview and understanding of how the spiritual development of children in the early years:

1. Supports children's holistic development and well-being
2. Contributes to the protection of children from violence

Adults also need to know how spiritual development contributes to the protection of children from violence in the early years and how this is important for children's well-being.

Through different activities, we will learn about the main areas of the Conceptual Framework. They are:

1. The dignity of the child and child rights
2. Holistic child development
3. Early childhood development
4. Spirituality and children
5. Violence in early childhood

Module 2

Nurturing one's own spirituality
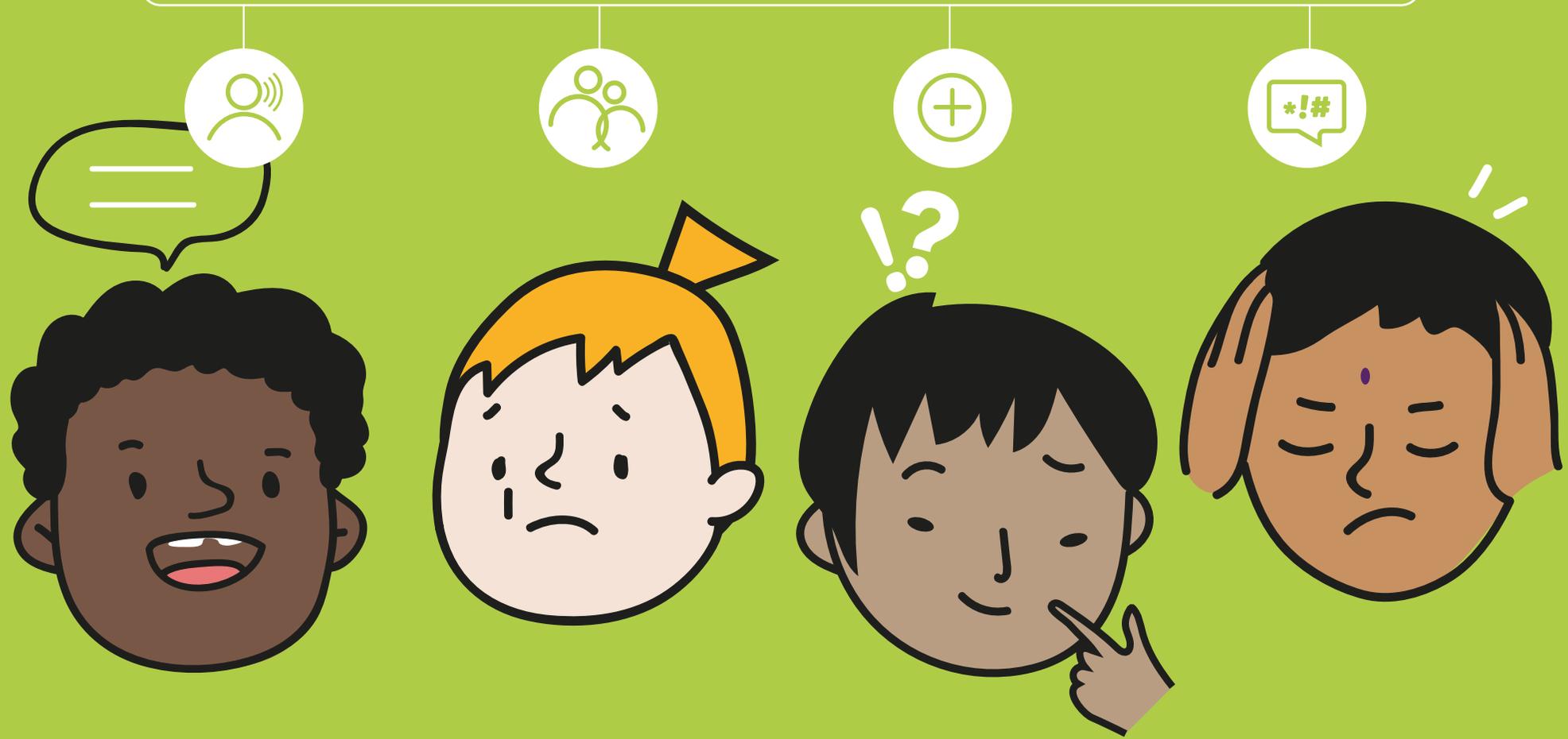
Better listen to and understand the needs of children

Better able to empathize with children

Respond positively to children

Realize the impact of our words and behavior

Module 2

For more details, see Module 2 in the Learning Program for Adults found in Booklet II.

Module 2 supports parents, caregivers and educators to nurture their own spirituality. Nurturing the spiritual development of children requires that adults work on their own spiritual development.

When we nurture our own spirituality, we are better able to listen to and understand children, empathize with them, respond positively to children's demands and needs, and realize the impact of our words, behavior, and actions on children's well-being.

Through different activities, we will reflect on our own understanding of spirituality, how our beliefs shape our spirituality and discuss different parenting practices that contribute to children's well-being.

Module 3

Positive relationships

Safe, respectful and violence-free environments

Empowering experiences

Module 3

For more details, see Module 2 in the Learning Program for Adults found in Booklet II.

This module is based on three conditions to support the nurturing of children's spiritual development.

They are:

1. Positive relationships with parents, caregivers and educators
2. Safe, respectful and violence-free environments
3. Empowering experiences for children

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.

The module ends with an introduction to the Activities for Children found in Booklet III for parents, caregivers and educators.

Infographics to Support the Conceptual Framework found in Booklet I

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Child Rights

ARTICLE 27:

Every child has a right to a standard of living adequate for the child's physical, mental, spiritual, moral and social development.

12 RESPECT FOR CHILDREN'S VIEWS

14 FREEDOM OF THOUGHT AND RELIGION

19 PROTECTION FROM VIOLENCE

29 AIMS OF EDUCATION
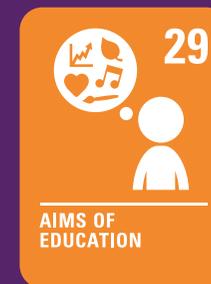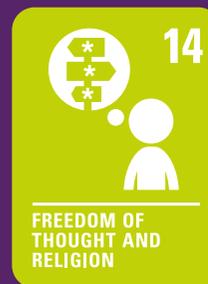
Child Rights

You can use this card in Module 1 - Session 1 and Module 3 – Session 8 in the Learning Program for Adults found in Booklet II.

For more details, see "The dignity of the child and child rights" found in the Conceptual Framework in Booklet I.

UNICEF (2017). *The Convention on the Rights of the Child: A Child-Friendly Version*.

Respect for the human life and dignity of the child is central in all major religious and spiritual traditions. They remind us that children must be treated with respect and that they are not objects upon which we impose our views. Children are individuals in their own right.

The United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child outlines 54 articles. All articles are interconnected but there are some articles that are the most relevant to the Toolkit.

Article 12 states: "Children have the right to give their opinions freely on issues that affect them. Adults should listen and take children seriously."

Article 14 states: "Children can choose their own thoughts, opinions and religion, but this should not stop other people from enjoying their rights. Parents can guide children so that as they grow up, they learn to properly use this right."

Article 19 states: "Governments must protect children from violence, abuse and being neglected by anyone who looks after them."

Article 27 is often overlooked. It states in the full CRC: "State Parties recognize the right of every child to a standard of living adequate for the child's physical, mental, spiritual, moral and social development."

Article 29 states: "Children's education should help them fully develop their personalities, talents and abilities. It should teach them to understand their own rights, and to respect other people's rights, cultures and differences. It should help them to live peacefully and protect the environment."

The Dignity of the Child

Regardless of race, ethnicity, ancestry, gender, socio-economic status, gender, sex, ability, etc.

Child Dignity

Inherent

Intrinsic

Sacred

The Dignity of the Child

You can use this card in Module 1 - Session 1 and Module 3 – Session 8 in the Learning Program for Adults found in Booklet II.

For more details, see "The dignity of the child and child rights" in the Conceptual Framework found in Booklet I.

You can also select religious scriptures from the Consortium Website.

Tip: When discussing child dignity with the participants, refer to your own religious scriptures and talk about how your traditions and teachings treat children with dignity and respect.

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 religious and spiritual traditions.

The child dignity is inherent, intrinsic and sacred. It is accorded to everyone by the virtue of being human. It is not contingent on the child's age, sex, mental or physical development.

The child dignity has its origin in a sacred reality that is both transcendent and immanent. This calls us to treat children with the utmost reverence and love for their lives, which ought to be expressed in our relationships with them and in the care and nurturing that ought to be provided for their sound 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.

Holistic Child Development

EMOTIONAL Development

COGNITIVE/ LANGUAGE Development

SOCIAL Development

SPIRITUAL Development

PHYSICAL Development

Holistic Child Development

You can use this card in Module 1 - Session 2 in the Learning Program for Adults found in Booklet II.

See "Holistic child development" in the Conceptual Framework in Booklet I for more details.

Tip: When explaining holistic development, you can relate the parts of the diagram to the parts body. We develop our mind (cognitive and language), our body (physical), our hearts (social and emotional) and our spirit (spiritual). All elements of our being are developed together – this is what holistic development is.

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:

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

The model presented in this Toolkit is built on the understanding that the spiritual development of the child is a central part of full, sound and holistic development. A holistic approach that includes the spiritual well-being is often a missing piece in current child development frameworks or programs.

A Whole-Community Approach

Chronosystem
Environmental changes that occur over the life course

Macrosystem
Attitudes and ideologies of the culture

Exosystem
Extended family and neighbours

Mesosystem

Microsystem

Parents' economic situation

School board

Family

School

Health services

CHILD

Peers

Mass media

Religious organization

Neighbourhood playground

Government agencies

Daycare facility

Social services and health care

Bronfenbrenneur, U. (1972). *The Ecology of the Child.*

A Whole-Community Approach

You can use this card in Module 1 – Session 2 and Module 3 – Session 8 in the Learning Program for Adults found in Booklet II.

For more details, see "A whole-community approach - 'It takes a village to raise a child'" in the Conceptual Framework found in Booklet I.

Tip: During the session, you can reflect with parents, caregivers and educators on the different people in your community that influence a child's development.

A child is influenced by the context that they grow up in.

Early learning and development can be seen as a "complex ecosystem" of relationships that are affected by multiple levels of the surrounding environment, from immediate settings of family and school to broad cultural values, laws, and customs.

"It takes a village to raise a child" is an African proverb that means it is the whole community that supports the well-being and development of the child.

Caring for young children, and therefore the nurturing of their spiritual development, is not only the role of parents or caregivers, nor it should be thought of as solely women's role. It is a whole community approach.

Community involvement in children's upbringing, along with children's involvement in community life, produces long-term benefits in children's lives, helping them to develop their sense of belonging and build a strong sense of identity.

Nurturing Care Framework

GOOD HEALTH

ADEQUATE NUTRITION

Components of nurturing care

RESPONSIVE CAREGIVING

OPPORTUNITIES FOR EARLY LEARNING

SAFETY AND SECURITY

Nurturing Care Framework

You can use this card in Module 1 – Session 2 in the Learning Program for Adults found in Booklet II.

For more details, see "Nurturing Care as a facilitator of holistic development" found in the Conceptual Framework in Booklet I.

A holistic development approach contributes to children reaching their full potential and helps create the foundations for life-long 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 encompass the Nurturing Care Framework which offers key strategies for supporting the holistic development of children from pregnancy up through age 3.

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.

This Toolkit is a contribution to support parenting and Early Childhood Development programs to use a whole child development approach through the inclusion of the spiritual development of children, and the involvement of religious and spiritual communities and faith actors as critical influencers in the ecological system of the child.

Early Childhood Development

This model shows human brain development.
Neural connections for different functions develop sequentially.

Language

Higher Cognitive Function

Sensory Pathways
(VISION, HEARING)

First Year

-8 -7 -6 -5 -4 -3 -2 -1 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10 11 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10 11 12 13 14 15 16 17 18 19

Birth   Months   1Y   Years
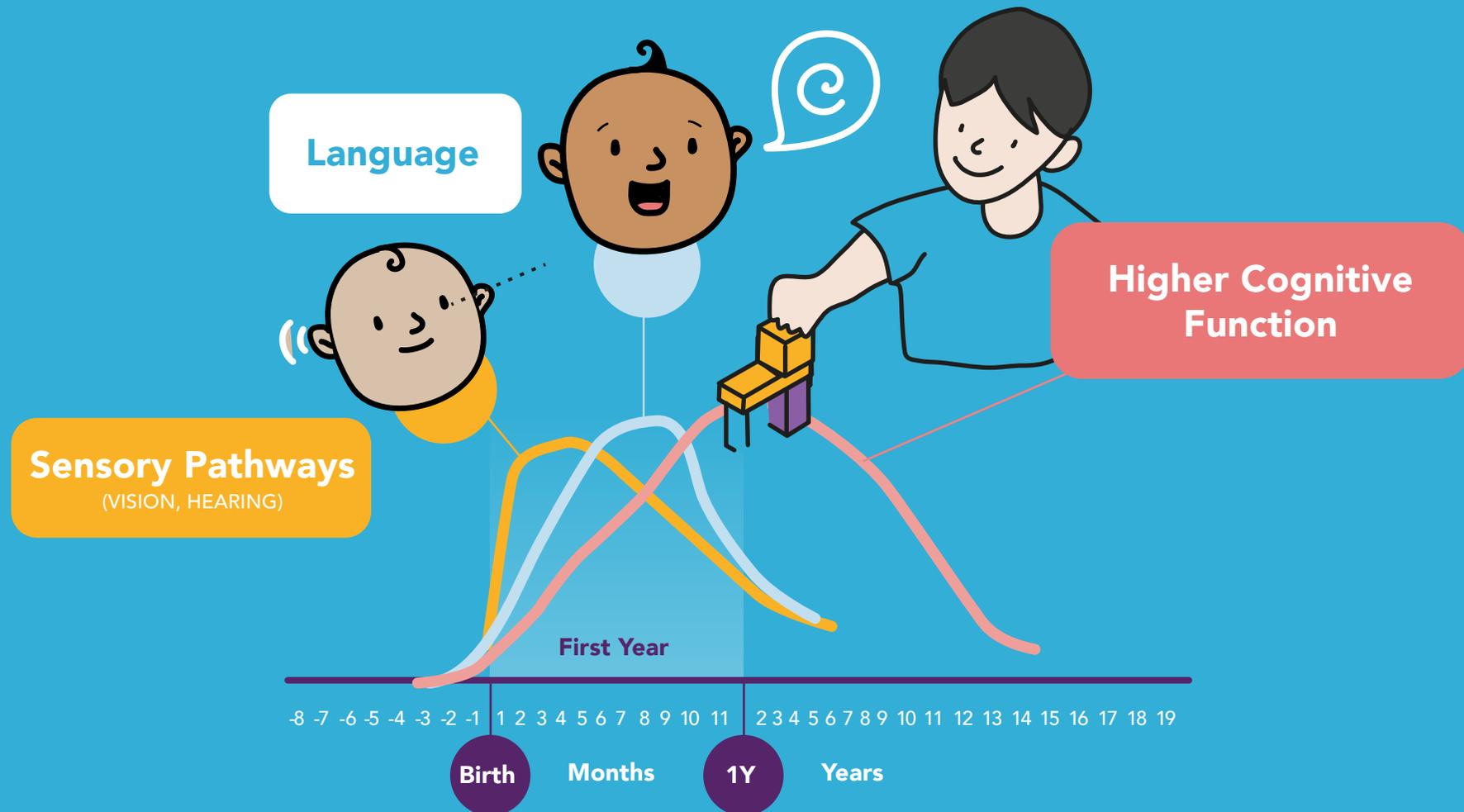
Early Childhood Development

You can use this card in Module 1 - Session 2 in the Learning Program for Adults found in Booklet II.

For more details, see "Early childhood development - The foundation of lifelong capacities" found in the Conceptual Framework in Booklet I.

The brain is one of the few organs not fully developed at birth. Although the brain starts to develop about a few weeks after conception, infancy and early childhood are especially critical in determining the neurological basis for skills development and the well-being of the child.

The care that we receive as children during the early years influences our lifelong health, our ability to learn and how productive we are as adults.

Children start forming their identity and building relationships with others from birth. Identity is a critical aspect of spiritual development. How this unfolds depends on how children are nurtured and the experiences they have.

The first years of a child's life have a significant influence on the emergence and development of physical, intellectual, emotional, social and spiritual capacities. Parents, caregivers and educators have a decisive responsibility, since virtually all of this vital period is spent at home or in daycare centers and schools.

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.

Religious and Spiritual Rituals in Early Childhood

Christianity

The disciples ask Jesus, "Who is the greatest in the kingdom of heaven?" Jesus replies, "Truly, I say to you, unless you change and become like children, you will never enter the kingdom of heaven. Whoever humbles himself like this child, he is the greatest in the kingdom of heaven."

Hinduism

There are 16 samskaras (rites of passage) in Hinduism. The purpose is to create a positive impact on the child, and to remind adults that the child is a precious being to be treated with love and care.

Buddhism

Parents and caregivers are called to practice the Dharma in their child-upbringing practices. In this practice of Dharma, our children become teachers as well, as the Buddha's teachings are transmitted in reciprocal relationships.

Judaism

Children are blessed every Friday evening at the start of the Shabbat, the holiest day of the week for Jewish people.

Sikhism

Many rituals are practiced to nurture the spirituality of the child. For example, reading words from the Sikh Holy Scriptures (the Shri Guru Granth Sahib Ji) during childbirth and immediately after.

Islam

The Qur'an expresses the utmost love and value for children of all abilities, describing them in various ways: the child is a gift from God (Hiba), an adornment of life (Zeenah), a great blessing (Ni'imah) and a protector or friend who carries a legacy (Waleeh).
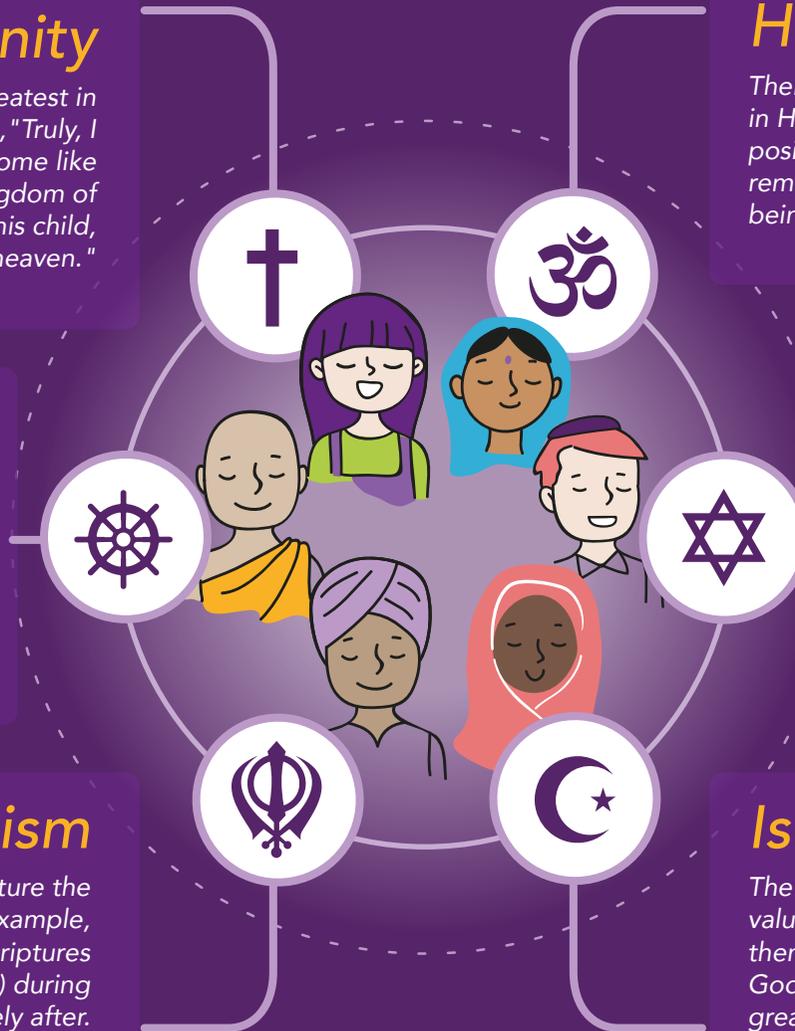
Religious and Spiritual Rituals in Early Childhood

You can use this card in Module 1 - Session 2 in the Learning Program for Adults found in Booklet II.

For more details, see "The critical importance of early childhood in various religious and spiritual traditions" found in the Conceptual Framework in Booklet I.

Tip: You can use this moment to discuss with parents, caregivers and educators the different religious and spiritual rituals that take place in early childhood in your context.

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

Many religious and spiritual rituals and celebrations take place during early childhood, such as the naming ceremony, visits to places of worship for a special prayer for health and well-being, the first haircut, the first solid meal, and the first reading of the holy scripture to name a few.

These religious and spiritual practices can help foster children's well-being and pass onto them ethical values that can develop as the foundations for spiritual nourishing, which can serve later in life as a source of strength to stand firm when things get difficult in life's journey.

Towards an Understanding of Spirituality

Sense of purpose and meaning

God, the Divine, the Transcendent or Ultimate Reality

Nature

Spirituality

Oneself

Others

Sense of belonging
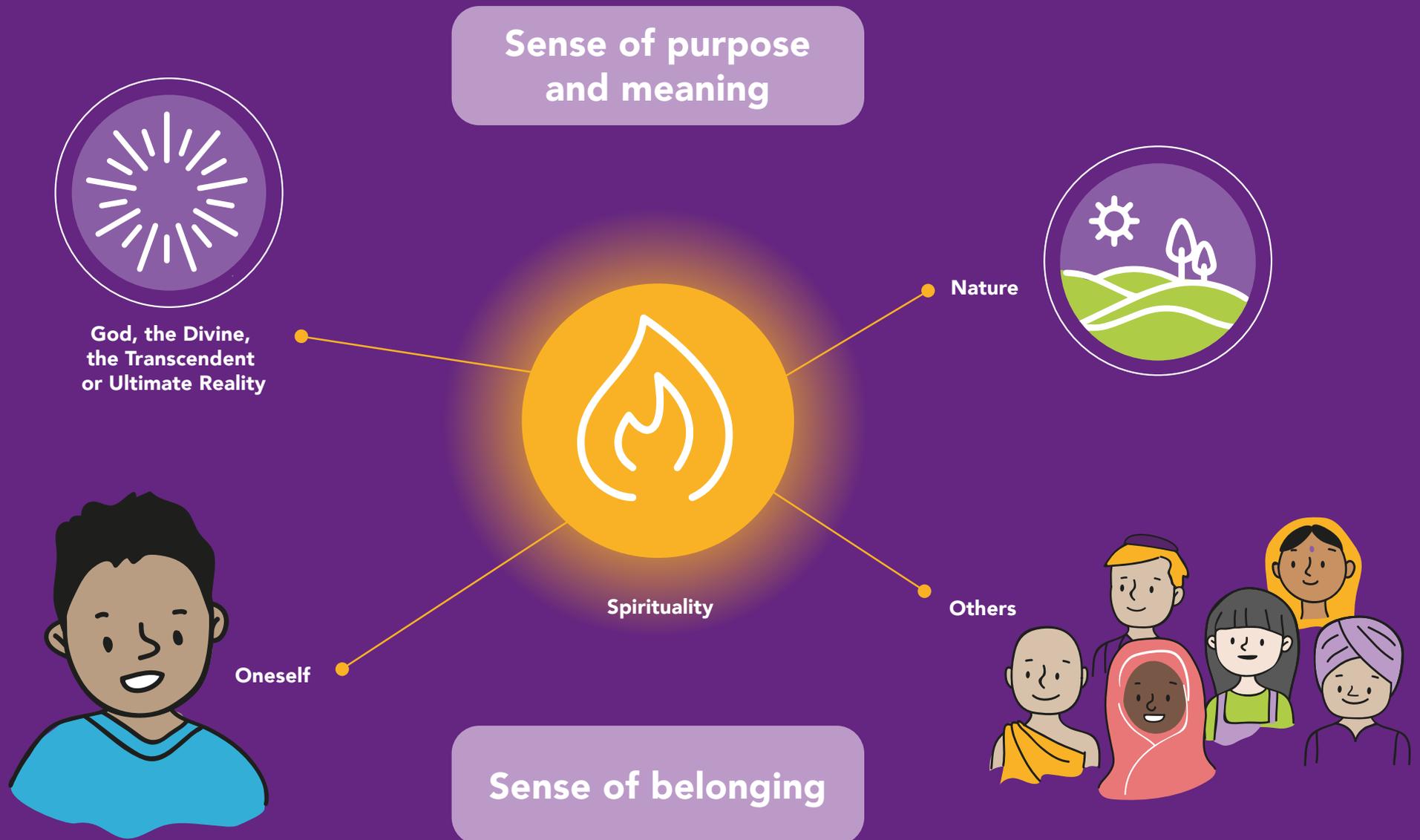
Towards an Understanding of Spirituality

You can use this card in Module 1 - Session 3 in the Learning Program for Adults found in Booklet II.

For more details, see "Towards an understanding of spirituality" found in the Conceptual Framework in Booklet I.

You can also select religious scriptures from the Consortium Website.

A multitude of definitions of spirituality exist, and there is no universally agreed definition. Religious and spiritual communities may each view this concept in a different light.

Spirituality is not confined only to religion or to religious people. Spirituality refers to the connection and relation with the self, with others, with nature, and with that which is referred as God, the Divine, the Transcendent, or Ultimate Reality.

A spirituality that connects these multidimensional relationships helps children to be grounded in their sense of self and helps them connect to their roots. It builds a sense of belonging, strengthens children's identity, ethical values, prosocial behaviors, and positive relations with others. It also lifts children up to develop a sense of purpose and meaning around who they are, what they do, where they live and what children are meant to be and want to become.

Spirituality...

Is innate
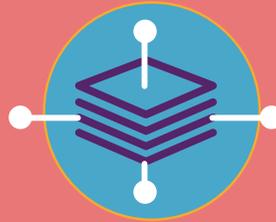
Is multi-dimensional

Is an intrinsic part of being human

Cannot be imposed
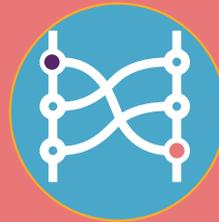
Is related to but not confined to religion or faith
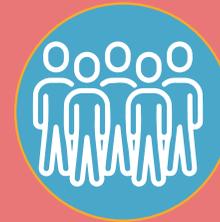
Is embedded in relationships and community

Is expressed in ethical behaviour

Is transmitted intergenerationally
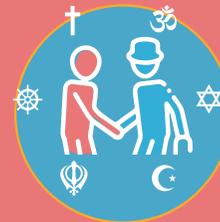
Supports interreligious learning and respect for other religions or beliefs

Spirituality...

You can use this card in Module 1 - Session 3 in the Learning Program for Adults found in Booklet II.

For more details, see "Towards an understanding of spirituality" found in the Conceptual Framework in Booklet I.

You can also select religious scriptures from the Consortium Website.

Spirituality is innate. We are inherently, genetically spiritual. Children enter the world prepared to have a spiritual life, and at the same time their spirituality needs to be cultivated and sustained.

Spirituality is an intrinsic part of being human. To be human is to be spiritual; it is an intrinsic human capacity. Spirituality is understood and manifested with great variety across cultures and religious and spiritual traditions in history.

Spirituality is multi-dimensional. Spirituality is about interconnectedness with oneself, with others, with nature, and with that which people refer to as God, the Divine, the Transcendent, or Ultimate Reality.

Spirituality cannot be imposed. The process of spiritual nurturing cannot happen through imposition or vertical teaching, it takes place through role-modelling, positive relationships, and experiences.

Spirituality is related to but not confined to religion and faith. Spirituality may be cultivated both within and outside traditional religious and spiritual frameworks.

Spirituality is embedded in relationships and community. It is shaped through the community, religious and spiritual narratives, beliefs and practices, as well as by the broader forces in society and culture.

Spirituality is expressed in ethical behavior. 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 is transmitted intergenerationally. 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.

Spirituality supports interreligious learning and respect for other religions or beliefs. Nurturing spiritual development strengthens the child's family religious and spiritual 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.

A Spirituality of "Moving Beyond" is...

From the immediate to the ultimate

Not satisfied with answers
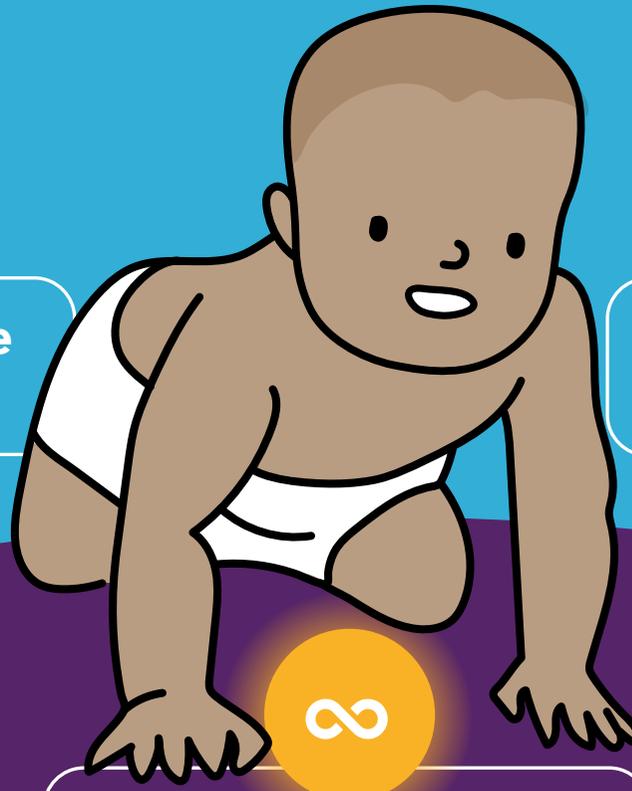
Not limited to boundaries

A Spirituality of "Moving Beyond"

An important aspect of the spirituality presented in this Toolkit is that it fosters a transcendent relationship that opens into a sacred world with direction and connection that gives people meaning and purpose, and helps them "move beyond" what they normally experience.

- **About connection:** Spirituality can be experienced in connection and relation with the self, others, nature, and God, the Divine, the Transcendent, or Ultimate Reality.

- **From the immediate to the ultimate.** Punishing children shows a concern about the immediate, a wish to quiet a child as an immediate desire without asking what this punishment will mean to this child in the long run. A spirituality of moving beyond is not satisfied with the immediate and therefore seeks to embrace the ultimate.

- **Not satisfied with answers:** To go beyond is to question. We are sometimes so sure we have the answer that we fail to ask the question. In the early years, children are always asking "Why?"; they see, they hear, they touch, they experience, and they ask, "Why?" It is this innate. It is this innate curiosity of children that creates the foundation for their spiritual growth.

- **Not limited to boundaries:** It is instead focused on possibilities. It is possible for people to live and work together for the good of the community. Is it possible to love one's enemy? In asking whether this is realistic, we open ourselves to the possibility itself.

Children's Innate Spiritual Capacities

Self-Awareness

Wisdom

Empathy

Wondering

Love

Compassion

Curiosity

Imagination

Mindfulness

Awe & Wonder

Children's Innate Spiritual Capacities

You can use this card in Module 3 - Session 10 in the Learning Program for Adults found in Booklet II.

For more details, see "Understanding spiritual development" and "Children's innate spiritual capacities" found in the Conceptual Framework in Booklet I.

The spiritual development of children closely connects to other developmental domains – and all domains mutually reinforce each another. As spiritual qualities or capacities develop, these affect the physical, cognitive and socio-emotional domains. In turn, as the other domains of development build up, this strengthens the development of spiritual capacities of the child.

Children have innate spiritual capacities, qualities or assets that are foundational to their being. These lifelong foundational capacities need to be nurtured for them to further develop, to enhance children's holistic well-being.

There are 10 innate spiritual capacities identified in this Toolkit: wisdom, self-awareness, wonder and awe, mindfulness, love, empathy, compassion, wondering, curiosity and imagination. They are not an exhaustive list.

The Activities for Children in Booklet III provide a description of all the spiritual capacities and how they can further contribute to the development of pro-social behaviors and ethical values. It also provides ideas for parents, caregivers and educators to nurture these innate capacities through daily interactions, playful experiences and care.

Direct Violence

Bullying

Sexual violence

Neglect

Maltreatment

Emotional or psychological violence

250 million one year olds (around 6 in 10) are punished by physical means.

Close to 300 million children (3 in 4) aged 2 to 4 worldwide experience violent discipline by their caregivers on a regular basis.

UNICEF. (2017). *A Familiar Face: Violence in the lives of children and adolescents.*

Direct Violence

You can use this card in Module 2 – Session 4 in the Learning Program for Adults found in Booklet II.

For more details, see "Violence in early childhood" found in the Conceptual Framework in Booklet I.

The term "violence against children" includes all forms of violence against people under the age of 18. This could be perpetrated by parents or caregivers, relatives, peers, romantic partners, other people close to the child such as religious or spiritual leaders and coaches, or strangers.

Globally, it is estimated that close to 300 million children between the ages of two and four (three in four children of this age) experience violent discipline (physical punishment and/or psychological aggression) from their caregivers on a regular basis, and 250 million one year olds (around six in ten) are punished using physical means.

Violence 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.

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

Structural Violence

Extreme conditions
POVERTY, POLITICAL UNREST, FOOD INSECURITY, ETC.

Climate change
CAUSING MIGRATION AND DISPLACEMENT

COVID-19 pandemic

Structural Violence

You can use this card in Module 2 - Session 4 in the Learning Program for Adults found in Booklet II.

Fore more details, see "Structural violence" found in the Conceptual Framework in Booklet I.

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.

The climate change crisis has been further exacerbated by overlapping crises of conflict, such as the COVID-19 pandemic. These events cause great damage to the most vulnerable families and communities, increasing toxic stress that can alter the development of children's brain architecture in ways that are likely to negatively influence academic performance, health, relationship formation, and other long-term life outcomes.

The pandemic has severely affected young children's physical and mental health, social and emotional development, and safety and access to education and recreation activities, leading to an unprecedented crisis of care and learning. Childcare centers and school closures during the peak of the COIVD-19 pandemic kept 1.52 billion children out of school, and for many, remote learning has been out of reach.

Violence and its Impact on Child Development

FRONT

Healthy Brain

This PET scan of the brain of a normal child shows regions of high (red) and low (blue and black) activity. At birth, only primitive structures such as the brain stem (center) are fully functional; in regions like the temporai lobes (top), early childhood experiences wire the circuits.

TEMPORAL LOBES
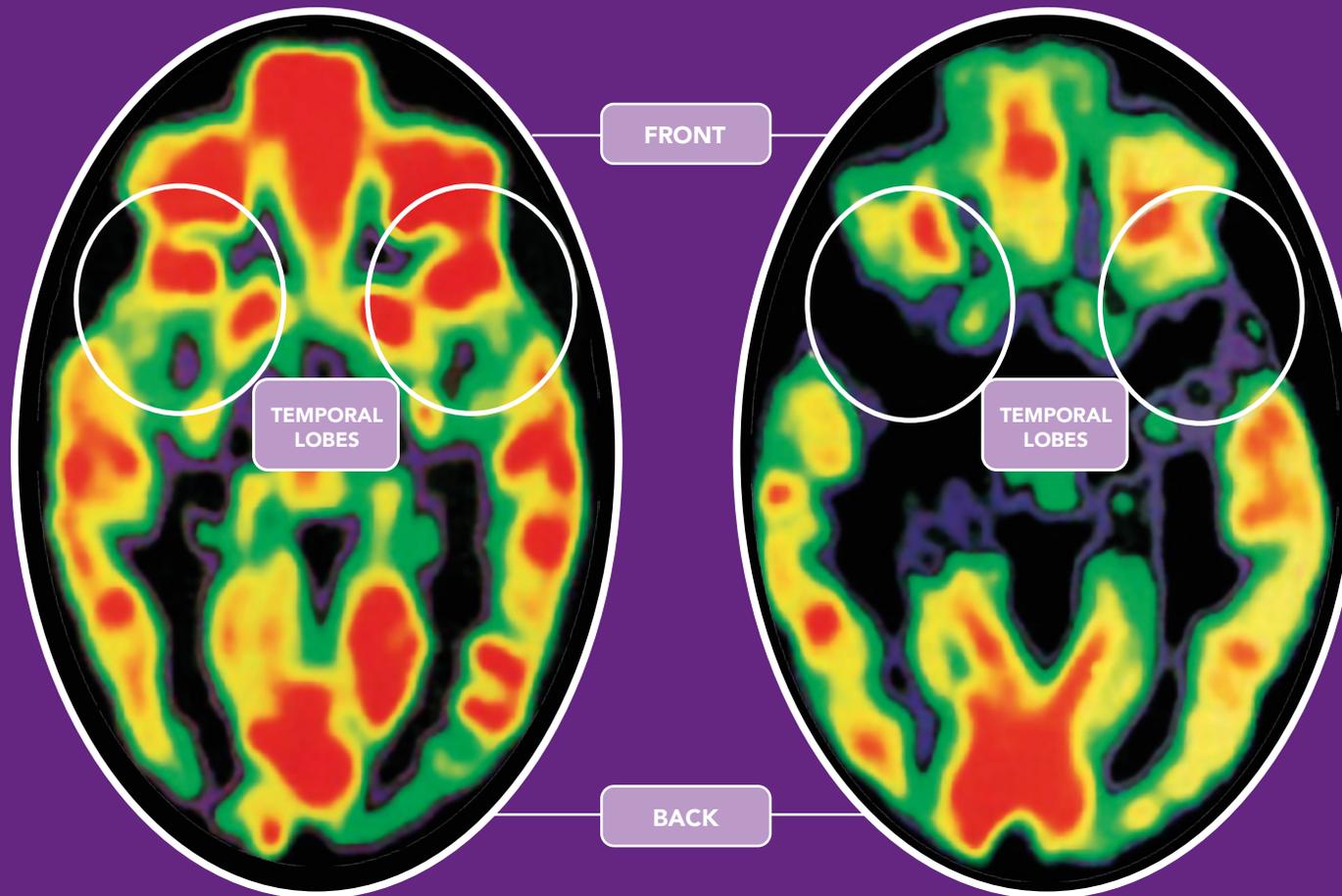
TEMPORAL LOBES

This PET scan of the brain of a Romanian Orphan, who was instutionlized shortly after birth, shows the effect of extreme deprivation in infancy. The temporal lobes (top),which regulate emotions and receive input from this senses, are nearly quiescent. Such children suffer emotional and cognitive problems.

BACK

Chungani, H. T., Behen, M. E., Muzik, O., Juhász, C., Nagy, F., Chugani, D. C., (2001). *Local brain functional activity following early deprivation: a study of post institutionalized Romanian orphans.*

MOST ACTIVE   LEAST ACTIVE

Violence and its Impact on Child Development

You can use this card in Module 2 – Session 4 in the Learning Program for Adults found in Booklet II.

For more details, see "Violence and its impact on child develoment and well-being" found in the Conceptual Framework in Booklet I.

The experience of violence in childhood often has effects that linger throughout an individual's lifetime. Some studies show that children who suffer violence in childhood are more prone to mental illnesses such as anxiety and depression.

Neuroscientific evidence demonstrates that exposure to prolonged stress, violence and conflict in early childhood, or "toxic stress," is linked with the chronic activation of the body's stress response system, which can be detrimental to young children's health, well-being, and psychological functioning, memory and learning, and more.

This brain scan image shows the severe effects of a lack of nurturing care. Studies show that PET scans of a healthy child's brain, compared to the brain of a deprived child's brain, presents more activity in the temporal lobes, an area where emotions are regulated which develops and grows based on early childhood experiences.

Alterations to the brain resulting from childhood violence can also shape later adult behavior. Research shows 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.

The Ethical Demand

End violence against children

Break perception of early childhood as period of transition

Recognize that children are rights-holders who must be respected and protected

Birth of a child is a blessing in religious and spiritual traditions

Religion and science both emphasize the importance of early childhood

Religious and spiritual communities can address harmful traditions and practices that condone violence against children

Development of child-centered and violence-free religious and spiritualcommunities that provide support

The Ethical Demand

You can use this card in Module 2 – Session 4 in the Learning Program for Adults found in Booklet II.

For more details, see "The ethical demand to address violence against children" found in the Conceptual Framework in Booklet I.

Addressing violence against children in early childhood is a moral imperative and an ethical demand.

Religious and spiritual traditions recognize the Divine, the sacred, in every child. In many religious stories and passages, children are viewed as a blessing. The birth of a child is seen as a blessing that brings us closer to the experience of and more aware of that which is referred to as God, the Divine, the Transcendent, or Ultimate Reality.

In their own ways, both science and our religious and spiritual traditions point to the importance of early childhood. Yet, in silence and secrecy, many children suffer from the diverse forms of violence inflicted upon them.

A major obstacle to ending violence against children is the perception of early childhood as being merely a period of transition. A major obstacle to ending violence against children is the perception of early childhood as being merely a period of transition, with lesser status than adulthood. It is often assumed that, only when reaching adulthood, is a person a full-fledged person with inherent human rights. This perception must be challenged.

Religious and spiritual communities can play a critical role in strengthening protective factors for child development, as well as in preventing violence against children, by addressing – through theological reflection – beliefs, social and cultural norms, as well as practices that condone violence against children.

Conditions to Nurture Children's Spiritual Development

Positive relationships

Safe, respectful and violence-free environments

Empowering experiences

Conditions to Nurture Children's Spiritual Development

You can use this card in Module 3 – Sessions 7, 8 and 9 in the Learning Program for Adults found in Booklet II.

For more details, see "A praxis approach to nurturing children's spiritual development in the early years" found in the Conceptual Framework in Booklet I.

- Children's spirituality needs to be nurtured for it to flourish and develop.
- These three conditions are how we nurture spiritual development in the early years.
- While the potential for expression of spiritual capacities already lies within the child, it is the primary role of the family – particularly, parents, caregivers and educators – to nurture them through their relationships, experiences and stimulation from the environment.

1. **Positive Relationships:** Spiritual development in children grows through caring, loving relationships. Parents/caregivers are role models to their children. Siblings play an especially important role in the development of young children. Like parents, older brothers and sisters act as role models.

2. **A Safe, Respectful and Violence-Free Environment:** A safe, non-violent and respectful environment is created when caregivers listen and respond to the needs of children, spend plenty of time together playing and interacting, and when children are protected from abuse, violence, neglect and maltreatment. An environment of trust, close relationships and mutual respect contributes to children feeling true to themselves and helps to develop a sense of belonging and acceptance.

3. **Empowering Experiences:** Children must be provided with opportunities to explore, appreciate nature, learn about diversity and their own and others' religious and spiritual traditions, make their own choices and decisions, and interact and contribute to their communities, according to their evolving capacities. These experiences allow them to practice and internalize ethical values, develop their agency, sense of community, belonging and purpose.

The Importance of Play

Allows children to explore unimagined places, give life to dreams & engage without conditions

Key to building resilience & coping with stress

For expression: joy, hope, appreciation, freedom to wonder, delight in life and wholeness

Development of self-regulation skills

Builds cognitive skills, content knowledge and creative thinking

Space to interact and build relations with others

Improves social development: capacity to share, negotiate, resolve conflicts

Nurture spiritual capacities: empathy, imagination, curiosity

Critical for holistic development and nurtures innate playful spirit

The Importance of Play

You can use this card in Module 3 – Session 7 in the Learning Program for Adults found in Booklet II.

For more details, see "The importance of play for children's spiritual development and holistic well-being" found in the Conceptual Framework in Booklet I.

Tip: Consider asking parents, caregivers and educators about what they used to play with as a child. You could invite them to bring in their favourite toy as a child or to demonstrate a childhood game.

You could also ask participants to share how their child likes to play. What is their favourite game? Do they enjoy playing outdoors?

Play is one of the main tools for the blossoming of spirituality in the early years through interaction and relationship with others.

Play supports children's developmental processes by building cognitive skills, content knowledge and creative thinking, including problem-solving skills. It fosters social development by enhancing children's capacity to share, negotiate, reach compromises and resolve conflicts.

Play is the essence of childhood and is part of children's nature.

Playfulness is perhaps one of the highest expressions of the human spirit, whereby joy, hope, appreciation of the present moment, freedom to wonder, and giving of oneself come together, at times unconsciously, in a delight in life and sense of wholeness.

The development of a playful spirit is also key to building resilience, the capacity to bounce back in difficult situations, which helps children to cope with stress, a sense of failure, and disconnection.

Play 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.

Spiritual Development of Children in the Early Years (1)

Less risk of aggressive behavior

Less risk of depression

Fewer high-risk behaviors

Less risk of substance use

A child exposed to spiritual development

Spiritual Development of Children in the Early Years (1)

You can use this card in Module 1 - Session 4 in the Learning Program for Adults found in Booklet II.

For more details, see "Spiritual development of children in the early years and its contribution to protecting them from violence and promoting their holistic well-being" found in the Conceptual Framework in Booklet I.

Nurturing the spiritual development of children requires three main conditions, (positive relationships, safe, respectful and violence-free environments, and empowering experiences), that support the emergence and flourishing of innate spiritual capacities.

The spiritual development of children early on benefits their holistic well-being for years to come, acting as a preventative mechanism. Research has shown that older children whose parents have nurtured their spirituality have higher levels of predicted happiness. As research progresses, it is becoming clear that spirituality is not only vital to human development, but also an essential component of various aspects of human life, health, and education.

Youth who as younger children were exposed to spiritual development demonstrated less aggressive behavior, less substance use, fewer high-risk behaviors, and less risk of depression.

Children who had two generations of caregivers who emphasized their spiritual development (for example, a grandparent and a parent) showed 80% less depression as youth than children who did not. This shows that spiritual development in parents, caregivers and educators directly affects our children.

Nurturing children's innate spirituality contributes to the development of ethical values and prosocial behaviors that can benefit families and communities.

Spiritual Development of Children in the Early Years (2)

A child exposed to spiritual development

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- Stronger mental health
- Enhances ethical behavior and actions
- Better able to deal with conflict peacefully
- Better able to heal from adversity
- Reduces a child's experience of violence
- Decreases likelihood of engaging in criminal activity
- Reduces chance of becoming perpetrator
- Increases chance of becoming agent of positive change

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A more peaceful, cohesive society

Spiritual Development of Children in the Early Years (2)

You can use this card in Module 3 – Session 8 in the Learning Program for Adults found in Booklet II.

For more details, see "Spiritual development of children in the early years and its contribution to protecting them from violence and promoting their holistic well-being" found in the Conceptual Framework in Booklet I.

This process of nurturing spiritual development in the early years, together with other positive inputs, such as responsive caregiving, child protection, and a focus on holistic well-being, can be a protective factor, an aid to coping, and a means for violence prevention.

Spiritual development is a powerful transformative agent that, together with factors mentioned above, can significantly reduce the child's experience of violence. This can reduce the child's likelihood of later engaging in violence themselves – potentially also against children – as an adult.

When a critical mass of the population espouses values such as respect, empathy, compassion, solidarity, and capacity to reconcile differences, this has the power to become a tipping point for a societal transformation toward social cohesion – a state in which people learn to live together respectfully, value diversity and pluralism, and cooperate with one another to develop and prosper individually and collectively.

This process can be sustained when children who grew up in this environment bear the next generation of children, transferring values of social cohesion and employing positive parenting practices that benefit the earliest development of the upcoming generation.

Nurturing One's Own Spirituality Through Religious and Spiritual Traditions
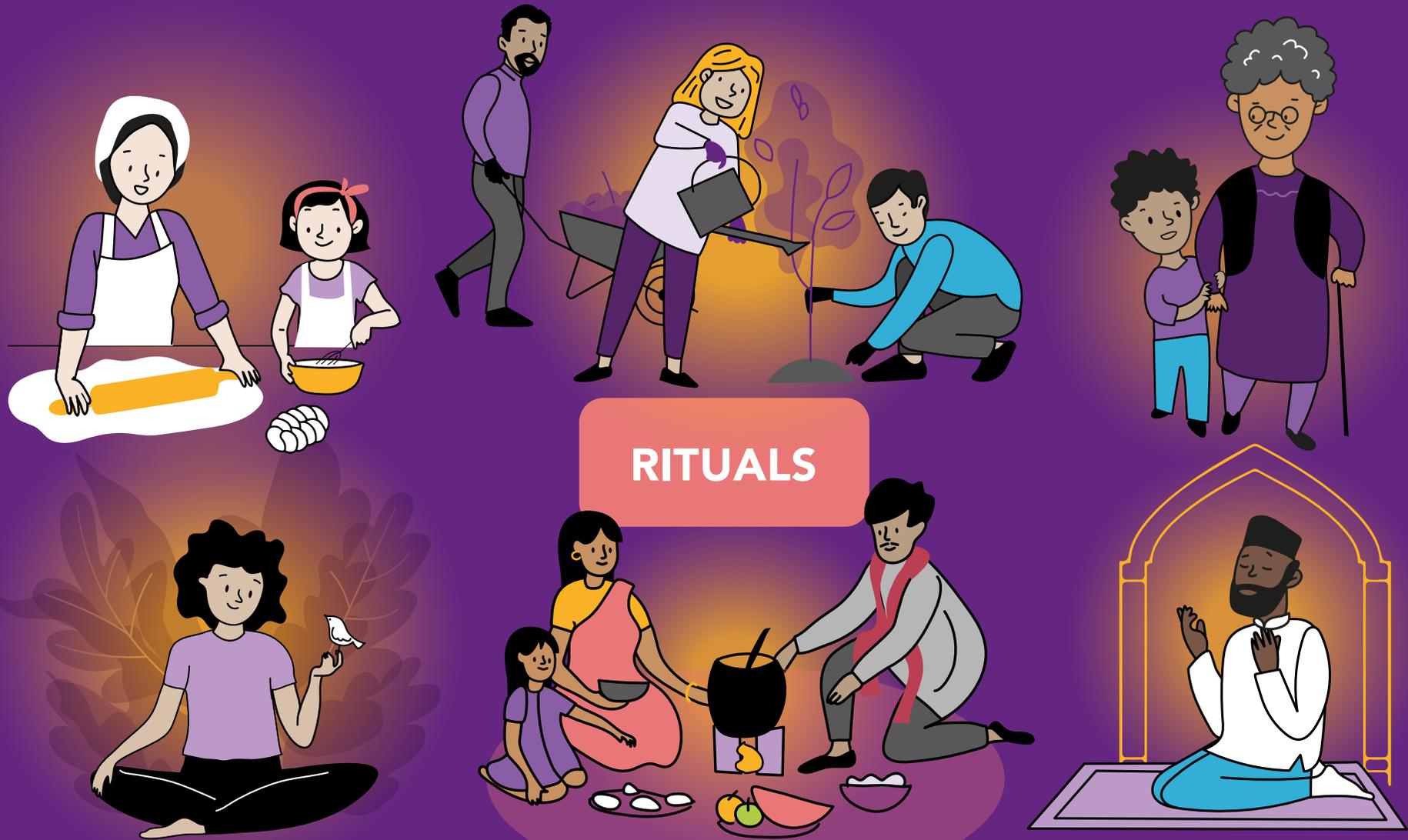
RITUALS

Nurturing One's Own Spirituality Through Religious and Spiritual Traditions

You can use this card in Module 2 – Sessions 5 and 6 in the Learning Program for Adults found in Booklet II.

For more details, see "The importance of nurturing one's own spirituality in various religious and spiritual traditions" found in Annex I of the Conceptual Framework in Booklet I.

You can also select religious scriptures from the Consortium Website.

It is important that anyone who is part of the upbringing of a child nurtures their own spirituality.

By nurturing our own spirituality as a parent, caregiver or educator, we are preparing ourselves to provide care for our children. We are then able to respond in a more positive manner to their needs and able to create safe spaces for them to explore.

We need to find physical spaces to reconnect with ourselves and children. Here, we can better understand their needs, aspirations and dreams, by asking them questions, listening to them and giving them space.

Nurturing spirituality also means reflecting on the ways we decide to take responsibility in our communities. It is also about understanding the injustices around us and committing to transform them.

As parents, caregivers and educators develop greater understanding and awareness of spiritual development, this will translate into greater capacity to interact with their children in ways that strengthen their innate spirituality.

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