

# Faith in Action for Children:

## Our response to the Covid-19 Pandemic

### STRENGTHENING FAITH WHILE KEEPING PHYSICAL DISTANCE



Our day to day behaviours and lifestyle must change radically if we are to halt the spread of COVID-19. Social distancing is an essential measure to protect ourselves and those who are most at risk. Using time in confinement to practice prayer and meditation, spiritual closeness and solidarity with others can strengthen our own faith. Religious communities can offer virtual spaces and online support to pray, listen to one another, and strengthen the sense of community.

### FOSTERING INTERFAITH DIALOGUE AND COLLABORATION



As countries shut borders to slow down the spread of COVID-19, we must build bridges of trust, solidarity and compassion across people of different cultures and beliefs. In some contexts, the current measures of social distancing, resource scarcity and crisis might evolve into social tensions and different forms of violence against the 'other'. Religious communities and religious leaders have a role to play in working individually and collectively to challenge xenophobia and oppose discrimination against others, and in promoting teachings and practices that protect and affirm the rights of minorities, particularly of children.

### STRENGTHENING OUR INTERCONNECTEDNESS AND SENSE OF UNITY



The pandemic has clearly shown how strongly we are all interconnected as a global community. We are learning the valuable lesson that even the behaviour of one person can affect others, and that our collective actions have the power to change the situation around the world in any direction. We are called today to harness the power of our interconnectedness to work together to transform hope into action for the most vulnerable, especially children.

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### **BUILDING SOLIDARITY TO RESPOND TO THE NEEDS OF THE MOST VULNERABLE CHILDREN**

Some women and children may become extra-vulnerable not only from the virus but also from their vulnerable situation in most societies, including from domestic violence, gender-based violence, lack of effective social safety nets, and lack of financial support. We have the opportunity to act in solidarity with those in already vulnerable conditions. Let us act individually and collectively to put children's welfare first, assuring love, nutrition, shelter, health care, and education, particularly for those who are already marginalized and are the hardest to reach.



### **NURTURING CHILDREN'S SPIRITUALITY TO STRENGTHEN THEIR RESILIENCE**

The best way to support our children in this difficult period is to strengthen the connection we have with them, make them feel safe, loved and reassured, and give meaning and purpose to each day during confinement. Fostering gratitude, encouraging children to care for themselves, for others and mother Earth, connecting with the Divine or Transcendent, and creating spaces for reflection, meditation or prayer, help children nurture their inner selves and respond positively to the situation



### **SUPPORTING PARENTS AND CAREGIVERS TO PREVENT VIOLENCE AGAINST CHILDREN**

High-stress home environments during the confinement are increasing the risk of children experiencing or witnessing domestic violence. Parents and caregivers' self-care and providing children with attention and care can reduce the risk of violence. One-on-one time, staying positive, creating a daily routine, managing stress, and talking about COVID-19, are some of the useful strategies. Read more on evidence-based advice from the [World Health Organization](#) and [UNICEF](#) for parents with children of all ages. Reach out to families in distress, and call your national child helpline or the police, when necessary.

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### KEEPING WITH ONLINE SAFETY FOR CHILDREN DURING COVID-19

As children spend more time online, it is important to be aware of both the positive opportunities but also the harmful risks of the digital world, including learning how to protect our children from online child sexual violence and abuse. Parents and caregivers are advised to use digital resources and tools with care and to limit screen time, according to the age of the child, and monitor what their children access online, while also ensuring that children are safe

online. It is important to balance the online activities with other non-digital kinds of learning and to encourage children to share and discuss information and experiences with family members at home.



### LISTENING TO CHILDREN WITH COMPASSION AND AN OPEN HEART



Children will have many questions and preoccupations. Their lives have been disrupted, they cannot go to school, they cannot meet their friends, and in many cases, they are confined to home. Today, more than ever, we need to be available to listen to our children with patience, compassion and to open our hearts and empathize with their feelings and emotions.

### HARNESSING OPPORTUNITIES TO STRENGTHEN CONNECTIONS AND NURTURE POSITIVE VALUES WITHIN THE FAMILY

Parents and caregivers have this opportunity to be closer to their children and spend more time reflecting on values that are important for the family and life in community. Let us use this time to build stronger connections with our children by doing day-to-day activities together at home, speaking with them, and fostering children's ethical reflections and response to care for others. Let us foster children's understanding of their own significance as part of the social fabric and how their actions impact upon others. Our example is the best teacher for our children.

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### **FOLLOWING CLOSELY INFORMATION AND GUIDANCE FROM YOUR GOVERNMENT**

It is important to follow the updates and advice of your government and health officials regarding the current outbreak of coronavirus disease COVID-19 in your country. Use and disseminate only official information about the Pandemic provided by government sites or the World Health Organization [website](#). There is a lot of disinformation that is counterproductive and hampers efforts to contain the pandemic. Make sure that children are provided with age-appropriate information, and use clear and simple language that does not stigmatize any groups of the population or perpetuate existing stereotypes.

### **SUPPORTING EFFORTS TO ENSURE THAT CHILDREN LIVING IN FRAGILE AND CONFLICT-AFFECTED AREAS ARE NOT LEFT BEHIND**

Fragile and conflict-affected states have weak health systems and many are already facing humanitarian crises. Many children in these states have been displaced by conflicts, live in vulnerable conditions, including in camps, informal settlements and on the streets. Many are not in a position to isolate or distance themselves from others or comply with basic hygiene measures, including simply washing their hands. Religious communities can help ensure that deprived children are protected and not left behind. This may include working together with governments and call for global leadership and concerted efforts to prioritize additional funding for fragile contexts, support social safety nets, and access to appropriate washing facilities. Religious communities can also raise awareness and provide appropriate guidance to families on how to improve sanitation conditions and promote hygiene practices to halt the spread of the virus.

### **TEACHING CHILDREN HEALTHY ROUTINES**



Teach children the importance of eating healthy and make handwashing and hygiene fun. Explain to children how to wash hands properly, to cover the mouth when coughing, and to keep physical distance from others. Get proper information from [UNICEF](#) about the Coronavirus and how to protect your children.