



A1 HIDDEN ISSUES – INFORMATION FOR FACILITATORS

Tools in this section of *Reveal* provide background information on hidden issues for facilitators. Tools in other sections are designed to be used with communities.

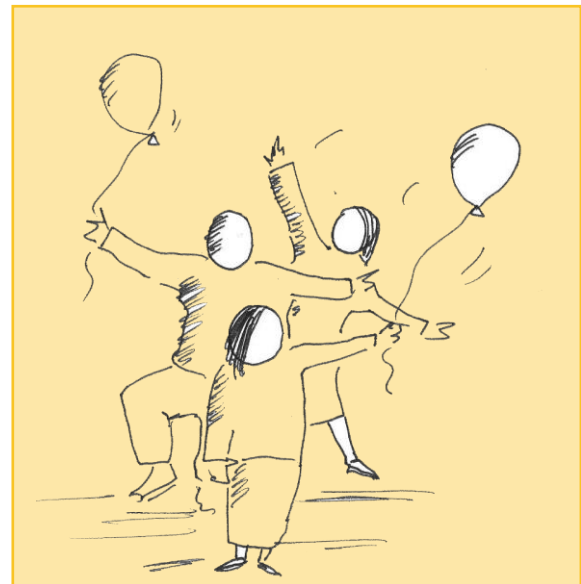
Revealing the need to protect children: information for facilitators

Questions for a facilitator to consider:

Do children contribute towards decision-making in the community? Which names are used when people talk to, or about, children? Are the words used in a negative or a positive way? Do they help children to feel valued and loved?

In many cultures, children are considered a blessing to families. Sadly, however, in many communities, not every child is well cared for and protected. They can sometimes be abused, exploited, neglected, or left without parental care or supervision. Their development is sometimes misunderstood or seen as unimportant.

These types of behaviour are internationally recognised as harmful and called ‘child abuse’. They are likely to be happening somewhere within your community – whether rich or poor, or of any culture. Usually these issues are ‘hidden’ and not talked about.



Under international standards, a child is any person under the age of 18 (The UN Convention on the Rights of the Child).

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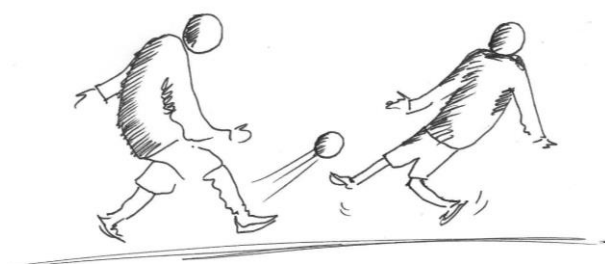
What does the Bible say?

Children are a gift from God (Psalm 127:3) and are created in his image. God loves and cares about children. Jesus' words and actions gave immense worth and value to children.

In Matthew 18:1-10, Jesus explains that the kingdom of heaven places the greatest value on the least. Jesus identifies himself with a child: 'Whoever welcomes a little child like this in my name, welcomes me.' In Matthew 19:14, Jesus welcomed children in a way that surprised adults, saying: 'Let the little children come to me... for the kingdom of heaven belongs to such as these'. He refused to accept the attitudes of his society towards children, which regarded them as insignificant and unimportant.

As Christians, we need to follow the example of Jesus. We all have a responsibility to care for and protect children, and to help them grow and develop.

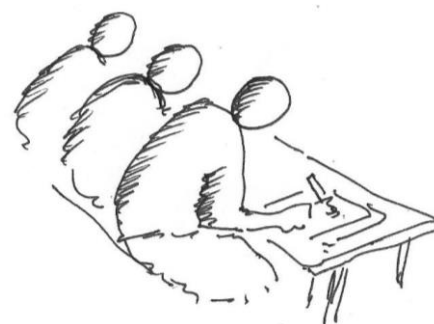
For Bible studies on this issue, please see **Section B** of *Reveal*.

Understanding child development

Child development describes the process of change that children go through from being a small baby to becoming an adult. Each child should be encouraged and supported as they grow and develop so that they can reach their unique God-given potential.

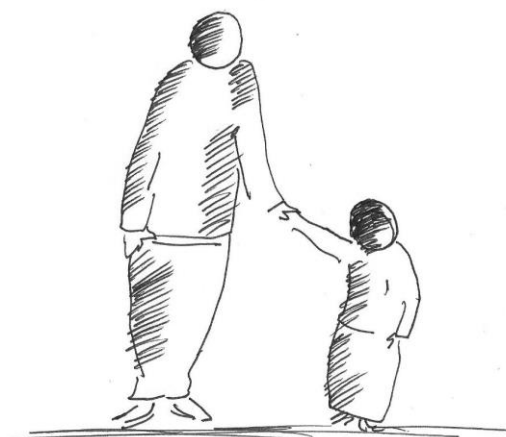
Children develop in five main areas:

- 1) Physically – growth and development of the child's body, supported by nutritious food, water, hygiene and exercise.
- 2) Intellectually (or 'cognitively') – what the child learns, understands or remembers.
- 3) Emotionally – developing feelings (eg empathy, sympathy, love etc), and developing appropriate control over their emotions.
- 4) Socially – learning through stimulation, social interactions and playing with others.
- 5) Morally – knowing the difference between right and wrong, developing a set of principles by which they live, influenced by religious teachings, beliefs or culture. One element of this may be spiritual development.



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Children develop best by learning about the world within safe boundaries provided by adults who form positive and trusting relationships with them. They need stimulation and opportunities to play and learn. If children do not grow up within a safe environment, their needs are not met or their rights are not respected, their development will be negatively affected, and they may be at risk of harm. The impact of this may last into adulthood.



Understanding children’s rights

Governments have agreed that all children have rights.¹ These include:

Survival: Their basic need for safe shelter, nutrition, and access to good health services, hygiene and clean water being met.

Protection: Protection from every form of abuse, ill-treatment, torture, sexual exploitation, involvement in armed conflict, child labour and discrimination.

Development: Their full development should be supported through play, education, freedom of thought and religion, and access to medical care.

Participation: Their views being obtained, listened to and taken into account in decisions that affect them, their families and their communities, depending on their age and maturity.

Each of us is responsible for making sure these rights are respected for all children, regardless of their race, colour, ethnicity, language or ability.

Understanding child abuse, neglect and exploitation

Child abuse and neglect includes all actions that risk or result in harm, injury or death to children. It is often carried out by an adult or older child who has responsibility for, or is in a position of trust or power over, the child.



Abuse can be committed in different ways: physically, sexually, emotionally and spiritually. Neglect is when a caregiver fails to provide for a child's health, education, emotional development, care, water, nutrition, shelter or encouragement. Children are also sometimes exploited, being forced to work in a way that damages their development (including in hard physical work, prostitution or pornography). Children with special needs, due to a disability for example, can be at higher risk of abuse than other children. In times of crisis such as

¹ These are set out in The Convention on the Rights of the Child (CRC), passed by the United Nations in 1989 and were later included in the African Charter for Children’s Rights and Welfare in 1999.

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flooding, an earthquake or in violent conflict, children may be at even greater risk of abuse. This can include trafficking, early marriage and sexual violence.

The impacts of abuse, neglect and exploitation are very serious. All aspects of a child's development can be harmed. Not only can they face physical harm, health problems and even death, but children who have been abused, neglected or exploited may also suffer emotional trauma. This can lead to low self-esteem, lack of confidence and a sense of worthlessness. Children may also be impacted intellectually and fail to learn important skills that will affect their ability to earn a living later in life.

All children need to be protected from all harm, abuse, injury or death so that they can achieve their full development and reach their God-given potential.

Who is responsible for protecting children?

Caring for children is the responsibility of parents and families, communities, churches, and the state. In places where there is a functioning government, it is reasonable to expect that child protection measures will be written into law, meaning that parents and guardians can face criminal charges for abuse, neglect and exploitation of children. In some states there is also a mechanism for state protection of vulnerable children, meaning that children may be taken away from their homes and put into state care (often known as 'foster care') if their families are considered unable to care for them adequately. Depending on the context, the care provided by the state may or may not be an improvement on that which the children have left.

By educating families and communities about the protection of children, we can try to strengthen local networks to provide the best possible environment for the well-being of children. In time this will minimise the number of children that have to be removed from their homes. Churches are well placed to encourage and support good parenting, through strong biblical foundations and by modelling the compassionate, supportive care of children.'

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Child or early marriage

1 in 3 girls in the developing world are married by their 18th birthday. While it happens to both girls and boys, it is mostly girls who are affected. It is illegal under international law.

Early marriage often means the end of education and the end of childhood. Girls are not physically or emotionally ready to become wives and mothers. They face high risk of dangerous complications in pregnancy and childbirth, becoming infected with HIV, and suffering from domestic abuse. Girls who get married typically have children themselves very young. Approximately 70,000 girls die in labour every year because their bodies aren't ready for childbirth.

Why does it happen? In many places child marriage is a traditional practice that has happened for generations. Girls are not valued as much as boys, and have a lower status in societies as a result of harmful traditions, attitudes and beliefs. Poverty is also a huge factor. Giving a child away means one less person to feed, clothe, educate and keep healthy. In communities where a dowry or 'bride price' is paid, it is often welcome income for poor families. In cultures where the bride's family pay the groom a dowry, they often have to pay less if the bride is young and uneducated. Many parents also wrongly believe that being married young will keep their child safe. **Source:** www.girlsnotbrides.org

What about traditional practices? Most traditional practices are good. However, some may be harmful to children. Harmful practices include female genital mutilation/cutting, early marriage, bride kidnappings, ironing of breasts and 'honour'-based killings.

What about discipline? The word 'discipline' relates to the word 'disciple'. We are called to 'disciple' our children and show them how to live. We are to love and encourage them as Jesus did with his disciples. We need to forgive them when they make mistakes, and we mustn't remind them of their failures. Discipline should be appropriate to the child's age and understanding, for example, taking away a treat or providing them a punishment that will not harm their development. It should not be given in anger, and adults should not hit or smack children.

Should children work? In some cultures, children are expected to work, some as young as four years old. Work that is not suitable for children can affect them negatively, for example working on building sites, riding donkey carts, herding animals or carrying heavy jerry cans of water. It is not right for children to work for long hours without rest, for little or no pay, in hazardous conditions and at risk of being injured or harmed. These are all examples of child labour. Children should be protected from this so that they can be educated and have better choices in life.

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Children need love, care and non-violent forms of discipline so that they understand clear boundaries that keep them safe and teach them how to treat others. They need to be given opportunities to play, learn and rest. It is important that communities recognise when child abuse, neglect and exploitation happens. Only then can communities make plans to overcome these issues sensitively, respecting confidentiality, and so ensure that all children are cared for and protected. Communities can also begin to offer healing and help to children who have already suffered.



Using Reveal

See **Section A2** for activities which help groups to understand children's right to development, protection and participation, and **Section B** for Bible studies on how God views children and their role, identity and status.



Finding out more

- Tearfund (2007) *Footsteps 72 – Family life*
tilz.tearfund.org/en/resources/publications/footsteps/footsteps_71-80/footsteps_72/
- Tearfund (2002) *Footsteps 52 – Nutrition*
tilz.tearfund.org/en/resources/publications/footsteps/footsteps_51-60/footsteps_52/
- Tearfund (2008) *Footsteps 74 – Household healthcare*
tilz.tearfund.org/en/resources/publications/footsteps/footsteps_71-80/footsteps_74/
- Tearfund (1999) *Footsteps 38 – Child participation*
tilz.tearfund.org/en/resources/publications/footsteps/footsteps_31-40/footsteps_38/
- Tearfund (2004) *Roots 7 – Child participation*
tilz.tearfund.org/en/resources/publications/roots/7_child_participation/
- Tearfund (2006) PILLARS Guide – *Seeking justice for all*, chapter on 'Special rights for children'
http://tilz.tearfund.org/en/resources/publications/pillars/seeking_justice_for_all/

Related tools:

- A2 – Using the media to talk about child protection [A2: Children & youth-1]
- A2 – Drama on child marriage [A2: Children & youth-2]
- A2 – Discussing standards for child protection [A2: Children & youth-3]
- B – Caring for children (Bible study) [B: Children & youth-1]
- B – God's view of children (Bible study) [B: Children & youth-2]