

# ACTIONS TO END VIOLENCE IN CHILDHOOD

Violence against children is ubiquitous. In 2015, at least three out of four of the world’s children – an estimated 1.7 billion – had experienced some form of inter-personal violence<sup>1</sup> in a previous year.<sup>2</sup> When the cumulative impact of violence is considered, almost no children – whether they live in rich countries or poor, in the global North or South – experience violence-free childhoods.<sup>3</sup>

Though the evidence base is geographically narrow – emanating largely from advanced economies – numerous examples of promising efforts by governments, communities and organizations from across the world demonstrate that childhood violence can be effectively prevented.

## Core strategies for violence-prevention

- **Acts of childhood violence are inter-connected.** Violence does not take place in isolation. Acts of violence should not be treated as separate incidents but seen as a thread that is woven into childhood experiences.
- **Structural causes of violence should be addressed.** While designing context specific strategies, ending childhood violence requires the simultaneous tackling of the structural roots of violence such as gender discrimination, social prejudices, inequalities, deprivations and adverse social norms that underlie many individual acts of violence.
- **Working with communities is essential.** To be effective, prevention programmes should involve communities in design and implementation and be sensitive to community norms and cultural beliefs.

The *Ending Violence in Childhood* Report has developed a series of essential strategies for violence-prevention that recognize both the complexity of violence in childhood and the need for multi-sectoral responses (FIGURE 1). Highlighted within each strategy are key actions that enhance the capabilities of individuals, embed violence-prevention in existing services and institutions,

and can help to uncover the roots of violence to prevent violence.

FIGURE 1: Prevention of childhood violence – a strategic framework.



Source: Know Violence in Childhood 2017.

<sup>1</sup> This estimate includes child homicide, violent discipline (or corporal punishment) at the hands of caregivers, peer violence (including bullying and physical fights), and sexual and physical violence experienced by adolescent girls.

<sup>2</sup> See Evidence Highlights 2 in this series. *Violence in Childhood. Key Facts*

<sup>3</sup> This summary draws on chapter 2 of the *Ending Violence in Childhood: Global Report 2017*. Know Violence in Childhood 2017. Ending Violence in Childhood. Global Report 2017. Know Violence in Childhood. New Delhi, India.

## Strategy # 1: Enhance individual capabilities

Violence in childhood must be addressed at the larger societal level, but helping individual children and adults recognize, prevent and resist violence will also be key to building a global movement against childhood violence, and a social framework that consistently rejects the abuse and endangerment of young people.

*Key action: Equip parents and other caregivers*

Homes and families are the frontline of prevention of childhood violence. Informed parents, backed by knowledge and services, can create safe, supportive and stimulating spaces for caregiving, can manage stress and aggression and can nurture children with empathy and care. Interventions that improve adults' parenting skills can have a positive effect on risk factors or proxy measures associated with child maltreatment. In several countries, perinatal home visiting programmes and family-based early childhood parenting programmes have been shown to prevent or reduce certain forms of child maltreatment, such as physical abuse and neglect. Cash transfers can also reduce forms of childhood violence rooted in economic insecurity.

*Key action: Empower children*

Efforts to build children's core protective skills, including cognitive, emotional, inter-personal and social skills can be delivered through pre-school programmes, academic enrichment programmes and vocational education. Early safety skills training can empower children with lasting preventative, personal safety and communication strategies.

*Programa Jornada Escolar Complementaria (Complementary School Day)* in Colombia and *Escuelas Abiertas (Open Schools)* in Brazil are two examples of school-based efforts that show positive achievements in terms of building citizenship skills, self-esteem, participation and tolerance, improving relationships between students and between students and instructors, and reducing violence.

Efforts to address the attitudes of boys and girls toward unequal gender norms, promote inclusive attitudes toward peers and build the capacity of young people to resist and prevent gender-based violence are also key. Empowering children to respond can reduce and prevent bullying. Processes that foster contact and mutual respect by promoting diversity in friendships can help address prejudice, build understanding and reduce the conditions for violence.

## Strategy #2: Embed violence-prevention in institutions and services

Violence-prevention is not only the responsibility of "child protection" services. Violence is typically

interwoven into the everyday lives of children and families, and its prevention should be built into all institutions and services that address their everyday needs.

*Key action: Prevent institutionalization*

Children living in care institutions are vulnerable to multiple forms of violence, from neglect to abuse and exploitation. A principal aim therefore should be to create family-based alternatives to institutional care, and to strengthen families and communities so they can provide what their children need. Redirecting resources for residential placements toward supporting children in their families - rather than institutions and their infrastructures - can be an effective way to shift services toward the former. Developing and supporting a range of alternative care options, short- and long-term, from family-based to small family-like residential care, from foster care to adoption, is essential to address the diverse needs of children of different ages.

As countries work toward developing alternatives to institutional care, it is important that they strengthen the capacity of existing institutions to ensure children's safety while in care. Additional training and support for service providers and caregivers - in residential settings and family placements - is also key.

*Key action: Transform school cultures*

School cultures can be transformed through a number of steps. These include strengthening teachers' capacities to foster inclusive and non-violent cultures in the classroom; shifting social norms on issues such as corporal punishment by encouraging teachers to use constructive and positive rather than punitive disciplinary methods; and strengthening the culture of the whole school to build the support not only of teachers and the education sector but also of families, children and community members for a non-violent school environment. After-school programmes for at-risk youth that address issues such as under-achievement, behavioural problems and socio-emotional functioning are another way that schools can help to reduce the risk of childhood violence.

*The Good School Toolkit* is a school-wide intervention in Uganda. It influences the operational culture of schools by engaging community members, local leaders, teachers and parents in efforts to strengthen a positive school culture. The Toolkit also facilitates learning about gender, sexuality and disability; promotes positive discipline; and creates violence-free classrooms.

*Key action: Ensure online safety*

The Internet and digital telecommunications can create new dangers for children, but can also

be part of a broader process of child protection. Strengthening children’s capacities to use the Internet to their advantage – in an age-appropriate way – can help minimize risks and prevent exposure to abuse. The Internet can also be used to make institutions more accountable for protecting children’s rights.

Encouraging safety online is a matter of increasing the capacities of parents and teachers to protect and supervise their children. Organizations and governments can create safe spaces where children can build their online skills and literacy.

*Key action: Embed violence-prevention in health services*

Strategies to end violence should be a component of all services that reach women and children – particularly health services, which play an important role in prevention, and early response to violence and rehabilitation following trauma. Health services should offer links to safe spaces where women and children can report violence, with the guarantee of supportive hearing, and where perpetrators, particularly young perpetrators, get the support they require to address aggression. All clinicians should know when and how to ask about violence, what first-line care to provide and how to refer patients for additional support.

**Strategy # 3: Tackle the root causes of violence**

No prevention strategy can succeed simply by responding to or punishing a wrong after it has happened. Eliminating violence in childhood means addressing the problem at its roots, uncovering causes, changing social expectations and building violence-free societies.

*Key action: Change social norms*

Violence in childhood is often deeply embedded in social norms, including patriarchal norms that perpetuate gender inequality and underpin interpersonal violence against women and children. These norms may appear difficult to change but, in fact, norms on violence are constantly shifting: for example, opinion is steadily moving against bullying and corporal punishment.

Communications-based strategies, including strategies focusing on individual knowledge, attitudes and practice, as well as programmes that encompass training, capacity building and efficacy approaches are an inherent component of the response to violence in childhood. Effective interventions are ones that address the interconnected nature of social groups, while focusing on changing the perceptions of individuals. Small-group training can help individuals shift their attitudes, beliefs and practices to support a broader

change in norms, while mass media and social marketing initiatives can help shift attitudes at scale.

*Key action: Establish violence-free communities*

Community-based violence can be reduced by strengthening systems of formal justice supplemented with community-based mediation. Local authorities can target high-risk hotspots with a range of services and resources, offering young people productive outlets for their energy and strengthening community cohesion.

Investing in public infrastructure, the appropriate design of community spaces and better urban planning that creates safer public spaces can make a substantial dent in community and public violence.

Access to justice can be improved by encouraging community-based mediation and arbitration, by engaging police to identify and refer youth in need of services, and by working with local programmes to enhance opportunities for young people. Better regulation of alcohol and firearms, both of which are linked to increased violence against children and women, are also important steps toward establishing violence-free communities.

**Essential public action to prevent violence**

Broadly speaking, urgent actions to prevent childhood violence are needed along three critical fronts (FIGURE 2).

**FIGURE 2: Actions to prevent childhood violence.**



Source: Know Violence in Childhood 2017.

## Break the silence

Breaking the silence around childhood violence is essential to understanding and preventing it. Advocacy should draw attention to children who are particularly vulnerable to violence, focusing on challenging gender and social norms that fuel violence. Non-violent discipline and conflict-resolution should also be promoted, together with closer cooperation between the movements concerned with violence against children and violence against women.

## Strengthen violence-prevention systems

Because violence permeates the everyday lives of women and children, multi-sectoral approaches to violence-prevention are essential. Professionals in health, education, social welfare, child protection, law, governance, planning and policing must work together to build sound violence-prevention platforms. Violence-prevention modules should be integrated into training programmes for health workers, schoolteachers, social workers and police officers, and should be part of training across disciplines, including law, medicine, public health and social work. Professional associations can also provide leadership on violence-prevention to their members. National governments and donors – including bilateral agencies, multilateral agencies

and foundations – should earmark dedicated and sufficient resources across sectors for preventing childhood violence, based on clearly articulated violence-prevention plans.

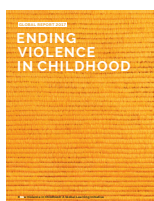
## Improve knowledge and evidence

Improving global violence-prevention efforts requires immediate action to build knowledge, support research and encourage evaluation to bridge policy and practice. More specialized research is needed to outline the social determinants of violence against women and children. Economic analyses can illuminate the connections between deprivation, inequalities and childhood violence, while research to improve our understanding of the gendered nature of violence and its links with gender inequality and gender roles, stereotypes and myths can inform effective strategies to protect women, boys and girls.

Well-designed studies can generate evidence to improve the response of criminal justice and legal systems to violence, while operations research can advance efforts to design efficient, effective, sustainable and culturally appropriate services that reach vulnerable women and children. Advocates should encourage an evaluation culture that combines quantitative and qualitative methods to better understand how change can be generated and sustained.

Every day millions of boys and girls around the world experience fear and violence – physical, emotional or sexual. This need not happen. Violence in childhood is preventable – through concerted and collective action that addresses the root causes of violence and lays firm foundations for both sustainable development and more peaceful societies.

To fulfill the commitments to ending all forms of violence that are enshrined in both the Convention on the Rights of the Child and the Sustainable Development Goals of the 2030 Agenda, states and societies must analyze the causes of childhood violence, and invest in preventing violence against women and children.



Know Violence in Childhood is a learning initiative dedicated to informing and supporting a global movement to end violence in childhood. Established in 2014 for a three-year period, the Initiative analyzed existing data, commissioned new research and synthesized knowledge on the causes and consequences of childhood violence worldwide. Its work highlights the impact of childhood violence on individuals, families, communities and societies, expands the research base on this global crisis and promotes evidence-based strategies to prevent violence.

The full report and related outputs are available at: [www.knowviolenceinchildhood.org](http://www.knowviolenceinchildhood.org)

