



Ideas for Action

Faith in Action for Children:

How Religious Leaders and Communities Can Support and Protect Children during the COVID-19 Pandemic

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Faith in Action for Children calls on religious leaders and religious communities to increase their actions in response to the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic on children. Faith plays a critical role in emergency situations to strengthen resilience in children and young people, and religious leaders can make crucial contributions to positively influence millions of followers to protect children from harm and affirm children's dignity.

The following 9 recommendations provide concrete ideas for religious leaders and communities to support, protect and nurture children's physical, socio-emotional and spiritual well-being.

1. Raise Awareness about Increasing Levels of Violence Against Children

Close to 90% of the world's school children are not attending school at present and are being confined to home and places of shelter. Recent reports indicate that there is an increase in domestic violence and violence against children. Several factors contribute to violence such as higher levels of stress, school and business closures, loss of income and economic vulnerability, family confinement, isolation and loss of access to support systems. During this time of crisis, children are particularly vulnerable and when violence occurs, religious communities have an important role to play.



What religious leaders and religious communities can do:

- Raise awareness through online, radio or TV messages and/or religious services about the negative impact that the disruptions caused by home or indoor confinement can have on families, friendships, daily routines and the negative consequences for children's well-being, development and, in some cases, for their very protection.
- Learn about the impact of COVID-19 on children by reading some of these resources from other religious leaders and child protection experts, which are available and constantly updated on Arigatou International's website.
- Provide information to all members of your community, parents and caregivers about how to contact the National Child Helplines or National Domestic Violence Hotlines.
- Contact all families in your communities by phone to get insight to their situations, provide counselling and listen to the most vulnerable members of the family.
- Encourage members of the religious communities to reach out to each other and inform religious leaders when they suspect children or women are experiencing violence at home.

2. Support Children's Awareness of COVID-19 and Coping with Physical Distancing

Religious leaders and religious communities can support families to understand the impact of social distancing measures on children's well-being, and can raise awareness of concrete strategies to overcome the negative consequences of social distancing for children.



What religious leaders and religious communities can do:

- Provide comfort, address fear, anxiety, and stigma about self-isolation and social distancing through scripture-based teachings. Use telephone, radio, TV or social media to share the teachings.
- Help families to find virtual ways to encourage children and young people to be connected with one another.
- Organize activities for children online or talk to them through telephone calls, read the scriptures together, and discuss information about the Coronavirus. Share how important it is to keep physical distance from others in order to help prevent the spread of this disease. For families without access to the Internet, you can share messages via WhatsApp or radio programs.
- Raise awareness and share the updates and advice of the government and health officials regarding COVID-19, including its prevention, medical care and treatment as some families might not have easy access to reliable information.

3. Help Create Healthy, Nurturing and Safe Environments for Children during the Confinement, including Online Safety

As religious leaders and religious communities it is important to support parents and caregivers to create healthy, nurturing and safe routines and environments for their children, including while online. This is a moment of uncertainty and anxiety for our children and now more than ever, they need to feel loved, reassured and secure. As some children will spend more time online during the pandemic, it is important for parents to be aware of both the positive opportunities but also the harmful risks of the digital world.



What religious leaders and religious communities can do:

- Use scriptures to encourage families to treat each other with care, compassion and respect. Provide examples for parents and caregivers on how to use positive language and gentle care with one another and with children.
- Encourage parents and caregivers to support their children by listening with patience, empathy and compassion, and to show kindness and appreciation to them, as these are forms of child protection.
- Use religious activities to teach children healthy routines and particularly to prioritize handwashing and hygiene as these are major preventive measures against COVID-19. Explain to children how to wash hands properly with soap and water, how to cover their mouths when coughing or sneezing, and how to keep physical distance from others. [Here is information](#) from UNICEF about COVID-19 and how to protect children.
- Support parents and caregivers in providing learning opportunities for their children, for example by organizing specific activities via telephone, radio, TV or social media for children.
- Raise awareness for parents and caregivers about the need to protect their children from online child sexual abuse and exploitation, and how to do this. 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.
- Encourage parents and caregivers to balance online activities with other non-digital kinds of learning, for instance, by creating opportunities in the family to share and discuss information together.

4. Strengthen Faith and Interfaith Collaborations During Confinement

Religious communities should make sure not to hold in-person gatherings and services during the time of physical distancing and home confinement, and should collaborate with governments to contribute to the safety and good health of the society. For religious leaders and religious communities, it is important to continue their life in community and find alternative ways to feel connected and strengthen their faith and care for one another and for others in the society during confinement. 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'.



What religious leaders and religious communities can do:

- Invite members of your communities to strengthen their personal and family religious practices by creating spaces within homes to pray, or meditate and share time together.
- Organize virtual moments of prayers for members of your community of faith, including dedicated moments of prayers for children and youth.
- Reach out to religious leaders from other religious communities to support one another and offer help to their communities, if needed. This support can be through the collection and sharing of food, medicinal supplies and equipment and hygiene supplies such as soap and disinfectants.
- Challenge xenophobia and discrimination against others through sermons and theological reflections using radio, TV and social media.
- Speak out and call for the non-discrimination and non-stigmatization of people, including children, who have been affected by the COVID-19.
- Promote teachings and practices that protect the rights of minorities, particularly of children.
- Organize interfaith prayers online and through radio and TV for children and their families.

5. Support Parents to Nurture Ethical Values and Spirituality in Children within the Family and in Places of Shelter

Religious leaders and religious communities can support strengthening the resilience of families, especially children. When families are in lock-down, they have the opportunity to be close to their children and they can use this time to reflect on values that are important for their family, for life in their community and for the environment.



What religious leaders and religious communities can do:

- Support parents in fostering in children and young people the understanding of their own significance as part of the social fabric in these difficult times, and how their actions impact upon others. You can initiate ethical reflections on everyone's role and individual and collective responsibilities in helping to halt the spread of the virus and how children and young people can help by sharing the message to peers.
- Promote solidarity with one another and encourage families to reach out by phone to family, friends and others who might be lonely or in need, or help by getting food for them. Our personal example is the best teacher for our children, and if we behave with care, compassion and empathy towards others, our children will learn from us.
- Help parents and caregivers to nurture gratitude in children and to promote ways for children to care for themselves, for others and mother Earth, and connect with God, the Divine or the Transcendent, by creating regular spaces for reflection, meditation or prayer.
- Encourage parents and caregivers to strengthen connections with their children, by engaging together in day-to-day activities such as playing, praying, singing, and age-appropriate participation in preparing foods for cooking.
- Share this booklet of activities prepared by Arigatou International that parents and caregivers can use with children at home to nurture ethical values and spirituality.

6. Empower Children to Participate and Contribute to Community Life

Finding innovative and transformative ways to engage and empower children in this time of crisis is important to help them strengthen their sense of belonging in their community and their sense of purpose.



What religious leaders and religious communities can do:

- Use the internet and social media, radio, TV and telephones to promote and encourage the participation of children and young people in religious activities. This can be done by asking children, from their homes, to contribute prayers, songs, or messages for other children and the community, and by creating spaces for children to meaningfully participate during the digital worship, and thereby connect with their community and their peers.
- Organize specific online activities by members of the community for children to practice and deepen their faith by listening to stories, singing songs and connecting to one another.
- Engage children and young people to organize online activities for the younger ones, or develop videos or social media messages, and online activities for your religious communities.
- Listen to the voices of children, their fears and concerns. Create spaces to listen to their ideas and encourage proposals on how they can respond and support each other.

7. Connect with Your Local and National Government

Religious leaders have great moral authority and legitimacy within the communities where they work. Their influence can help protecting the most vulnerable communities and children.



What religious leaders and religious communities can do:

- Share messages from governments and health organizations with your communities that provide guidance about how to protect people from spreading COVID-19. Underscore the importance of ensuring compliance with government recommendations.
- Ask national and local governments to provide basic supplies such as clean water, soap, and other needed protective equipment for medical care workers, medicine and equipment for treatment, as well as to strengthen social safety nets and economic support to the most vulnerable families.
- Advocate to governments to strengthen funding and programmatic responses to support women and children victims of domestic violence.
- Offer religious facilities as service centers for the sick and those without shelter in the event of over-stretched government and other medical facilities.

8. Build 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. 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 of those are not in a position to isolate or distance themselves from others or comply with basic hygiene measures, including washing their hands. Religious leaders and religious communities can act in solidarity with those in already vulnerable conditions, and help ensure that children at risk are protected and not left behind.



What religious leaders and religious communities can do:

- Raise awareness and promote actions that 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.
- Help set up groups of volunteers to support the most vulnerable, such as women and children victims of domestic violence, families with children living in poverty, children with disabilities, and children whose parents may be ill.
- Raise awareness and provide appropriate guidance to families in fragile contexts on how to improve sanitation conditions and promote hygiene practices to halt the spread of the virus.
- Call for global leadership and concerted efforts to prioritize providing additional funding for fragile communities to strengthen social safety nets, and ensure economic support and access to appropriate washing facilities, food, medical supplies, and overall protection, especially of children.

9. Support and pray for medical professionals, caregivers, and researchers

Worldwide, doctors, nurses and paramedics are facing an unprecedented workload in overstretched health facilities and are working in stressful and frightening work environments, with limited personal protective equipment, which leaves them vulnerable to infection.



What religious leaders and religious communities can do:

- Constantly raise awareness in your communities that the best way to protect our frontline medical professionals and avoid overwhelming our health facilities is to strictly follow the advice of health experts to wash our hands frequently with soap and water, covering their mouths and noses when coughing or sneezing, clean surfaces often, self-isolate if feeling unwell, and maintain social distance by staying home when asked to do so, and otherwise avoiding crowded and public spaces.
- Help to ensure that medical professionals have access to food for their own families and help ensure that their children are being cared for when their parents have to work or become ill.
- Pray for doctors, nurses and medical staff and other caregivers and workers in essential roles, that they will be protected as they place their own well-being at risk in the service of all.



For additional information, [click here](#) to view the World Health Organization's document on practical considerations and recommendations for religious leaders and faith-based communities in the context of COVID-19.



FOR MORE INFORMATION, CONTACT US

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