Preventing and responding to violence against children: UNICEF’s approach

All children have the right to be protected from violence inflicted on them anyone, whether parents, teachers, friends, romantic partners or strangers. Yet in every country, children experience violence at home, at school and in their communities, often at the hands of people they trust and interact with daily.

In addition to causing physical pain, violence undermines children’s sense of self-worth, affronts their dignity and hinders their development. Violence also perpetuates cycles of exclusion and poverty and has long-term social and economic costs for society as a whole.

The 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development includes a global commitment to end violence against children and acknowledges that eradicating violence is a key component of sustainable development.

Key facts

- Three quarters of children aged 2 to 4 regularly experience violent discipline by their caregivers.
- Only 60 countries have adopted legislation fully prohibiting corporal punishment at home.
- Fifteen million adolescent girls aged 15 to 19 have experienced sexual violence.
- More than 1 in 3 students between 13 and 15 years old experience bullying regularly.
- 732 million children, half the population of school-age children, live in countries where corporal punishment at school is not fully prohibited.
- Nearly 500 attacks or threats of violence against schools were documented in 2016.
- Every 7 minutes, somewhere in the world, an adolescent is killed by an act of violence.


Sustainable Development Goals targets focused on ending violence or harmful practices against children

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<tr>
<th>Goal 16. Promote peaceful and inclusive societies for sustainable development, provide access to justice for all and build effective, accountable and inclusive institutions at all levels.</th>
<th>Target 16.1 Significantly reduce all forms of violence and related death rates everywhere.</th>
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<td>Target 16.2 End abuse, exploitation, trafficking and all forms of violence against and torture of children.</td>
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<th>Goal 5. Achieve gender equality and empower all women and girls.</th>
<th>Target 5.2 Eliminate all forms of violence against all women and girls in the public and private spheres, including trafficking and sexual and other types of exploitation.</th>
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<td>Target 5.3 Eliminate all harmful practices, such as child, early and forced marriage and female genital mutilation.</td>
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| Goal 4. Ensure inclusive and equitable quality education and promote lifelong learning opportunities for all. | Target 4.A Build and upgrade education facilities that are child, disability and gender sensitive and provide safe, non-violent, inclusive and effective learning environments for all. |
Responding to the call to end violence against children by 2030, UNICEF has strengthened its evidence-based approach. Priority areas for UNICEF action include the following:

**Support coordinated national plans and actions to address violence against children:** Actions must be informed by coherent and well-coordinated national plans. The most promising approaches involve comprehensive, multisectoral initiatives that engage both government and civil society and are based on evidence about what works to prevent and respond to violence.

**Strengthen legal and policy frameworks:** Legal and policy changes can help protect children from harm, provide justice for victims and influence attitudes about acceptable treatment of children. Many countries need to strengthen the laws and policies that protect children from violence, exploitation and abuse – and to back these efforts with solid monitoring and enforcement.

**Shift norms and practices that perpetuate violence:** National approaches should address societal beliefs that perpetuate violence against children in all settings. Parenting programmes can shift norms concerning the tolerance of violence, help create positive parent-child relationships and reduce harsh parenting practices. School-based programmes can teach children to solve problems in non-violent ways, deal with their emotions, empathize with others and safely manage abusive situations.

**Implement policies to curb violence and improve services:** Creating protective environments for girls, boys and adolescents requires participation and improved services across all sectors. Such services range from safe mechanisms to report violence in person and online and sensitive treatment of child victims by law enforcement and justice systems to physical and psychosocial support from the health and social welfare systems. Many countries need to strengthen their social service systems and train social workers to provide support for children who have experienced violence. Systems and services also need to be more resilient to ensure that children are protected if crises occur.

**Educate and empower girls and boys to exercise their rights, manage risks and seek help:** Children and adolescents can be agents of change in their own lives and among their peers, families and communities. Prevention efforts based in schools and communities can help boys and girls recognize and safely report violence in all its forms and seek help when they need it. Life skills and livelihood programmes can help adolescents prepare for adult economic responsibilities and postpone childbearing and marriage until they are ready to be parents. Changing gender norms that condone violence can help children and adolescents build more equitable and nonviolent relationships.

**UNICEF programmes to prevent and respond to violence against children**

To guide its work on preventing and responding to violence against girls, boys and adolescents, UNICEF has developed multisectoral programming guidance based on an overarching theory of change. The guidance presents a strategic vision, describes pathways of change, proposes a package of evidence-based strategies, and articulates a chain of results, both for preventing violence and for improving the lives of victims. It incorporates a focus on the forms of violence highlighted in the Sustainable Development Goals, including violent discipline and sexual violence.

The programming guidance addresses all forms of violence against girls and boys – physical, sexual and emotional – including in settings affected by armed conflict and other emergencies. The guidance is designed to help UNICEF country offices and partners develop more coherent and effective actions to address violence against children through UNICEF country programmes and by monitoring progress and tracking results at the national level.

**Partnerships**

Ending violence requires collaboration among diverse actors including governments, civil society groups, international organizations, the private sector, faith-based organizations and communities and children themselves. In 2016, WHO, UNICEF and key partners1 jointly launched INSPIRE: Seven strategies for ending violence against children, to advance a common set of effective prevention and response actions. INSPIRE is a prominent component of the Global Partnership to End Violence Against Children. Working closely with partners, UNICEF supports national and global efforts to bolster advocacy to spotlight the extent of violence against children, and intensify efforts to end it. Doing so is a matter of human rights and fundamental justice, and it encourages the development of more inclusive and peaceful societies.

**Key resources**

- UNICEF #ENDViolence Campaign

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