

Children have the right to be protected from all forms of violence, abuse and exploitation



Cambodia: All children have the same rights regardless of their language, religion, disability, gender, opinion, or national, ethnic or social origin. Children's club members teach other children about child rights and help to protect them from harm.
Laura Reinhardt / World Vision

Protecting children

Three out of four children worldwide experience some form of violence, abuse or exploitation every year. That is 1.7 billion children under 18 years old, from every community and country, both poor and rich. This robs children of their dignity, their rights, their potential, their future and, too often, their lives. There is also a high cost for society as a whole. But it can be stopped – a world where all children are protected is possible.

“We owe our children—the most vulnerable citizens in any society—a life free from violence and fear. In order to ensure this, we must be tireless in our efforts not only to attain peace, justice and prosperity for countries, but also for communities and members of the same family.”

– Nelson Mandela

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This topic sheet covers issues that some students may have experienced and that are difficult for younger children to understand. We recommend using it with students in Year 8 and above.

Why do children need protection?

Every day children from every country, including those from both rich families and poor families, experience violence. Many children face psychological, physical or sexual violence, abuse and exploitation in places where they should be safe: in their homes, schools and communities. The largest share occurs in the family environment.

Children are vulnerable and relatively powerless. Often they are unaware that they are experiencing violence, abuse or exploitation, and, in other cases, they are too afraid to protest or are not heard. The children most vulnerable are those living without parents; on the streets; in institutions; in places where there is conflict; and children who are forced to leave home.

There are many interconnected causes of this violence, abuse and exploitation, such as harmful norms and traditions; gender inequality; poverty and economic stress; as well as weak protection services and laws. Situations of natural disaster, conflict and displacement can increase the risks children face. Children are also at risk when a parent or caregiver has had poor education, misuses alcohol or drugs, or has experienced violence, abuse or exploitation.

Why do New Zealand children need protection?

Children in New Zealand are also affected by violence, abuse and exploitation. In fact, New Zealand has the fifth worst child abuse record out of the 31 countries of the OECD (Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development):

- Every second day a child goes to hospital with injuries from abuse or neglect.
- On average one child is killed every 5 weeks. Most of these children are under 5 and the largest group is younger than 1 year old.
- 1 in 7 (14%) of young people report being harmed on purpose by an adult at home.
- 20% of young girls and 9% of young boys report unwanted or forced sexual contact.

Sources: www.oneyouok.org.nz www.childmatters.org.nz

What are the effects?

The violence, abuse and exploitation that children experience crosses over psychological, physical and sexual boundaries, which is why it's such a powerful force. It affects children's physical, psychological and social development and has far-reaching consequences for their future. It can permanently impact a child's brain and immune system, leading to poor health over the course of their lifetime and a shorter lifespan. It undermines the chances of boys and girls to develop the capacity and life skills that they need to achieve their full potential. Children who are exposed to domestic violence as a victim or a witness are more likely to become victims or perpetrators later in life.

Childhood violence, abuse and exploitation also undermine the wellbeing of societies and countries. It erodes progress made by sustainable development activities and slows economic development. The global costs are estimated to be US\$7 trillion per year – 8 per cent of global Gross National Income.

Where can you get help?

We can all take action to stop violence, abuse and exploitation here in New Zealand by reporting it to:

NZ Police 111

Oranga Tamariki – Ministry for Children 0508 326 459

Children and young people can seek advice and help from:

What's Up online chat [whatsup.co.nz](https://www.whatsup.co.nz)

0800 WHAT'S UP 0800 942 8787

Youthline 0800 376 633 or TXT 234

Violence, abuse and exploitation cross boundaries

Psychological – ongoing threats, criticism, lack of affection, neglect – at home, school or in any social context. Children's health, wellbeing, self-esteem, and emotional and intellectual development suffer.

Physical – family violence, maltreatment, corporal punishment (being hit with a hand, ruler or other object), or other physical hurting. Children receive bruises, injuries, broken bones, and in extreme cases may die from their injuries.

Sexual – being forced or persuaded to watch or take part in sexual activities they may not understand, for example inappropriate touching, intercourse, pornography. It may or may not involve physical contact. Abusers often target children who know and trust them, or use the internet to befriend or groom a child. There are significant physical, psychological and social consequences.

Any physical or sexual forms of violence, abuse and exploitation almost always include psychological.

In what situations are children most at risk?

Children are most at risk in situations such as child labour, child trafficking, child soldiers, child marriage and female genital mutilation. These involve a combination of psychological, physical and sexual violence, abuse and exploitation.

Child labour

Child labour is work that "is mentally, physically, socially or morally dangerous and harmful to children" (International Labour Organisation). Children work long hours doing repetitive or dangerous work that deprives them of their childhood, education, health, and their potential. Often their families are trapped in a cycle of poverty and debt, so their children work to survive.

Child trafficking

A child is trafficked when they're moved from their home to another place within their country or across a border. Children are trafficked for child labour, adoption, marriage, sexual purposes or armed conflict. Trafficking affects children's health, development and futures and puts them at risk of further violence, abuse and exploitation. They're sold, exploited or tricked into harmful work they can't escape.

Child soldiers

Most children who become soldiers are between 15 and 18 years old, however some are as young as 10. Armed groups use girls in combat roles, as labourers and child brides. Children who survive may have received physical injuries, contracted HIV or given birth. They suffer from psychological trauma and may be rejected by their family or community. Children may join armed groups for survival, to get food or income, or to seek protection. Others are kidnapped then forced to fight or kill.

Child or early marriage

This is a formal or informal marriage arrangement with any child under 18 years old (not yet a consenting adult). It most often involves girls, who then become mothers at a young age which damages their health and that of their children. Early marriage also restricts their access to education and future opportunities, and puts them at risk of violence, abuse and exploitation. Children are vulnerable to early marriage if they lack education, live in poverty, and there's insufficient legal protection.

Female genital mutilation

This procedure is carried out on girls and young women, mostly in Sub-Saharan African countries. Sometimes it's called circumcision or cutting. The conditions are often unclean without anaesthetic. The procedure restricts passing urine or faeces which causes severe pain, bleeding, pelvic and urinary tract infections, birth complications and psychological trauma.

How many children are affected?

Violence, abuse and exploitation generally take place in secret and break laws so it is difficult to get exact recent statistics to show how many children under 18 years old are affected.



VIOLENCE, ABUSE AND EXPLOITATION

3/4

of all children in the world (1.7 billion) experience violence, abuse or exploitation every year

60%

of all children are disciplined by being hit or slapped violently by an adult at home



CHILD LABOUR

152 million

children are in child labour around the world

73 million

of those are in hazardous work



CHILD TRAFFICKING

1.2 million

children are trafficked each year worldwide

28%

of all detected trafficking victims are children



CHILD SOLDIERS

Hundreds of thousands

of children are in armed groups

130,000

child soldiers have been released since 2000



CHILD OR EARLY MARRIAGE

25%

of women in the world aged 20-24 were married by 18 years old

6%

of women in the world aged 20-24 were married before 15 years old



FEMALE GENITAL MUTILATION IN SUB-SAHARAN AFRICA

37%

of women 15-49 years old have undergone FGM

15%

of girls 0-14 years old have undergone FGM

Sources: Know violence in childhood; International Labour Organisation; UN Office on Drugs and Crime; UN Office of the Special Representative of the Secretary-General for Children and Armed Conflict; UNICEF State of the World's Children 2017.

How is the international community responding?

International human rights law has existed for more than 70 years, protecting people from violence, abuse, exploitation and other violations of their rights. But it was only in 1989 that the United Nations adopted the Convention on the Rights of the Child, a treaty specifically aimed at protecting children. Today, the Convention is the most widely accepted human rights treaty; it has been ratified by every United Nations member country except the USA.

The United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child (1989) outlines the obligations of governments to ensure that children's rights are recognised and protected. This means always doing whatever is in the best interests of the child. One key obligation is that all children everywhere have the right to be safe from violence, abuse and exploitation.

Read it here: www.ohchr.org/EN/ProfessionalInterest/Pages/CRC.aspx

Through the United Nations Sustainable Development Goals, which came into effect in 2016, protection of children is acknowledged as a global development goal. By 2030, Sustainable Development Goal 16.2 aims to: "end the abuse, exploitation, trafficking and all forms of violence against and torture of children". But it will take cooperation of international agencies, governments, local organisations, communities and individuals to realise this goal.

The World Health Organisation has worked with 10 international organisations, including World Vision, to create a package of globally agreed-upon strategies for ending violence against children. The seven strategies focus on improving child protection laws and accountability, increasing social services and support, catalysing behaviour and attitude change, and strengthening child resilience.

Read more at:

www.who.int/mediacentre/factsheets/violence-against-children/en

Most governments around the world have laws making family violence and abuse a punishable crime. Strengthening a country's legal system and social services is the most effective way to respond to and prevent violence, abuse and exploitation against children.



India: Children have the right to be protected from economic exploitation. Goats help families earn better incomes so children don't have to miss school to work.
World Vision

How is New Zealand responding?

Having signed and ratified the Convention on the Rights of the Child, the New Zealand government agrees that the best interests of children come first in decision-making, services and laws concerning children.

The government must report to the United Nations every five years about how it is meeting its responsibilities.

Non-governmental organisations that work with New Zealand children also report their concerns to the United Nations as part of this process.

New Zealand has government ministries and community organisations that protect and care for children, prosecute offenders and prevent violence, abuse and exploitation. Some government initiatives include:

- Oranga Tamariki Act 1989 (Children's and Young People's Well-being Act 1989) – the main law for protecting children in New Zealand.
- The Vulnerable Children Act 2014 – ensures vulnerable children are protected by child protection policies and safety checking of children's workers.
- Oranga Tamariki – the Ministry for Children coordinates government agencies as they work with children, young people and their families.

www.orangatamariki.govt.nz

Where can you get help?

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How is World Vision responding?

World Vision is working to protect children at individual, local, regional and global levels because it believes *It Takes a World to End Violence Against Children*. World Vision's key aim is to challenge attitudes, beliefs and behaviours that accept violence, abuse and exploitation against children.

World Vision's approach to community development establishes long-term sustainable community-led initiatives to protect children. World Vision works with governments, churches and schools to improve victims' access to legal protection, care and health services. Community groups and children's clubs play a vital role in educating adults and children and taking action to protect children in their community. World Vision's work to address poverty and increase family incomes is another important way to help children who are at risk.

Part of World Vision's response during a disaster or conflict is establishing child-friendly spaces. Trained volunteers run these spaces and lead informal education and fun activities to support children's psychological and social needs. Through child-friendly spaces, children can access support and counselling for any psychological trauma from their horrific experiences.

All World Vision staff and volunteers follow a child protection policy which seeks to protect children and takes any non-compliance very seriously.



Lebanon: Children have the right to be protected. At child-friendly spaces children who are refugees from Syria are safe and can dance, play, learn and make friends.
Yara Chehayed / World Vision



It takes a world to end violence against children

World Vision's global campaign aims to catalyse a movement of people committed to keeping children safe from harm. We aim to tackle harmful norms and encourage governments to prioritise ending violence against children.

Find out more about how you can take action:

www.worldvision.org.nz/causes/advocacy/protect-women-and-children-from-violence

Hope for the next generation

In the 5Mile settlement in Port Moresby, like all of Papua New Guinea, traditional roles of men and women are well established within families and communities. Women and children are often subject to domestic violence and abuse, and the cycle continues to the next generation because children learn these roles from their parents.

To change this, World Vision's Channels of Hope for Gender approach inspires and mobilises faith and community leaders to break the cycle. Kadasa Damaro, pastor of the Seventh Day Adventist Church, and his wife Linda, participated in the Channels of Hope for Gender workshop. The innovative approach emphasised gender equality, positive disciplining and love, and was just what their community needed to address gender issues, roles and values.

First, Kadasa and Linda made changes in their own family, then they ran the gender programme in their church in the 5Mile settlement where they live. Men who attended have realised the importance of women and begun to act against all forms of violence, abuse and exploitation. More than 900 women have taken part in programmes, becoming empowered to bring about change in their community. Kadasa said, "Not many people have really listened to the voices of the local mothers, and therefore they came to the church to learn and listen."

Kadasa and Linda believe that the next generation is the key to a positive future. Kadasa says, "I teach the children to see themselves as important people in the community and valuable. I conduct awareness training for the youth as well, so they will know that women are important in the society and this will help them to respect women and girls in the community."



Papua New Guinea: Children have the right to be protected. Kadasa Damaro (green shirt) and other leaders learn about preventing domestic violence and abuse at a World Vision workshop on Channels of Hope for Gender.
Steven Doe / World Vision

Partnering to protect children

World Vision uses community-based advocacy to empower people of all ages to speak out against injustices in their own communities. In the Nilphamari Sadar community in Bangladesh, this has resulted in children, adults and local government leaders working together to protect children.

Mitu is a Year 10-11 student who is determined to bring change to her community. She chairs the local child forum, through which about 200 children learn about child rights and issues such as child marriage and dowry, education (especially for girls), violence against children, child labour and harmful drugs. The child forum works with local government and other community-based organisations to take action to protect children.

Bimal James Costa, World Vision Programme Manager, is enthusiastic about the work of child forums: *"Child forums help children learn about leadership, child rights and social responsibility. This year, the forums have contributed to putting a stop to a number of child marriages in the community."*

In Bangladesh, about two out of three girls are married by the age of 18. Mitu's involvement has made a real difference for her community says Bodiujjaman Prodhon, the local government chairman. *"It is our intention to make a child marriage free community... Mitu has great concern and she is always working with local government to achieve the mission... her team is closely monitoring child protection issues, which is contributing to establish our community as child marriage, dowry and drug free"*.

Mitu explains that it is easy to complain against wrong, but it is hard to change the society. *"I feel so happy to do something for my friends towards ending violence against children,"* said Mitu.



Bangladesh: Children have the right to be protected from harm. Mitu (third from left) and forum members with their banner "Say no to drugs. Ensure child rights."

World Vision



Uganda: Children have the right to be protected from violence, abuse and exploitation. In Buyamba, children are taking the lead in protecting themselves and others from corporal punishment. World Vision

Making school safe

School is a place where children should be safe from violence. But at schools in the Buyamba area of Uganda, tempers flared and children resorted to fighting to solve playground disputes. Corporal (physical) punishment by teachers was common and students were often absent for fear of punishment. Parents, too, were violent and abusive to their children. It seemed that everyone accepted this situation as normal.

Children were at risk, so World Vision made ending violence and against children in schools one of the priorities of its development work in Buyamba. Government education officials, school managers and teachers participated in training about preventing violence. Schools then formed clubs where children could learn how to stop violence and abuse, and advocate against it.

The children's clubs have been hugely effective in changing attitudes and behaviour. Students now know that ending violence begins with them, and they have learned better ways to handle disputes. Through the clubs there is a system for reporting violence to the teacher on duty. Club members have made posters to display around the school to remind students and teachers about acceptable behaviour to make school safe.

Club member John explains how the clubs have helped: *"Before the club was established in our school we would accept all punishments, including corporal punishments, and never report to anybody. When we formed our club the leader taught us about acceptable punishments and those that we should not accept. When a bad punishment is given, we report the teacher responsible to the Head Teachers because we know which punishments are not good for us."*