

SVRI sexual
violence
research
initiative

Child Participation and Faith: Supporting spaces where children can be seen and heard



Selina Palm & Sahlim Charles

May 2026

Dialogue Brief 3, Faith & GBV Community of Practice



Background

This dialogue brief is the third in a series which draws on data from interactive learning dialogues held online between adult participants on the SVRI's global course "Faith and Helping Children Thrive without Violence". This is coordinated by SVRI's Working Group on Faith and Violence against Children which is part of the [Faith & Gender-Based Violence Community of Practice](#). The 12-week course is led and designed by [Selina Palm](#), who is also chair of the Working Group. [Sahlim Charles](#) is both a course graduate and a trainee course co-facilitator.

This virtual course brings together experienced practitioners and survivors from diverse country contexts and different religious faiths to co-create multimedia content and to reflect and learn together through shared testimonies, lived experience, and practice-based knowledge with an emphasis on the African continent. The insights below centre participants' own voices and experiences in homes, faith spaces, and communities.¹

This dialogue brief is part of a wider learning series that promotes the value of courageous conversations on these sensitive topics. It aims to equip its readers, including course alumni, to continue this conversation within their own faith contexts. The brief draws on insights from over 100 interactive written discussions between fifty course participants. It is intended to stimulate further conversations and therefore also includes eight questions, designed by the two co-authors, which readers can use in small groups in their own contexts.

Why this theme matters

Across multiple faith traditions, children were described by various participants as being sacred members of the faith community and symbols of hope and renewal. Yet those participants also repeatedly highlighted their awareness of a tension between these faith teachings and how children are treated in everyday faith practice.

In many contexts, cultural and religious expectations of silent obedience and respect for elders was identified as limiting children's ability to express views or question authority, especially around adults and religious leaders.

"Growing up in an environment shaped largely by an African culture that states, 'children are not to be heard', it is important to inculcate the significance of allowing children to participate in initiatives that involve them and have their voices heard. This calls for a lot of unlearning and relearning for all, including faith leaders and actors." (Purity, March 2025)

At the same time, various participants noted that many faith traditions contain narratives which affirm children's dignity, wisdom, agency, and spiritual significance. For example, Esther from Zambia pointed to Jesus' words, "Let the little children come to me..." (Matthew 19:14), while others shared similar stories where children's voices and initiative were taken seriously by spiritual leaders as [evidence](#) on child rights in diverse faith contexts also shows.

Behind this tension sit beliefs about power, authority, childhood, parenting, and the human-divine relationship. This brief explores four areas: challenging norms that silence children; reclaiming faith narratives of child agency; reconnecting child participation with protection; and moving towards meaningful participation in faith spaces.

1. Cultural and religious norms that silence children

Children's silence is viewed as central to respect

A common theme across participant discussions was that many children are socialised to equate respect with silence. Participants described a range of cultural settings in which children speaking before elders, questioning caregiver decisions, or expressing discomfort is treated as a form of insolence or as deserving of punishment, rather than being valued as a form of honest communication. A participant from Cameroon noted:

"In a conversation where elders are talking, I don't have the right to contribute (as a child), as it is considered disrespectful" (Ngum, March 2025).

¹ Fifty participants graduated from this course in 2025. They included survivors, faith leaders, doctors, lawyers, social workers, psychologists and child ministry teachers and came from multiple religious traditions and over 20 countries, primarily from the Global South. All quotations and insights in this dialogue brief are taken (with permission given to use their first names) from a thematic analysis of participants' interactive written discussions on this topic. These formed a key component of the decentralised course approach.



Participants consistently pointed out that children’s silence is neither accidental nor automatic but is learned and reinforced through both cultural norms and certain faith practices. Family structures and religious ideas often present obedience as a virtue and position children speaking up as disrespectful. In many settings, children are formed early on to believe that their role is only to listen, comply and receive instructions from adults rather than to question, challenge or contribute, and they later pass on this same belief as adults. A participant from Nigeria noted that, *“in many religious settings, many believe children can only listen but not be heard, others believe children cannot process information given to them and should be 100% subject to adults, even if what they are being told is wrong”* (Christiana, June 2025).

This silencing of children was highlighted strongly by African participants, but those from Asia, the Americas and Europe also noted similar realities. One participant from Denmark recalls, *“Growing up, the overarching takeaway from my faith community was that children should be obedient, not express discomfort, nor ask questions, particularly of those in leadership. This conflicted with the Mark 19 message (in the Bible) that was also stressed, about Jesus calling the children to him and being the future of the kingdom of God.”* (Sarah, March 2025)

Family power hierarchies given spiritual legitimacy

Participants insisted that faith leaders must also engage critically with the power structures that often lie underneath expectations of silent compliance by children. Across a range of contexts, they noted that children are not only discouraged from speaking out, but are often denied any right to explain themselves, to dispute accusations made by adults or to participate in important decisions that shape their lives. Crispen, a male faith leader in Zimbabwe, highlighted that *“children are culturally not allowed to respond when being reprimanded. ... to respond when being corrected is ‘answering back’ (which is viewed as bad). Even if they are being accused of something, they are not given the opportunity to clear themselves”* (Crispen, April 2025).

The spiritual reinforcement of normalised patterns of power over children by adults needs better recognition and engagement. In this pattern, adults always hold authority and speak, define and decide, and the child is expected to obediently submit. These hierarchies are often justified as needed for child discipline, but in reality, they can reinforce silencing children and shaming of speaking up. Guidance and boundaries are viewed by participants as necessary to nurture young minds, but they insist that they should not come at the cost of dismissing a child’s dignity or ignoring their voice, as has been laid out in Article 12 of the [UN Convention of the Rights of the Child](#).

Featured Story: Addressing Parental Power

Alice is a social worker in rural Zimbabwe and a Sunday school teacher in her local church. Her work shows her the need to challenge wider beliefs that mean that many parents treat their children as if they were possessions or objects rather than as fellow humans with the right to be consulted and heard. Alice shared that, *“I have seen circumstances where adults make decisions for children without consulting them. Most of these times, these decisions will end up affecting children negatively”*. She pointed out that an underlying belief that *“adults feel like they own their children”* leads to social norms where parents automatically have the power to make all the decisions even when their children are negatively affected. Alice has seen in her own work with family systems, *“that this belief can be used to perpetuate abuse against children”* (Alice, April 2025).



Religion and culture connect to reinforce gendered silencing

Participants noted that this silencing of children is often gendered. Girls especially are expected to obey silently until they go through specific gendered rites of passage into adulthood. Adult women also often continue to face gendered spiritual expectations of silent obedience to men, especially within family structures. This enforced silence is not merely a spiritual or cultural norm. It is a condition that enables [violence](#). In religious settings, silence by both women and children is typically connected through the reinforcement of patriarchal power (patriarchy literally means ‘the rule of the fathers’). This may be framed not only as culturally appropriate, but also as spiritually desirable. It lifts up silent obedience without question as a spiritual and ethical duty for women and girls. Participants who were also survivors were clear that this practice contributes to the protection of, and lack of accountability of those in authority, and silences victims. Other participants noted that the regular suppression of



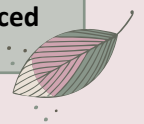
children’s perspectives, especially girls, makes it hard for them to speak up with one pointing out that, “This culture of silence makes it easy for abuse to be normalised and covered up” (Alice, March 2025).

Participants described environments where religious teachings emphasise obedience and discourage any questioning of authority as common across multiple faiths and cultures. They pointed to the selective use of particular sacred texts, such as the command for children to obey and honour their parents, and the transmission of cultural hierarchies and values through various religious systems to reinforce ideas of children as “being seen and not heard”. These beliefs often sit within a wider spiritual hierarchy with the divine often positioned as a stern authoritarian male parent and humans as obedient ‘children’ who must do as they are told. Participants suggested that faith actors must confront how cultural hierarchies and religious authorities may combine to keep children quiet and obedient, even in the face of adult wrongdoing. Instead, they can reclaim faith resources that place children not at the margins of community life, but near its centre, seen and heard.

Key Shift: From treating children’s silence as a sign of good upbringing, respect or spiritual duty to recognising their voices and opinions as integral to their dignity, safety and belonging in faith communities.

Questions for further dialogue:

- 1. Is there a specific cultural norm or belief in your context that you feel may contribute towards silencing children?**
- 2. Can you give an example from your own religious tradition where child silence or obedience is reinforced as a spiritual duty?**



2. Faith traditions as positive resources for child participation

Children are active participants in their spiritual development

Diverse faith traditions also offer positive resources for affirming children’s voice, dignity and agency. Many participants highlighted specific theological narratives in their own faiths that affirm children’s value and support their active inclusion within spiritual communities. Irshad, a senior Muslim Imam from Canada, pointed out:

“In Islam, children are honoured as holders of fitrah (innate goodness) and as signs of God’s mercy, so their insights and feelings matter, not only their obedience. When imams and teachers invite children’s voices in mosques and classes, they model prophetic gentleness.” (Irshad, October 2025)

Participants from different faith traditions pointed to spiritual teachings emphasising compassion, justice, and respect for the vulnerable, which apply to children. These offer resources for reframing children as active participants in spiritual development rather than passive recipients of adult guidance. Pranjal noted that in her context in Nepal, where respect for elders is prioritised, she feels children’s wisdom needs more recognition:

“In my Hindu tradition, the childhood of Lord Krishna reminds us that children can teach important lessons through their innocence and playfulness. Hindu families give blessings to children as symbols of hope and continuity. This connects with values I see in other traditions, for example, Buddhism’s emphasis on compassion, Islam’s teachings on justice and protection of the vulnerable, Christianity’s message of love and acceptance, and Kirat traditions that honour harmony with community and nature. All these uplift the dignity of children in different ways.... By working together, faith communities can ensure every child’s voice is heard and respected.” (Pranjal, September 2025)

Re-reading sacred texts through a child-centred lens

Catholic theologian Nontando from Southern Africa shared ways of reading sacred stories from the Bible where young children, such as Samuel and Miriam were invited into God’s wider purposes. Participants said that these examples helped them see their own sacred texts through child-centred lenses and recognise children’s agency in them. This contextual approach to sacred texts also strengthens child safeguarding. One participant noted that the story of Samuel shows that, “we should empower children to speak up and be heard. This is key in the early detection of child abuse and early intervention if children are taught to speak up” (Michael, November 2025).



Participants also identified other stories of children taking action in sacred texts to show how those who are young are often underestimated, or their contributions devalued, but that dismissing the voices and decisions of children, the weak, and the vulnerable can perpetuate further violence or limit possibilities for transformation.

One participant from Zimbabwe used contextual ways of re-reading bible stories in her Sunday School in more responsible ways through developing child-centred engagement with social expectations of child silence and the celebration of children who speak out. Participants noted that theologians on the course assisted them to think about how to reinterpret stories within their sacred texts including one where children are harmed to promote child safety and agency today. This need was also reinforced by youth within participants’ own faith spaces.

“The Bible story about Abraham and Issac terrified me as a young child in Sunday school. The idea that a loving parent could suddenly turn on their child and do harm in the name of God was really scary.” (Andy, December 2025)

Muslim participants also resonated with this approach to sacred texts. One participant from Uganda suggested that telling sacred stories from children’s perspectives could be transformative, noting: *“There would be a change in the common narrative of seeing things only as adults see them. A fresh lens... will emphasise the importance of innocence, curiosity, and openness in spiritual journeys”* (Fatuma, May 2025).

Developing intergenerational connections as spiritual practices

Nurturing intergenerational connections can also become part of communal spiritual practices. For example, 19-year-old Amy, a young course participant, shared her experience of growing up in a church where she was included in holy communion rituals and where children are now invited to be part of delivering this sacred ritual.

Featured Story: Learning to Listen

Inspired by her learnings on the course, participant Chiranthi developed a small post-course faith-rooted initiative idea within her Buddhist context in Sri Lanka called Miyul Sitin (“listening with a gentle heart”) in response to the course’s emphasis on child voice, participation and agency. This initiative is grounded in core Buddhist values of compassion and awareness and is designed to create safe emotional spaces for children and teenagers within Buddhist communities. It includes two aspects; *faith storytelling circles* for children that draw on traditional Jataka tales to gently address themes of speaking up, compassion towards difference and protecting the vulnerable. This creates safe spaces where children feel seen and can learn to trust their voices; and *mindful listening* benches situated near Buddhist temples that offer quiet reflective spots to help children and young people to process their emotions, build spiritual resilience, and feel heard. Trained adults, including Buddhist monks, are equipped to gently support and be present when needed in these anonymous listening spaces, ensuring that children of different ages can come and feel safe, respected, and heard without judgment.



Other participants emphasised the need for theologies of “relational equity,” where even the youngest children are viewed as equal to adults in the eyes of God. As a result, adults of faith must actively seek out children’s views and voices. Mary, a pastor who develops child ministry materials across Kenya, noted that excluding children’s voices both harms children’s formation, and also stops adults from understanding the realities children face.

Key Shift: From viewing children as passive recipients of spiritual guidance only to view them as active participants in spiritual development and equitable dialogue partners who are recognised and used by God.

Questions for further dialogue:

- 3. Do you know any sacred stories of children who were agents of change in divine or historical purposes?**
- 4. Can you share an example where a child has challenged your own ideas about the Divine or something else?**





3. Child participation as essential for child protection

Child empowerment as part of trauma-informed care and response

Child participation and agency emerged as central to providing child-centred care and reporting in ways that recognise that child survivors have experienced trauma and this may influence how they behave and what they may need (trauma-informed care). Participants resonated strongly with the idea that children’s empowerment, voice, and agency are critical for developing reporting systems where child survivors are believed rather than silenced in favour of adult voices (this area is explored further in [Brief 1](#)). Child empowerment, voice and agency were increasingly recognised as essential for both prevention and protection. Abuse takes away child agency and voice and in responding to it, faith systems can play a central role to help restore it.

This has implications for how faith institutions are structured. Irshad, an Muslim imam from Canada, argued that addressing child sexual abuse requires a *“radical recentring of child voices, instincts and wellbeing more widely in faith institutions”* and a reassessment of top-down authority structures. Urfat, a feminist Islamic scholar from Kenya, shared that she encourages young people to set up youth-led mosques where they can make decisions.

Participants also recognised how difficult this shift can be for adults themselves. A social worker from Cameroon reflected: *“I was not seen and heard as a child, so I did not open this space for other children in my work as an adult”* (Fola, December 2025). When children know their agency and healing matters, resilience increases: *“Children must be seen not only as recipients of care but as active participants in their healing journeys... When children know their voices matter, they are more likely to seek help, which is foundational for healing and spiritual growth”* (Charles, October 2025). Participants invited their own faith communities to build cultures of trust where children feel their concerns will be taken seriously, as opposed to perpetuating harmful volunteer cultures where adults are automatically trusted without accountability checks which can create havens for abusers. Because abuse often involves the removal or manipulation of consent, reporting and support for healing processes should intentionally help to restore a child survivor’s right to their own voice, choices, and agency.

Children as contributors to child protection efforts

Participants stressed that when children feel safe to speak, they can also help to create safer environments. Thembelani, a participant who is a pastor in South Africa, points out that children often know what makes them feel unsafe: *“When children are given a voice and invited to share their experiences and ideas in a respectful, age-appropriate way, it empowers and builds their confidence. They can help identify risks, suggest practical solutions, and contribute to creating environments that truly protect them”* (Thembelani, November 2025). This helps communities create better, more effective safety programs and policies that respond to children’s real needs.

This challenges common assumptions that children are too immature to shape institutional life and instead recognises them as active citizens within the communities they belong to. A participant from Cameroon suggested that this requires a changed mindset from adults to be willing to see differently, saying, *“We need to believe that children, too, have an apt lens through which they see life from, and it matters to them. We would understand their perspectives better when we wear their hats and listen to them”* (Ngum, November 2025).

Featured Story: What Children Feel Matters

Sonali, a child protection worker from the South Pacific region who contributed a video to the course, pointed out that children need to *feel safe* as well as be safe. She noted that adults can forget this aspect or make adult-centred assumptions about what they think children need to feel safe. This can miss things that children may see as important or fail to give due attention to children’s gut instincts, which need to be trusted and form part of processes of keeping children safe. She invited participants to reflect on whether children would see them as people whom they feel safe and confident around, and why so. Sonali drew on insights from the Australian Royal Commission into Institutional Responses to Child Sexual Abuse around faith institutions to highlight that harm can unwittingly take place even when trying to do good. She insisted that humility requires involving the wisdom and instincts of children in developing child protection systems. This requires time and intentionality from adults, for example, by having two child representatives on a panel when selecting a new Sunday School adult coordinator.





Connecting protection and participation

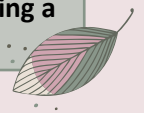
Participants repeatedly said that involving children in the decisions affecting them is key to ending violence. Yet they also described how the language of “protection” can at times be misused to deny child agency. Grace from Kenya noted: *“In my context, the idea of ‘protecting’ children has been used to silence their voices or limit their participation... True protection should not mean exclusion”* (Grace, October 2025).

These reflections highlighted how children, especially girls may be excluded from school, worship, leadership, or sexuality education in the name of protection, which often increases their vulnerability to harm. A participant from Uganda who is a youth pastor notes that protection often takes priority: *“Many societies, including mine, still struggle to genuinely trust children as capable contributors. We focus on protecting and teaching them but forget that they also have wisdom and perspectives shaped by their experiences. True inclusion means not just listening to children but valuing their input in decisions that affect them.”* (Christian, November 2025)

Key Shift: From seeing child protection and child participation as unrelated silos or placing them in competition to seeing child participation as an essential component of effective holistic protection systems

Questions for further dialogue:

- 5. Do you see examples in your own social context where the well-meaning desire to protect children is used in ways that may deny them the right to have voice, agency and participation?**
- 6. Can you share some practical ways in which you think children could play meaningful roles in developing a more holistic system and culture of child protection within your own faith institution?**



4. Meaningful child participation in faith institutions

Going beyond token inclusion

A strong theme across participant discussions was that while children are often present in faith institutions, they are rarely meaningfully included in shaping these institutions. They sing, attend, perform and participate in activities which are typically designed and decided by adults only. Participants questioned whether this involvement amounted to genuine participation, especially when children typically remained absent from faith spaces where spiritual ideas are conceptualised, decisions are taken, and child safety is discussed. Being present in faith spaces is not the same as being an active contributor in child-centred ways, and requires more attention.

Participants pointed out that the limited forms of child participation within their current faith communities are not enough to foster a genuine sense of child agency. Tanya, a participant from the UK reflected that, in her own church context, children’s time *“is a little tokenistic,”* with children only being asked for their views hurriedly at the very end of a service or not at all. Her observation reveals a pattern which was also noted by other participants as common in many faith institutions where children are given moments of visibility, but not ongoing meaningful influence. Their participation is often merely ornamental or is strictly constrained within adult agendas.

Featured Story: When Children Are Treated as Citizens

Ornella grew up in Colombia, and as a child, she was invited to participate directly in the Global Network of Religions for Children. Here she learned early on about the connections between faiths and ending violence against children. Ornella noted, *“early in my life I embraced the idea of child dignity as something fundamental to many different faiths.”* These early opportunities to interact with different faiths and contexts have inspired her whole life. Twenty-three years later, she is the Head of Global Advocacy for Arigatou International, a multi-faith organisation originating in the Latin American region. She introduced their [Global Toolkit for the Spiritual Development of Children in the Early Years](#) to participants and shared why being involved as a child was so important. Her chance, enabled by a faith organisation, to be an active part in creating intergenerational solutions have shaped her adult life due to the opportunities she was given as a child to speak up, contribute and be heard.





Esther from Zambia suggested that *“Ornella’s experience highlights the importance of amplifying children’s voices in spaces that influence their lives. It invites reflection on whether traditional views in faith communities sufficiently value and include the perspectives of young people”* (Esther, May 2025). Esther feels that stories like Ornella’s can help challenge long-held beliefs about children being passive participants in their faith journeys rather than active contributors, and the need to reshape adult perspectives to both see and include children as agents of change.

Amy, a 19-year-old participant noted, *“this course impacts the way I teach Sunday School. I have learnt the importance of placing children at the centre of teaching, and creating spaces where they feel safe....also that talking about ‘taboo’ topics in age-appropriate ways is also a form of protection for them.”* (Amy, October 2025)

Creating spaces where children are encouraged to speak up safely

Participants highlighted that building mutual trust and open communication between children and adults, rather than focusing on structures and policies alone, is the foundation of meaningful participation. In a child expression workshop for children’s ministry in Kenya across multiple churches led by course participant Charles, almost all children reported that they felt church leadership overlooked their inputs and failed to prioritise their voices, especially during repetitive or disengaging activities. Creating a culture of trust, inclusion and clear child-centred safeguarding systems would help to ensure children are heard and responded to and participants note that this requires adults and faith institutions who will take children’s opinions and perceptions seriously.

One participant from Kenya offered some practical suggestions for how faith communities can foster this culture of trust, inclusion, and respect of children in safe ways: *“This begins with training faith leaders and members to listen actively and respond compassionately to children’s voices. Establishing child-friendly forums - such as children’s clubs, participatory worship sessions, and youth councils - can give children structured opportunities to share their thoughts and contribute to church programs.”* (Grace, November 2025)

Building child participation into institutional faith life

Participants also began to imagine practical ways that diverse faith institutions could embed children’s voices and agency more positively and structurally. Suggestions such as developing youth councils, using child-friendly language, offering age-appropriate groups, positioning children as liturgy designers and song choosers, or the use of [children’s commissioners](#) in faith spaces recurred across participant discussions, including suggestions that came from adult survivors of child abuse who had been silenced in their own faith spaces.

“The concept of a children’s commissioner or child-led accountability mechanisms is a compelling approach to prioritising children’s rights and perspectives in decision-making. I like the idea of including children as monitors or advisors to enhance accountability, providing safeguards are in place to prevent tokenism.” (Suzie, April 2025)

Kueih, a participant from a faith-based organisation in Liberia, insists that faith institutions need more proactive methods of amplifying child voices and inclusion in ways that also support caregiver needs. He seeks to foster a more democratic culture where children are not just viewed as beneficiaries but are seen as active contributors to their own well-being and holistic development. The question is no longer whether children are included, but in what ways their voices and decisions can carry weight in faith spaces and beyond. Chiranthi from Sri Lanka pointed out that, *“it’s one thing to give children a ‘seat at the table,’ but quite another to ensure their voices are taken seriously and meaningfully shape outcomes”* (Chiranthi, October 2025).

Key Shift: Children’s engagement in faith spaces needs to be decided in collaboration with them, moving from symbolic gestures only towards active involvement in appropriate decision-making and spiritual processes.

Questions for further dialogue:

7. How can your faith community shift from inviting children into adult-designed spaces and activities only toward building ministries, leadership practices and rituals that centre children in age-appropriate ways?

8. Can you share any concrete ways that your faith institution centres child voices and their meaningful participation?





Conclusion

This brief shows that faith traditions and communities can play important roles in amplifying the voices of children and their active participation in spiritual life. This not only sets an example for the other social contexts that children inhabit, but it can lead to more equitable intergenerational faith communities that can challenge, and not merely reinforce, pre-existing cultural or religious views on children always being silent and obedient.

This important task of centering a culture of child participation, voice and agency is especially crucial in the light of widespread evidence regarding the systematic abuse and harm that many children have historically experienced within adult systems, including faith institutions and from religious leaders. Many adult survivors here shared that they felt unable to speak out about this with safety at the time, leading to years of abuse. A culture of speaking up, refusing consent to things that feel wrong and being active also supports child protection

Faith communities have the potential to contribute in unique ways to this change, but this requires significant unlearning and relearning on the part of many adults who may themselves not have been seen and heard as children. Faith leaders will need theological support to critique and reinterpret aspects of their own spiritual traditions that have been harmful. This will enable them to challenge entrenched, spiritually legitimised patterns of adult authority and child passivity and silence that reinforce patriarchal family and community patterns as divinely ordained. Instead, they can co-imagine alternative approaches through conversations with children. Participants insist that Sunday schools, youth groups, and confirmation classes must go beyond rote learning to become safe spaces where children are heard, consulted, and actively participate in decisions affecting them. Faith spaces can also facilitate child-led advocacy groups and mentor programs where youth guide younger peers.

“Faith institutions must affirm that children are image-bearers of God with inherent worth and voices that matter. Leaders should preach and model active listening, and champion children’s rights from the pulpit.” (Alice, June 2025)

Key messages

- Listen to children:** Faith systems can move from treating children’s silence as a sign of good upbringing, respect or duty to recognising their voices and views as key for dignity, safety and belonging.
- See children as spiritually active:** Faith communities can move away from viewing children as passive recipients of spiritual guidance to view them as active participants in spiritual development and equitable dialogue partners who are seen, heard and used by the divine as agents of spiritual change.
- Connect participation and protection:** Child protection and participation are integrally related, with child participation and empowerment forming a key component of protection and response systems.
- Involve children:** Children’s engagement in faith spaces can be decided in collaboration with them, moving from symbolic gestures toward active involvement in decision-making and spiritual processes.



Additional resources

1. World Council of Churches and UNICEF. (2018). [Churches' Commitments to Children](#).
2. Consortium on Nurturing Values and Spirituality in Early Childhood for the Prevention of Violence. (2022). [Toolkit: Nurturing the Spiritual Development of Children in the Early Years](#). Arigatou International.
3. Joint Learning Initiative for Faith and Local Communities. (2020). Panel Presentation: [Seen But Not Heard: A 3-Part Series to Lift Up Child Voices to End Violence - Practical Examples across Faiths](#).
4. Sahlm, C. (2026) [The Child Peacebuilder Guide. Ten pillars for practicing peace](#). Re-Imagining New Communities.
5. Palm, S. (2020). [Seen but not heard? Engaging the mechanisms of faith to end violence against children](#). In C. Jones & J. Grobbelar (Eds.), *Endangered Childhoods in South Africa* (pp. 34-64). AOSIS.

Suggested Citation: Palm, S. & Sahlm, C. (2026). Child Participation and Faith: Supporting spaces where children can be seen and heard. The Sexual Violence Research Initiative.

Acknowledgements: We would like to acknowledge the important contributions from specific course participants, reviewers and other working group members that have made this dialogue brief possible.



KEEP IN TOUCH



svri@svri.org



www.svri.org



SVRI NPC (2019/197466/08)