



# **Safe to Learn** **Essay Collection:**

**new ideas and solutions  
to end violence in and  
around schools**

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**Safe to Learn**



# Essays

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## Foreword by Joy Phumaphi

*Board Co-Chair, Global Partnership to End Violence Against Children*

### Safe to Learn: An Essay Collection

Violence against children on an unimaginable scale happens in every country and every community, and it undermines children's health, education and development. Schools should be a safe place for children to learn and play, but that is far from the reality for many children.

It is estimated that 246 million girls and boys experience violence and abuse at or on the way to/from school every year. Violence takes many forms including physical, psychological and sexual, each affecting girls and boys in different ways, and increasingly amplified online. Bullying by peers, sexual abuse by educators, and violent attacks on schools put children at risk in the very place that should protect them, nurture their learning, and help them flourish.

Education lifts people out of poverty, it helps change harmful social norms, it supports health and wellbeing and fosters peaceful societies. But widespread violence in and around schools is dramatically undermining this transformational power of education, leaving millions of children living in fear every day and limiting their potential.

We need to examine the causes of the different forms of violence in and around schools, and how environments which enable such violence are able to develop and take hold. We must hear perspectives from all of the people who have lived the reality of the violence, including children and young people, and those who can and are making decisions today that could help put an end to the violence. To that end, the Safe to Learn initiative and End Violence Partnership are proud to publish this collection of essays. Together, they provide a holistic insight into the problem and its impact - and the solutions.

In the opening essay, President Jakaya Kikwete,

Chair of the Global Partnership for Education, makes the case that the global community must put a greater political focus on ending violence in and around schools, and sets out four steps world leaders can take to achieve this goal.

Following this, UNESCO's Assistant Director General, Stefania Giannini, speaks to how the culture of peace starts with safe and non-violent learning environments and examines how these can be achieved.



**Education lifts people out of poverty, it helps change harmful social norms, it supports health and wellbeing and fosters peaceful societies. But widespread violence in and around schools is dramatically undermining this transformational power of education, leaving millions of children living in fear every day and limiting their potential.**

Dr Wajih Mousa Owais, Jordanian Minister of Education, provides insightful reflections on what can be done by ministries to facilitate an education system that promotes safe and peaceful learning, examining efforts currently being taken by his Ministry, including engaging children and young people in the process.

"Violence (in schools) IS preventable" argues Helen Grant, the UK Special Envoy for Girls' Education, who shares examples of approaches and programmes which are having a positive impact to reduce violence and could be scaled-up in other countries and contexts.

Yasmine Sherif, Director of Education Cannot Wait, examines the escalated risk of violence in schools in conflict and crisis contexts, and argues that children and young people who are in the most dangerous environments on earth must be prioritised.

The unique perspective of survivors of violence and sexual abuse is examined by Dr. Daniela Ligiero, Executive Director of Together for Girls. She offers a powerful personal reflection on the increasing impact of survivor-led efforts to end violence, and speaks to the increase in data emerging in this space, notably through the [Violence Against Children and Youth Surveys \(VACS\)](#).

Joséphine Kamara, a Global Partnership for Education Youth Leader from Sierra Leone, discusses her own experience of violence from a tutor and argues that young people must have a central role in decision making to ensure their safety and their ability to access a safe education. She examines how the issue specifically affects girls and how this is limiting the potential for millions of girls to learn and thrive.



**We urge leaders to listen to what is working and urgently scale-up efforts in every country, community and school to end violence.**

The critical role of teachers, and school management, is examined by Baguma Filbert Bates, Secretary General of the Teachers Union in Uganda, who sets out practical efforts being made including promoting positive discipline through teacher training.

We then hear from Reverend Keishi Miyamoto, President of Arigatou International, about the importance of social and emotional learning being integrated into curricula around the

world, to give young people the skills to respond to differences with tolerance and acceptance, and thereby prevent peer-to-peer violence in schools.

Finally we hear from Mark Finnis, an author and speaker, on the role restorative practice can play in preventing conflict developing in the classroom.

We know the impact violence in schools is having and we know what works to stop it. The Transforming Education Summit represents a pivotal moment for children, their safety and their futures. Through Safe to Learn, the End Violence Partnership welcomes the ideas set out in these essays and the efforts being made by these partners, and many more, to end violence against children. We urge leaders to listen to what is working and urgently scale-up efforts in every country, community and school to end violence.



# H.E. President Jakaya Kikwete

*Chair, Global Partnership for Education*

## Four steps leaders around the world must take to end violence in and around school

A shocking half of all children experience violence in and around school. School based violence is a universal issue, it happens on the way to school, at school, and online, in times of conflict, emergencies and peace.

If we want every child to have a quality education, we must ensure students' safety. But violence in schools remains under the radar on the global and national policy agenda, as wars, economic instability, climate change, and the pandemic dominate political and policy debates.

Continuing to ignore the issue means continuing to harm children. For example, in 10 countries as disparate as Cambodia, Kenya, and the United States, **400,000 girls** recently reported school sexual violence in just one year.

In addition to violence against individuals, armed non-state actors target entire schools. In February 2022, gunmen abducted **42 students and teachers** from the Government Science College in Nigeria, a chilling demonstration of the dangers some children face. Schools have been destroyed in the war in Ukraine.

Violence traumatises children, sets back learning, and pushes some out of school altogether.

The mental health toll can be substantial. School children like **Aichetou** of Mauritania are among the **two in three** young people globally who worry about being harmed in or around school. Aichetou walks 1.5 kilometres each way to College Riadh 5 in the outskirts of Nouakchott, Mauritania's capital. At first, she was afraid of the dangers on her route. But she walks with friends now and is flourishing, so she persists despite the risks.

The impact of violence makes it harder for children to learn, and to achieve their dreams. It weakens community ties and deprives countries of human capital, slowing their economic progress.

This must change. To elevate the issue globally, there are four steps our leaders should take.

**First**, ensuring safe schools must become a prominent topic at every major education forum. UN Secretary General Antonio Guterres is doing just that by focusing on mobilising "urgent action" to achieve inclusive, equitable, safe, and healthy schools at the Transforming Education Summit this September. I urge G7 leaders to take up this cause.



**Education** is one of the **most important investments** a country can make in its future. Our **leaders must safeguard this investment** by ensuring **every child**, no matter where they live, is **protected from violence and safe to learn**.

Safe to Learn, an initiative dedicated to ending violence in and through schools, is working to highlight the issue; its efforts should be supported.

Violence often stems from unequal power dynamics and gender inequality, and it affects boys and girls differently. Boys are more likely to face physical violence and corporal punishment in school (**720 million school children** live in countries where corporal punishment is not fully prohibited). Girls are more likely to be bullied, harassed, and sexually

assaulted. Children who diverge from gender norms are often preyed upon.

To respond to the gendered nature of violence, the **second** transformative step that leaders should take is to hardwire gender equality into their education systems.

What does this mean in practice? The Global Partnership for Education (GPE) is hardwiring gender equality into everything we do, this means strengthening countries' gender-responsive planning and policy development, identifying systemic and social bottlenecks for girls, and earmarking funds to address them.

**Third**, school leaders should address the root causes of violence. GPE's approach to education addresses violence at its core by supporting partner countries with building more inclusive, equitable education systems that promote tolerance, inclusion, and social awareness.

Some GPE-funded programmes in its partner countries could be replicated, including during crises. Learning from the Ebola epidemic, GPE addressed gender-based violence in its COVID-19 crisis response by supporting campaigns to prevent violence when schools closed and to help them reopen safely.

- In Togo, campaigns targeting parents, communities and students are raising awareness about gender-based violence, and teachers asked to sign a code of conduct that describes unacceptable behaviour and sanctions.
- In Bangladesh, GPE's COVID grant supported public awareness campaigns on gender-based violence and early marriage, both during school closures and when schools reopened.

All these efforts require financial support, of which there is far too little. The **fourth** step that leaders should take, then, is to step up financing for education.

National governments must protect and increase their domestic education financing to at least 20 percent of their national budgets, and development donors should increase aid to transform education systems.

Education is one of the most important investments a country can make in its future. Our leaders must safeguard this investment by ensuring every child, no matter where they live, is protected from violence and safe to learn.



# Stefania Giannini

*Assistant Director-General for Education, UNESCO*

## **Safe and non-violent learning environments: where a culture of peace starts**

A truly transformed education system is one that looks beyond academic outcomes and focuses on fostering citizens who have the values, attitudes and behaviours to co-create a more sustainable and peaceful world. This can only happen if schools are safe, friendly and violence free in the first place.

This is far from the case. Violence in schools deprives millions of children and young people of their fundamental right to education. It takes many forms: a girl fearing harassment because the doors of the school toilets don't lock or a boy bullied by his peers because he is perceived as effeminate or gender non-conforming.

These experiences are all too common. UNESCO's research finds that globally **one in three learners experience bullying**. Schools are also places in which students, mainly girls, experience sexual harassment or violence at the hands of peers or teachers. Cyber-bullying is becoming a growing issue in many parts of the world.

Everyone loses when school violence goes unchecked, not just the victims, but the perpetrators and bystanders as well. Violence not only causes physical injuries and harm but is associated with poor mental health, higher rates of substance use and lower rates of life satisfaction. Violence also negatively impacts learning outcomes, with children who experience violence more likely to disengage from school and have lower academic achievement. For example, new **UNESCO research on boys' disengagement from education** finds that fear and experiences of violence is a factor in early drop-out.

Transformative education involves a change in school cultures, with zero tolerance to violence. UNESCO advocates for a whole school approach requiring the engagement of different stakeholders both within and outside of the school setting. Creating a positive school culture, with strong teacher-student relationships and well-understood reporting and referral systems are key.

Teachers are perhaps our most critical allies in establishing and maintaining safe and friendly schools. As such, we must build their capacity to recognize and address violence when it happens. This was made particularly clear in a recent global survey which found that one in four teachers do not always agree that certain actions are acts of violence – these include hitting, sexual comments or touching, or ridiculing a student. However, the same study showed that most teachers do think that it is their responsibility for students to feel safe in the classroom.

In addition, we should turn our attention to curriculum-based interventions. Schools can deliver classroom programmes that instil the skills and values that young people need, now and in the future, to have respectful relationships, embrace diversity and solve problems constructively and non-violently.

There is increasing evidence informing how this can be achieved. Violence prevention curricula, social and emotional learning and comprehensive sexuality education have all been shown to positively impact knowledge, attitudes, skills and behaviours. At UNESCO we refer to these interventions as 'transformative education' - teaching and learning geared to motivate and empower learners to take informed decisions and actions at the individual, community and global levels.



Learners themselves recognise the value of such education. In **recent research** across five countries piloting a violence prevention curriculum, Connect with Respect, over 90% of learners said they believed that all schools should teach about the prevention of violence. One learner from Eswatini commented:

*“A lot of violence has been happening in my school, such as bullying, yet I wasn’t aware that it was violence until I got lessons about it. These lessons helped me understand that violence can affect one psychologically. We as students tend to laugh when one is being ridiculed and not knowing that we become an accomplice. My awareness of violence helped me a lot because I will not allow violence to happen to me, my siblings or any of my peers.”*



**Ending violence** in all its forms in and around schools **is a matter of urgency.** We have strong evidence of what works **but it has to be put into practice in every educational institution.** In our ambition to transform education, **it is time to ensure that every student is safe to learn.**

Ending violence in all its forms in and around schools is a matter of urgency. We have strong evidence of what works but it has to be put into practice in every educational institution. In our ambition to transform education, it is time to ensure that every student is safe to learn.

We have a formidable opportunity this year to raise awareness, mobilise political commitment and take action to make this happen. Convened by the UN Secretary General in September, the Transforming Education Summit in September 2022 will be a global stage, informed by national consultations around the world, to

raise the stakes around the urgency of forging a new social contract for education. One that is centred on human rights and provides every learner with the environment, knowledge and skills to flourish in today’s world and contribute to a more sustainable, healthy and peaceful future.



# Dr Wajih Mousa Owais

*Minister of Education and Minister of Higher Education and Scientific Research, Jordan*

## **National level efforts to prevent violence in schools: reflections from Minister of Education, Jordan**

Inspired by the Royal Vision of His Majesty King Abdullah II Ibn Al Hussein's, the Ministry of Education (MoE) in Jordan confirms that the provision of quality education is one of Jordan's top priorities. The Ministry focuses on building upon the achievements of the teaching and learning process, raising education quality, and overcoming challenges. The Ministry has embarked upon the development of the Education Strategic Plan (2018-2022) which integrates the objectives of the National Strategy for Human Resource Development (2016-2025), Jordan Vision 2025 and the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development.

The Ministry banned corporal punishment in schools in 1981, under the School Discipline Regulation, Instruction No.4 on School Discipline. However, there is none that prohibits corporal punishment in the home or family. For these inconsistencies, coupled with weaker institutional arrangements, reportedly **74.6 per cent of children** aged 8-17 years have experienced at least one form of physical violence in their lifetime.

The Ministry has also been working to place greater emphasis on safe and stimulating school environments to meet the emotional, social, educational and academic needs of students, in coordination with national and international institutions. To this end, the Ministry provides a range of programmes to ensure children's safety at schools including a joint MoE-UNICEF programme "Ma'An (together) Towards a Safe School" to reduce violence against children in all schools, including all public schools run by the MoE for Jordanians and Syrian refugees.

The Ma'An programme follows a multi-prong strategy which includes:

1. Administrative mobilisation and advocacy by MoE to promote the Programme messages on the new way of discipline in classrooms to all schools (principals, counsellors, teachers, school administrative staff) and municipal administrative staff;
2. Interpersonal communication through formation of Safe School Councils and school-based activities to promote non-violent and positive methods among school-based staff (principals, counsellors, teachers, school administrative staff) and students;
3. Advertising the Programme's messages through radio, television, newspapers, and the Ma'An website;
4. Community engagement and shifting of the social norm to promote zero-tolerance on violence in schools.

The cumulative results of the Ma'An programme over the past years is evident. However, as in many countries, our schools continue to confront various forms of violence, including corporal punishment, sexual exploitation and abuse, bullying and online violence.



At the Ministry of Education **we strongly believe that every child has the right to be heard**; a monthly online survey was developed and rolled out.. that gives children **a voice and allows them to convey their protection concerns and needs**. The survey also... enables us to provide effective and adequate **solutions to ensure a safe school environment** for all children in Jordan.

As an endorser of the [Safe to Learn Call to Action](#), Jordan has already demonstrated its resolve to ensure that every child is free from violence and can learn safely. Now, more than ever, during a time of ever-evolving challenges to education and learning due to the COVID-19 pandemic and its significant impacts on children, safe learning environments remain a priority for MoE.

A strategic framework and plan for the institutionalisation of the Ma'An programme was developed through the support of UNICEF, and the MoE started its implementation in 2020. As part of this plan, child protection training materials for school principals, teachers, counsellors were developed and integrated within the MoE for pre-service and in-service institutional training programmes to equip them with the needed skills and knowledge to prevent and respond to violence in their schools.

More focus was also given to enforce and strengthen our accountability system and responsive procedures - covering central, directorate and school levels. Identification and response detailed procedures and guidelines within the MoE for Child Protection and Gender Based Violence (GBV) cases in line with the national framework and guidelines have been rolled out since 2021. Various legislations of the MoE, including accountability standards, verification and investigation mechanisms were reviewed, the students' discipline regulations were updated, and key practical recommendations on how to strengthen or amend these mechanisms were developed.

As part of the national social behavioural programme to end violence against children in Jordan, school-based EVAC programmes were developed and endorsed by the MoE to be implemented at schools and institutions (community centres) in 2022. These programmes aim to provide educational and entertaining engagement for children to change their knowledge, attitude, and behaviour to end violence.

We, at the MoE, strongly believe that every child has the right to be heard; a [monthly online survey](#) was developed and rolled out in MoE schools as a complaint mechanism that gives children a voice and allows them to convey their protection concerns and needs. The survey also serves as a strong monitoring tool for the MoE to monitor the prevalence and types of violence that children may be experiencing and enables the MoE to provide effective and adequate solutions to ensure a safe school environment for all children in Jordan.

We have much to be proud of in the education services and efforts, yet we believe that there is still a lot to be done to ensure safe school environments in Jordan. We, at the MoE, are committed to increasingly enhance energetic partnerships for children's and women's rights at the national level. We will build on that progress, so that every boy and girl everywhere in Jordan can reach his or her full potential.



# Helen Grant MP

*UK Prime Minister's Special Envoy for Girls' Education*

## **Solutions to scale up to end violence in schools**

I often say that I have the best job in government, working for UK Prime Minister Boris Johnson as his Special Envoy for Girls' Education. It is now a year and a half since I was appointed to this role and, since January 2021, I have seen first-hand that investing in girls' education truly is a game changer. A child of a mother who can read is 50% more likely to live beyond the age of 5, twice as likely to attend school themselves and 50% more likely to be immunised. That is why I want to see every girl, everywhere, in school and learning.

Sadly, I have also seen the devastating impacts of violence on girls' education. We live in a world where 1 in 3 girls and women experience physical and/or sexual violence in their lifetime, 1 in 5 girls are married before their 18th birthday and over half of the world's children experience physical, sexual, or emotional violence or neglect. This appalling violence, perpetrated in and out of school, is not only a human rights abuse – it is also a significant barrier to education: violence can lead to low school attendance, high dropout rates, and difficulty learning when children are in school. Conflict-related violence also has devastating impacts on education for all children, but particularly girls. Girls living in crisis and conflict-affected environments are almost 2.5 times more likely to be out of school and there are approximately 7 refugee girls in secondary education for every 10 boys.

I am incredibly proud of the Foreign Secretary's '3 Es' approach to gender equality policy: educating girls, empowering women, and ending violence. These issues are inextricably linked, as I saw in South Sudan earlier this year, where gender-based violence, child marriage, and the lasting impact of conflict prevent girls

from completing their education. In Bangladesh, I heard that many girls drop out from grade 8 due to child marriage and due to sexual and physical violence or harassment at home, at school, and while travelling between the two. Travel to and from school is also a risk in Sierra Leone, where violence from bike riders, other community members and even teachers poses a threat. Tragically, in all the countries I have visited, I have heard reports of sharp increases in sexual and gender-based violence during the Covid-19 pandemic – with significant implications expected for girls' education. I have also heard time and time again how this violence is tolerated in society and how girls are often blamed and stigmatised, rather than their abusers.

The UK has, for many years, been a world leader in tackling violence against girls and women and enhancing girls' access to quality education. We played a central role in establishing the [Safe to Learn initiative](#) and were a founding Board member of the [Global Partnership to End Violence Against Children](#). While Foreign Secretary, Prime Minister Boris Johnson signed the UK up to the Safe Schools Declaration, committing to protect schools during military operations and armed conflict. Under the UK's Presidency, G7 countries committed to get 40 million more girls into school, and 20 million more girls reading by the age of 10, in low- and lower-middle-income countries, by 2026. We also hosted the Global Education Summit in 2021, raising a landmark \$4 billion for the Global Partnership for Education to get children into school and learning. To achieve our ambitious goals, we must prioritise girls' education in the Covid-19 recovery, including reducing violence in and out of schools.

The UK's groundbreaking What Works to Prevent Violence Against Women and Girls

Programme has pioneered projects in homes, schools and communities and demonstrated that violence is preventable. This evidence broadly shows that effective approaches bring people together to collectively discuss, and to reflect on violent practices and the norms that underpin these, over a sustained time period. This is particularly effective when combined with efforts to build skills such as communication, conflict resolution, empathy and provision of sustained support to survivors.

Well-designed interventions in schools can achieve significant reductions in violence of around 50% in just a few years. In **Pakistan**, What Works tested a play- and sports-based curricula integrated into the school schedule. Activities encouraged children to reflect critically on gender and violence, and build skills such as communication, empathy, and conflict resolution. The project also provided leadership training to children selected as junior leaders and undertook community outreach. The intervention achieved significant reductions in corporal punishment, peer violence and improvements in gender-equitable attitudes and depression.



**Education systems need to put girls' (and boys') safety and safeguarding front and centre – building this into education sector planning, policies, procedures, curricula, teacher recruitment and training and more.**

Wider literature on school-based interventions also highlights the potential for education that uses critical reflection to reframe ideas on gender and the use of violence. While evidence gaps remain, it is clear that school-based programmes have the potential to deliver violence prevention at scale while also removing barriers to girls' education. I was pleased that last year, the FCDO launched a £67.5 million What Works to Prevent Violence

successor programme to scale-up proven approaches to prevent violence, so we can continue our world-leading work.

Against the dual backdrop of huge learning losses and increased gender-based violence all over the world due to Covid-19, donors and our many partner governments and agencies must translate commitments into action, utilising the evidence on what works. Education systems need to put girls' (and boys') safety and safeguarding front and centre – building this into education sector planning, policies, procedures, curricula, teacher recruitment and training and more. Of course, tackling all forms of violence that impact girls' education is a complex task and will require working with children, parents, communities, teachers, schools and a range of district and national stakeholders within and outside of the education sector. But this work is essential to ensure that every girl, everywhere, can be in school and learning.



# Yasmine Sherif

*Director, Education Cannot Wait*

## How conflict and emergencies escalate violence in schools and what must be done

Ukraine, the latest armed conflict to have erupted in the world, is yet another stark reminder that schools are not safe in times of conflict and may even be the target of violence. Between 17 February and 3 March 2022 alone, over 20 incidents of attacks against education were reported in Ukraine and the Ministry of Education told of the destruction of 160 education facilities in government and nongovernment-controlled areas.

Ukraine is one of many crisis countries where schools and education are targeted as a means of warfare. The number of attacks on schools in conflict-affected Western and Central African countries, Burkina Faso, Cameroon, Central African Republic, Mali, Niger, and Nigeria – where Education Cannot Wait provides multi-year education investments - have increased from 303 to 802. In the Tillabery region of Niger alone, conflict led school closures to increase from 312 to 758 in 2021, affecting at least 72,000 young girls and boys deprived of access to education.

Violence around schools may also have long-term impact on the ability of children and their teachers to access education facilities. In Boali, Central African Republic, the surroundings of the school have been scattered with landmines and other improvised explosive devices. Students are not able to return to school since CAR does not have the necessary demining capacity.

Countless educational facilities have also been used by parties to armed conflicts as their bases or barracks, or to serve as detention centres. The use of these school buildings by men in arms increases the risk that schools will be damaged or destroyed as they become

targets. Teaching and other school supplies and equipment are too often looted in these situations.

Violence and conflict lead to forced displacement, which negatively impacts schooling and learning for internally displaced and refugee children and youth and the host communities where internally displaced or refugee students and teachers settle. Girls living in emergencies and protracted crises are particularly at risk as they are explicitly targeted because of their gender. Parties to the conflict have been reported to target school facilities specifically to stop girls from accessing education. Due to the long distance to access learning spaces and the risks girls encounter on the journey, many families keep their girls out of school and even marry them off to reduce the risk of gender-based violence in and around schools. In other contexts, girls are at heightened risk of being abducted, to being subjugated to sexual slavery or of early marriage, including with combatants. For boys, the risk of forced recruitment as combatants or kidnapping for use as support in military operations is quite high.



Surviving in the **most dangerous environments** on earth and without any safety to learn, **these are the children and youth that we need to reach first. Investments** must focus on the **continuation of education** during conflict.

Attacks against schools further set behind the education systems of these fragile and conflict-affected countries that were already struggling to make strides towards the achievement of



Sustainable Development Goal 4 on inclusive and equitable quality education for all. The increase in secondary education enrolment seen in every region of the world has failed to materialise in conflict-affected Sub-Saharan Africa. Likewise, gender parity is yet to be achieved for 62 million girls around the world, with the highest concentration in violence-ridden Sub-Saharan Africa.

Conflict and emergencies marshal violence in, against and around schools, that disproportionately affects girls, and exacerbates existing structural problems in already fragile education systems. Every year, millions of crisis-affected girls and boys are left behind and today 222 million children need educational support. This figure hides a long litany of violence targeted at children and their teachers. Many of them have been threatened, harassed, kidnapped for ransom, or killed merely because they were going to school to learn or to teach. Many also carry the scars of psychological trauma long after the incidents themselves.

Surviving in the most dangerous environments on earth and without any safety to learn, these are the children and youth that we need to reach first. Investments must focus on the continuation of education during conflict; rehabilitation of schools; removal of anti-personnel mines and unexploded ordnance in and around the schools; inclusion of crisis-affected children and youth; teacher training and positive pedagogy; mental health and psychosocial programmes; community-based interventions for gender equality and girls' empowerment; and protection assistance to student victims of unsafe schools. Respect for educational facilities is enshrined in International Humanitarian Law and the Safe Schools Declaration. Still, we also need to ensure physical protection on the ground. Without it, millions will live in fear rather than hope. This is not acceptable in the 21st Century.



## Dr Daniela Ligiéro

*Executive Director & CEO, Together for Girls and  
Chair, Brave Movement Global Steering Group*

### **The role data and research play in ending violence in schools**

The author and fellow survivor Christine MacDonald wrote, “there is solace in breaking our silence, a strength of spirit that comes when we share our truth, and it all starts with the moment we make the decision to live on the other side of ‘victim’.” Like most survivors of childhood sexual violence, I lived in shame and fear and felt very alone for a long time. It took many years for me to disclose my experiences to my parents. Once I was able to share what had happened with them, it set off a chain reaction that would change my life. From that moment, I embarked on an amazing - and sometimes challenging - healing journey. I was fortunate to receive the support that all survivors deserve to undertake that journey.

Today, I’m the CEO and Executive Director of Together for Girls, a global partnership engaged in data-driven advocacy to influence evidence-based action on violence prevention and healing and justice for survivors. Data guides the way; the TfG partnership supports national governments in implementing and using **Violence Against Children and Youth Surveys (VACS)** to inform national policies, programmes, and investments to prevent violence and support survivors.

The VACS are nationally representative household surveys of males and females aged 13 to 24 that measure physical, sexual, and emotional violence in childhood and provide important data on risk and protective factors and the consequences of violence. We now have data for over 10% of the world’s population under 24, and it paints an alarming picture. For example, among countries that have conducted a VACS, between 4 and 38% of girls and 1 and 21% of boys experience some form of sexual violence before the age of 18.

At Together for Girls, we’re particularly interested in exploring the relationship between violence and education because we know that schools are both a location of violence and a potential venue for transformative change that can challenge the gender and social norms that drive violence. We also understand keenly how important safe schools are for children’s rights, well-being, learning, and outcomes later in life.

We’ve conducted **secondary analyses of VACS data** to shed light on the prevalence of corporal punishment perpetrated by teachers against students, peer violence, and sexual violence perpetrated by teachers or students. We can also identify trends like higher rates of physical violence among male students. While patterns often emerge, there are important differences between country contexts. For example, male teachers tend to perpetrate more corporal punishment against male students, yet VACS data in Nigeria shows a different trend, with 31% of female students reporting corporal punishment perpetrated by a male teacher, compared to 21% of male students. This contextual difference underscores the importance of data and evidence-based violence prevention policies and programmes.

Finally, we’re able to measure the likelihood that a survivor of school-related violence will disclose their experience to a trusted adult or peer and whether they will seek and receive services. In four countries that conducted a VACS, less than 1% to just 12% of students who experienced violence received services. As a survivor, I understand deeply how critical accessing quality services is for all survivors. While this seems like common sense, especially to advocates and practitioners who work to prevent and address violence against children, there is a considerable gap between our understanding and the actions of governments and other key stakeholders.



I believe that one important reason that governments and institutions continue to fail survivors is because conversations about violence so often fail to include survivors themselves. This is why Together for Girls has prioritized centering survivor voices and leadership and, in partnership with allies, is catalysing a global movement to end sexual violence against children. We recognize that sexual violence is the most stigmatized form of violence that children experience and so we believe this is a critical entry point for addressing all forms of violence against children.



I believe that **one important reason that governments and institutions continue to fail survivors** is because **conversations** about violence so often **fail to include survivors themselves.**

The **Brave Movement** is led by a global coalition of survivors and allies focused on prevention, healing, and justice for survivors. We represent a broad agenda and seek to target an array of decision-makers, from national governments to global audiences like the G7 and UN stakeholders to each and every citizen who has the power to speak out in support of children and survivors.

We are living through a tumultuous time and face serious, interconnected challenges, from the silent pandemic of violence against women and children to climate change to conflicts that reap devastation on civilians. We all have a part to play in addressing these challenges. For me, engaging in the work of Together for Girls and our partners and allies is a critical piece of a much bigger puzzle. As a survivor, I am keenly aware that investments in prevention, healing, and justice can change the lives of countless individuals and communities. By leveraging data and evidence to underscore the voices of

survivors and the wisdom we have to share from our lived experiences, and with the partnership of allies, I believe we can create safer schools and communities and change the world for children, adolescents, and youth.



# Josephine Kamara

*Global Partnership for Education Youth Leader,  
Sierra Leone*

## What truly makes school safe for girls?

This question of preventing violence against children in and around schools can also mean what makes school safe or unsafe for children. Let me personalise the question further and narrow it to GIRLS. I believe approaching this conversation with girls in mind will make us do better in leading actions to foster social change, public policy or law reforms that enhance socio-economic development - because as of now over 60% of the world's illiterate population are women and the antidote to this is EDUCATION.

Educated girls will grow into empowered women who will be in better positions to support themselves and their communities and positively impact the growth of their children. However, we know now that getting girls into school is not enough, we must make sure they stay and feel safe to learn. As far as developing countries are concerned, the least I can say is our lives depend on it, and I am not exaggerating. We cannot experience total freedom and economic growth if we are not making intentional efforts to make education work for girls - pregnant, parent-learner, those living with disability, or from extreme poverty. A recent [World Bank study](#) estimates that "limited educational opportunities for girls, and barriers to completing 12 years of education, cost countries between US\$15 trillion and \$30 trillion in lost lifetime productivity and earnings."

But, what truly makes school safe for girls? Let's start from the beginning of the beginning - beyond policies and laws. Let us focus on the social aspect of safety in schools.

In my opinion, creating a dignified learning environment for girls is important to preventing violence in and around schools. When a school lacks adequate sanitary conditions such as proper toilet infrastructure and water supply,

it becomes an unsafe environment for girls and children in general. Sometimes even where there is a toilet infrastructure, it usually lacks sufficient privacy for adolescent girls, for instance, to check and change sanitary pads. Many Sierra Leonean school infrastructures make little or no provision for children living with disability and that makes such educational spaces unsafe for these children.



At 15 years old I was struggling with mathematics, **so my mother sought help from a man** who was willing to offer me free after-school lessons. **As a girl in a man's house, unsupervised, I was exposed to sexual abuse and unplanned pregnancy** because my mother was looking for what **my school could not offer.**

Another point to consider is that inadequately trained teachers and lack of teacher supervision, or teachers not understanding and practising their professional code of conduct, can make school environments unsafe for girls. Teachers developing unprofessional and inappropriate relationships with their students - this was very common in my secondary school and is still happening in our schools today - threatens safety in schools. Teaching must be perceived, and supported, as a profession and not something one picks up when there is nothing else to do.

When a school system becomes unsafe, it cannot offer students what they are supposed to get from school, so they turn to after-school lessons, which creates more harm for girls. I was

a victim of sexual abuse from such after-school lesson arrangements. At 15 I was struggling with mathematics, so my mother sought help from a man who was willing to offer me free after-school lessons. As a girl in a man's house, unsupervised, I was exposed to sexual abuse and unplanned pregnancy because my mother was looking for what my school could not offer.



Getting girls into school is not enough, **we must make sure they stay and feel safe to learn...** the least I can say is **our lives depend on it, and I am not exaggerating.**

When we establish schools without quality infrastructure and trained teachers, we inadvertently create space for violence and unsafety. A dignified learning space and safety are not cheap, but quality education in a safe environment is the bare minimum every country or government can offer its people. This is not something we should be asking for, it is a RIGHT.

We can have great policies and laws, but if we continue to fail to create a dignified learning environment by not improving school infrastructure, training teachers, respecting and cultivating a professional relationship with students, and providing quality education, schools will never be safe spaces for girls.



# Baguma Filbert Bates

*General Secretary, Uganda National Teachers' Union*

## **Positive discipline: the tools and resources required by teachers**

Teachers across the globe work under different conditions; some favourable, others harsh and difficult. Despite the diverse conditions of service, one challenge that cuts across is the issue of discipline. A teacher with a class size of 10, and another with 60 or more learners both require the right knowledge, skills, tools and resources to handle concerns related to discipline.

Unlike parenting, teachers are responsible for many learners at once, and all are unique in many ways. Furthermore, as one starts to understand their learners and figure out what works with them, they move on to the next class and are replaced by new faces, with their own unique needs and challenges.

When learners do not listen or refuse to do what is asked of them, it is easy for their teachers to become annoyed and frustrated. What should teachers do when this happens or better still, what should teachers do to curb the behaviour beforehand? When choosing disciplinary measures, oftentimes teachers will turn to methods and tools that were used on them during their time in school or those being used by colleagues.

It is important to understand that the choice of disciplinary measures makes the difference between a calm classroom and one in chaos. It also determines a teacher's time on the task whereby, with the right measures, one spends more time teaching and less time disciplining.

Bob Talbert said, "Teaching kids to count is fine, but teaching them what counts is best". One of the things that count, and therefore must be instilled in our learners, is the ability to harmoniously learn, live and engage with

others despite our differences. As teachers, it is important to question whether our own behaviour, teaching methods, and disciplinary measures nurture and support learners into the desired abilities.



**It is important to understand that the choice of disciplinary measures makes the difference between a calm classroom and one in chaos.**

Oftentimes, the term 'discipline' is misunderstood to refer to punishment. The intended outcome of the punishment is usually to scare or shame the 'culprit' into acceptable behaviour to a point of "I will not do it again!" using a form of negative verbal reprimand or by causing emotional and/or physical pain. Punishment focuses on the misbehaviour and does little or nothing to help the child perform better in the future. Discipline is meant to be a value that is taught and learned over time. A one-off punishment may not work and all forms of violence against children are a violation of their human rights.

Imagine a child who is being taught how to walk, clap, and talk. We use teaching practices such as modelling, (showing through example) as well as giving praise for every effort and opportunities to practice; not yelling, spanking, insulting or threatening. This encouragement is the type of reward that stimulates the child to walk, talk, and learn. The same techniques should be applied when it comes to discipline. This process is what is termed as positive discipline. It involves teaching children to internalise self-discipline and be able to make informed decisions on how to behave without

being forced. In the end, positive discipline helps children develop positive and acceptable behaviours that enable them to learn, live and work together with others at school, home and in the community.

### **What does the teacher need to practice positive discipline?**

- **Policy environment:** Positive discipline cannot thrive in a political environment where corporal punishment is still an option. The policies should clearly outlaw corporal punishment at home and in schools, however 'light'.
- **Teacher training (Pre-service and In-service):** *"Positive discipline is based on the understanding that discipline must be taught and that discipline teaches,"* Jane Nelsen, Author of Positive Discipline series. The training in positive discipline should start right in the teacher training institutions. Teachers need to be trained in positive discipline measures with the first step being changing their perception that discipline equals punishment. This is a major psychological hurdle to overcome because most people are raised with punishment being the only corrective measure both at home and in school. Undoing the "Spare the rod and spoil the child" mentality may not be an easy task to some, but must be done. Children should learn in a safe, secure and welcoming environment. Teachers in active service should also be trained in positive discipline as part of their Continuous Professional Development.
- **Resources:** There is a need to support teachers with the required tools to enable them to foster positive discipline. For example, handbooks on alternative discipline systems should be made available and easily accessible to all teachers.
- **Support from School Management Committees:** School Management Committees and Board of Directors on which parents are also represented should

all be on the same page when it comes to matters concerning discipline. If punishment continues at home, but positive discipline is practised at school, there will be a conflict. The school code of conduct and all parties therein should agree upon corrective measures.

- **Networking:** There should be opportunities for networking and interaction with other teachers as a form of experience sharing in positive discipline. This is possible through teacher networks both physical and virtual.



# Reverend Keishi Miyamoto

*President, Arigatou International*

## The role of social, emotional and spiritual development programmes in the prevention of violence

Violence in and around schools is a widespread and growing phenomenon that is often normalised and unaddressed by the school community. A 2019 UNESCO study estimated that almost **one in three students** (32%) had been bullied by their peers at school at least once in the last month and that a similar proportion had been affected by physical violence. In 2018 UNICEF estimated that globally **one in three students** aged 13 to 15 had experienced bullying in schools. Meanwhile, there is concrete evidence on which practices effectively prevent violence in schools. We know that early childhood interventions, mainly in pre-schools, have proven high returns on investment, with benefit-to-cost ratios ranging from **2.04 to 16.15**.

A critical preventive strategy to address violence in schools is to ensure that education supports children's social, emotional and spiritual well-being. This has become even more important due to the impact of COVID-19 on children's mental health. Cost-benefit analyses show that there is a **return of 11 dollars for every dollar invested** in social and emotional learning interventions, with sustained impact on academics, behavioural conduct, and emotional distress lasting up to 18 years.

Children's capacity to navigate complex realities, isolation, fear of the future, violence at home, competing or divisive narratives and difficult interactions is paramount for their sound development. Strengthening quality and inclusive education by offering social and emotional learning opportunities provides children not only with knowledge and skills, but also nurtures positive values that support them as they learn to manage their emotions,

find alternatives to violence, empathise with others, think critically, become more conscious about the issues that affect them and their communities, and consider the role they can play.



**A critical preventive strategy to address violence in schools is to ensure that education supports children's social, emotional and spiritual well-being... and there is a return of 11 dollars for every dollar invested in social and emotional learning interventions.**

Knowledge and skills are important to develop social and emotional competencies, but for them to be internalised and act as a protective factor against violence, it is necessary to help children connect with their inner selves and strengthen their spiritual capacities. This is where the spiritual development of children is of the essence in promoting safe learning environments and ending violence in schools.

Children's spiritual well-being is often overlooked as part of children's holistic development and education. It is closely connected to their social, emotional and cognitive development. It supports children as they learn to connect positively with themselves, with others, with nature and with that which they may refer to as the divine or the transcendent. It helps children to build a sense of belonging and strengthens their identity, ethical values, and prosocial behaviours. Studies have shown that opportunities for spiritual development contribute to strengthening people's resilience.



For instance, youth who as younger children were exposed to spiritual development demonstrated less aggressive behaviour, less substance use, fewer high-risk behaviours, and lower risk of depression.

The spiritual nurturing of children can also serve as a preventative factor by strengthening their agency, self-awareness, and capacity to denormalise, identify and speak out against violence that affects them. Strengthening children's ethical awareness and capacity to make well-grounded ethical decisions supports the formation of positive relations with others, contributes to children's self-esteem, decreases the likelihood that they will engage in criminal activities, and enhances their ability to positively contribute to their communities as they grow up. All this assists children to become resilient to violence not only in school, but across the lifespan, reducing the chance of becoming either a victim or a perpetrator, and increasing the chance of becoming an agent of positive change and peace.

Findings on programmes that address children's spiritual development through ethics education have shown that they increase children's capacity to deal with conflict in non-violent ways and to propose solutions to conflicts or situations affecting them or their communities. Such programmes have also contributed significantly to improving children's relations with others, to decreasing conflict levels, and to increasing cooperation and social coexistence in the classrooms.

Empowering children by strengthening their social, emotional and spiritual capacities builds their resilience to connect their individual power to social power. If each school around the world prioritised and invested in these kinds of programmes, we would see not only individuals that know how to deal with differences, solve problems and contribute to their communities, but also societies that live more cohesively, inclusively, equitably, and with a higher sense

of justice and respect for the sacredness of life. The solutions are within our reach. Indeed, they are already in our hands. What are we waiting for?



# Mark Finnis

*Leading author on restorative practice and Director, L30 relational systems*

## The role of restorative practice in reducing violence in schools

Restorative practice describes a way of being, an underpinning ethos, which enables us to build and maintain healthy relationships. It provides a strong framework within which we can promote a whole-school ethos founded on the importance of relationships. This includes a range of approaches to managing conflict and tensions in a way that repairs harm and mends relationships if and when those relationships do break down.

I'm sure that few teachers would disagree that the relationships they have with their students matter, but I know that many feel they don't have the time to invest in them thanks to the stresses of our results-focused system, our crowded classrooms and our overcrowded curriculum.



Schools that explicitly put a **greater focus on proactively building and maintaining relationships** will find that there will be **fewer occasions when relationships break down** and, therefore, there is **less need for them to be repaired**.

What's more, relationships are both simple and hard in equal measure, so it's easy to direct our focus onto the more tangible areas of school life – such as results – and, in doing so, fall into the trap of forgetting that not everything we count counts, and that not everything that counts can be counted.

Do we hit the target but miss the point? After all, it is said often enough that the quality of a

student's learning can't exceed the quality of their teachers. But I suggest that neither the quality of the teaching nor of the learning can exceed the quality of the relationship between the teacher and the student.

Every day, in lots of different ways, our students ask: do I matter to you, do you notice me, do I belong here? And, if we aren't careful – because actions speak louder than words – the answer will be seen in the behaviours that play out. It's not always what we say or what we do, but how we do it and how students end up feeling.

Schools that explicitly put a greater focus on proactively building and maintaining relationships will find that there will be fewer occasions when relationships break down and, therefore, there is less need for them to be repaired.

It's better to be more proactive and get involved earlier in the life of a problem and earlier in the journey of a student's day. Preventing things from escalating into more serious and complex situations, including how we respond to violence in and around our schools, and beyond.

Paperwork doesn't keep students safe, people do; interventions don't change lives, people do. That doesn't mean we don't need good quality interventions, we do, but the quality of the relationship will determine the quality of the outcome.

Removing threats doesn't mean we have created safety. For students to feel able to talk, you need adults who are willing to listen.

Such an undertaking needs everyone to act explicitly, across the whole school, with these goals in mind. This entails keeping a close eye on our own behaviours and habitual practices –



which speak louder than any list of values on a lanyard, poster or school website – and ensure that we treat everyone with respect. We must involve all members of the school community in decisions that affect them, listen actively to each other, be empathic and deal with conflicts and tensions in a way that seeks to repair harm and sustain relationships. This is the core of restorative practice.



**How do you change the culture of a school? One classroom at a time. Where do you start? In the one you're in now.**

Restorative practice is not about replacing traditional behaviour management systems in our schools. It's certainly not about being soft or turning a blind eye to poor behaviour. It's about elevating the culture of a school or organisation so students are pulled in, not pushed out, about fostering a greater sense of community and communal ownership.

Although its roots are clearly in restorative justice – as a way of repairing the harm done to the community and relationships within it – restorative practice has the bolder ambition of proactively developing the sense of community and seeking to increase the social capital between people and across the school and, from there, into the wider community.

Put simply, restorative justice is what you do; restorative practice is what you are.

If we aren't careful, we put our focus on the content and forget to simply connect. Our students need connection as well as important content. The connection creates the space to then be able to explore the content. Connections can happen by themselves, but wouldn't you want them to happen intentionally?

Remember the old joke about the pub on the moon that shut down because there was

no atmosphere? How does your classroom compare? If your classroom or office was a coffee shop, would you be a regular? Having people leave your presence feeling better than when they arrived is one thing, but what about helping people feel better just by coming through the door?

Greeting students at the school gate with a smile (remember, smiling at students is good for you both), a 'good morning', or a 'How are you?', will give you a quick temperature check to see how their day might work out. Most of all, it's important that we start the day on a positive note. Waiting for students at the classroom door gives us another opportunity to connect, saying their name correctly – that's the subtle difference – and remembering things about them.

If you're not modelling what you're teaching, you're teaching something different

Modelling is like breathing. You can't not do it. You are modelling behaviour for your students, whether you mean to or not. So, if you're not modelling what you're teaching, then you're not really teaching what you think you're teaching. Students see whether you're showing warmth and respect toward them and to the other students and adults in your school. Often, they will model their own behaviour after your behaviour, albeit subconsciously.

So, how do you change the culture of a school? One classroom at a time. Where do you start? In the one you're in now.



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