

Why Families Matter

INTRODUCTION

If you are reading this, you will have felt called to serve vulnerable children and you have a vision to see children safe, well and cared for in the best possible way. We want to commend you for this vision and look at ways in which we can help you to fulfil it. This extends to supporting children in families.

While recognising that families face numerous pressures, problems and issues and that the shape and form of a family differ vastly, we believe that children grow and develop best when they are brought up in the care of loving and nurturing caregivers, in the context of their own communities. There is a strong Biblical mandate to care for vulnerable children, particularly those without parental care. The Bible shows us that the family is the only institution designed by God for the care of children.

Not only this, the family is the core institution for child-rearing worldwide, and decades of research have shown that strong families promote positive child outcomes' and that separation from family can be harmful to a child.

Because of this, it is recognised that the best way to provide care for children is to support them in their families and if children become separated from their families that they are enabled to reunite with them or quickly be placed in a family environment. Preventing family separation through strengthening families, providing temporary emergency care for children and re-uniting children with families is increasingly becoming recognised internationally as good practice and national laws around residential care for children in many countries are changing to reflect this.

In all regions of the world the family is undergoing major changes, with increasing proportions of children living with one or no parent and family poverty remaining high in many countries. The Body of Christ (through the Church and Christian ministries), is in an ideal position to be able support children to remain in families, even if one or more parents are absent. Through the care and support of struggling families, the Church has the potential to influence whole communities with God's values. Where children are unable to stay with their biological family or next of kin, the Church is ideally placed to offer alternative families through fostering or adoption. We believe that when the body of Christ works together as described in Romans 12.5 and 1 Corinthians 12, that there is more potential for the Church to transform situations facing vulnerable children, including those without parental care.

WHY FAMILIES MATTER TOOLKIT FOR CHURCHES

Viva has developed a toolkit, which can be used in Churches to help Church communities to grow in understanding as to why families are so important to children and how Churches can nurture children and their families to be all that God intends

The Toolkit is intended to be used as a six-week series in churches. There are two parts to the Toolkit.

1. **Part One: A Study Guide** provides a framework for **Pastors** to lead their churches in understanding how to support families and nurture children and can be used to guide discussions in **Small Groups**.
2. **Part Two: Resources for children** is to help Children's Leaders prepare to teach **Children** the same principles about children needing a loving family.

There is a different theme for each of the six weeks which will help to build a holistic Biblical view of how God intended children and families to operate, and what provision He made within the community of faith when families find themselves in crisis. These are the six themes:

- **God:** because God has adopted us and is father to the fatherless, he is at the centre.
- **Child:** every child has inherent value and an unconditional right to holistic development.
- **Family:** a healthy family is the best environment for a child to develop and thrive.
- **Church:** the body of Christ is commissioned to care for the children without parental care and has the capacity to lead the local and global effort to end orphan hood
- **Community:** broad scale collaboration is required to transfer these core values across societies and see transformation occur.
- **Commission:** The mission is immense so we can only move forward with God's commission to present life in all its fullness.

HOW TO USE THE TOOLKIT WITH CHURCHES IN THE NETWORK

We recommend that you

- Start by running a Child Friendly Church workshop in your church which relate the 9 aims of the Child Friendly church and involves Churches the undertaking a Child Friendly Church Assessment. Materials for this workshop have been developed by Viva.
- Conduct a day's workshop with Church Leaders and Children's workers on "Why Families Matter" Materials and resources for this workshop can be provided by Viva if required.

At the end of the Why Families Matter workshop, participants should develop a plan as to how they will roll out 'Why Families Matter' on the 6 themes (listed above) with adults and children in their Churches. This could be through Pastors Teaching, small group discussion and activities with children. Materials (Study Guide for discussion groups and Resources for Children's) then can be given to those who have a plan.

It is important to follow up on whether the training and materials on 'Why Families Matter' have had any impact and whether Churches have been encouraged to support children in families or work with families in a new way.

At the end of the Study Guide in Annexe 6, participants of small groups are asked:

- What they are already doing for children and families?
- What they have learnt?
- Where they would like to start something new?
- Who they will link with?
- Where additional training is required?

We recommend that you collect responses at the end of the 6 week study and follow up with next steps. Viva can help you with additional materials for training on family support and strengthening.