



A Christian Caregiver's Guide to

**WORKING WITH
TRAUMATISED CHILDREN**

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Welcome!

Thank you for downloading our **Guide to Working with Traumatized Children**, which we hope and pray you will find helpful and inspiring.

Kids Alive International is a Christian organisation that works with traumatised children around the world, many having been abused, neglected, bereaved, with most living in abject conditions.

Our experience has shown that without “trauma-informed care”, many of these precious children will have behavioural, emotional and social issues for the rest of their lives.

Our vision is that all traumatised children will find emotional and spiritual wholeness, so they can go on to live life in all its fullness, as God intends for them.

We pray that this guide will be helpful in achieving this.

God bless you!



Tim Hunt
Executive Director



ABOUT KIDS ALIVE INTERNATIONAL

Kids Alive is a Christian charity that cares for traumatised and vulnerable children in some of the world's toughest places.

- Starving, abused and neglected children living in the brutal slums of Kenya.
- Traumatized Syrian refugee children living in abject conditions in Lebanon.
- Young children abandoned by their parents on street corners in Zambia.
- Child victims of unspeakable sexual assault in Guatemala.
- And so many more.

With four underlying goals for each child in our care, we ensure that they all receive trauma-informed care and counselling, an excellent education, food, love, life skills, family strengthening, the pursuit of justice and much more besides. All in loving Christian environments.

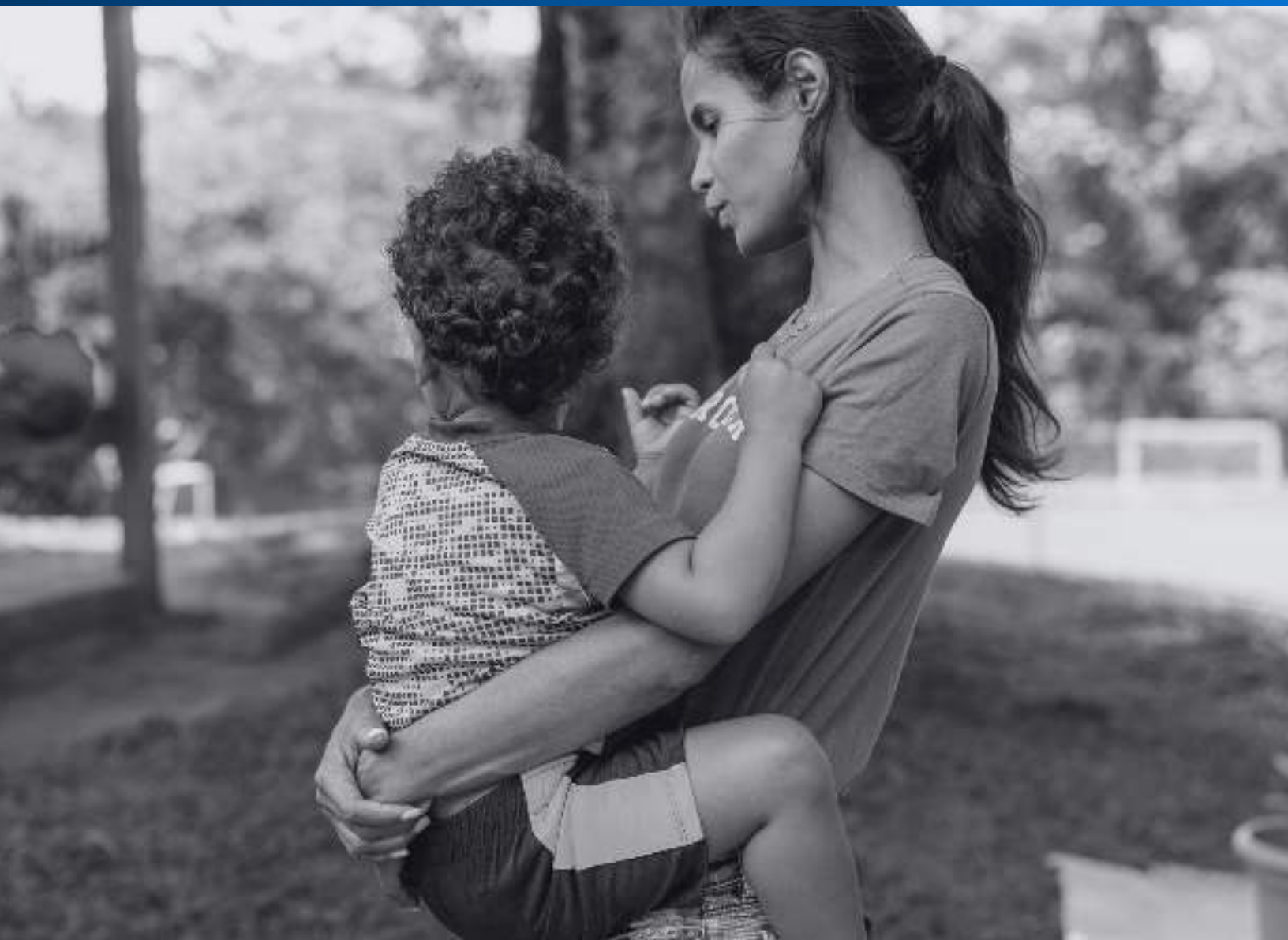
Visit www.kidsalive.co.uk for further information.



“Learn to do good; Seek justice, Rebuke the oppressor; Defend the fatherless, Plead for the widow.”
Isaiah 1: 17 (NKJV)

PART 1

A Caregiver's Guide to **TRAUMA-RESPONSIVE CARE**



Understanding **TRAUMA**

EVER WONDERED WHY A CHILD MIGHT BE BEHAVING ABNORMALLY?

Perhaps they lash out and are overly aggressive. Or they are painfully withdrawn.

Perhaps they burst into tears when confronted with a simple problem or situation. Or in the middle of the night.

Perhaps they struggle to concentrate and take in any information.

Or they simply have no 'oomph' in them and appear to have lost all of their spirit.



Understanding **TRAUMA**

Trauma is more than a past event - it's an experience that rewires how children view themselves, others, and God.

A child who has experienced neglect or abuse may live in a constant state of survival.

Their brain and body are on high alert, ready to fight, flee, freeze, fawn or flop at the first sign of danger.



INSIDE THE TRAUMA-IMPACTED BRAIN: WHAT YOU CAN'T SEE EXPLAINS WHAT YOU DO SEE

Our brains are designed to protect us - but trauma rewires how they function.

HOW DOES IT WORK

Even when there's no immediate threat, the brain stays alert:

Amygdala: Something's different

Hypothalamus: Low cortisol and adrenaline

Cortex: "Look. A bear. Better be careful, but I'm safe"



HOW DO THEY INTERACT?

When danger is up close, the trauma-response system takes over:

Amygdala: ALARM!!!!!!

Hypothalamus: A deluge of strong chemicals

Cortex: DON'T THINK:

FIGHT!!
FLIGHT!!!
FREEZE!!!!

Your body changes incredibly.



Many children face daily "bears" - triggers that activate trauma responses. What may look like anger, disobedience, or withdrawal is often the brain doing its best to stay safe.

The 3 Core Needs OF EVERY CHILD

Every child carries three deep needs:

- To connect: Trust builds when adults show up consistently, offering warmth and care.
- To be seen: Children need to know they are valued beyond their behaviour, grades, or performance.
- To be heard: Listening without judgement communicates dignity and gives children a voice.

Example: If a child says "Nobody likes me", don't brush it off. Pause, kneel down, and respond: "I hear you. That must feel really hard. You're not alone - I'm here with you and like you."



One of our therapists working with children in a remote region of Peru, where there is a high prevalence of violence against children and women.

The Dos & Don'ts **OF TRAUMA-RESPONSIVE CARE**

- Do:**
- Validate feelings: “I can see you’re upset. That makes sense.”
 - Create predictable routines: structure promotes safety.
 - Stay calm and steady: co-regulation lets children borrow your calm.
 - Offer choices: “Would you like to sit here or outside?” restores a sense of control.
 - Correct with dignity: Address behaviour without shaming identity. i.e. “That didn’t seem to be a great choice.”

- Don't:**
- Minimise pain: avoid phrases like “It’s not that bad.”
 - Use fear or shame: “If you don’t behave, God won’t love you” damages trust.
 - Expect “normal” age behaviour: trauma often causes developmental regression.
 - Rush to fix: sometimes children need empathy more than answers.
 - Correct with shame: “Why would you do that?” This communicates that something is wrong with the child rather than with their behaviour.



In Guatemala, the courts refer highly traumatised child victims of sexual assault to us. We often use art therapy so they can start to express how they feel.

Practical Tools FOR CAREGIVERS

Practical Tools for Caregivers

- Co-regulation: Stay calm. Speak gently. Slow your breathing. Your calm body helps calm theirs.
- Safe spaces: Create quiet areas where children can reset – a corner with soft seating, or even just stepping outside with a trusted adult.

Identity Reminders: Speak truth that heals:

- "You are chosen"
- "You are loved"
- "You are powerful."
- "You are God's masterpiece."
- Values in action: Model forgiveness, kindness, perseverance, and integrity. Children learn more from what you do than what you say.
- Creative expression: Encourage art, music, or play as outlets for feelings too big for words.



In Lebanon we work with Syrian refugee children, many traumatised by war, family upheaval and parental loss.

Your Role AS A CAREGIVER

You don't have to be a therapist to make a difference. Trauma healing often begins with simple, consistent presence. When you show up with empathy and patience, you create a safe harbour where a child can start to heal.

Sometimes the best thing you can do is simply listen. A child who believes they are alone or unloved begins to believe they are loved when you consistently show them: "I see you. I hear you. I'm not going anywhere."



Closing Note:

Every child is God's beloved. As caregivers, our role is to model His love – steady, patient, and kind. In doing so, we create spaces where children can begin to see themselves not as victims of their trauma but as cherished children of God, full of hope and potential.

PART 2

Renewing Identity

HELPING CHILDREN HEAL FROM TRAUMA

“By reminding children
WHO THEY TRULY ARE...”

RENEWING IDENTITY: HELPING CHILDREN HEAL FROM TRAUMA

When a child experiences trauma—whether through abuse, neglect, or systemic injustice—the deepest wounds are often invisible. Trauma doesn’t just leave scars on the body or mind; it distorts a child’s very sense of identity. They may begin to believe lies such as “I’m unworthy,” “I’m dirty,” or “I don’t matter.”

At Kids Alive, we believe healing begins with renewing identity. By sharing with children who God created them to be, how to know God, and to believe that they are chosen, loved, and powerful—we begin to replace the false messages of trauma with life-giving truths rooted in God’s love and affirmed by evidence-based care.

WHY IDENTITY MATTERS IN HEALING

Research in trauma care shows that healing is most effective when identity is affirmed and integrated into care. Children don't just need safety and support - they need to know they are seen, heard and valued.

Identity-Based Trauma-Responsive Care, a model we practice across our programmes, weaves together the best of trauma-informed principles with biblical truths. This approach acknowledges both the psychological impact of trauma and the spiritual reality that every child is God's masterpiece (Ephesians 2:10).



“...that every child
IS GOD’S MASTERPIECE.”

THE TRUTH THAT TRANSFORMS

Through our work, we guide children to embrace five powerful identity statements:

1. **I am God's Child** – replacing abandonment with belonging.

"Yet to all who did receive him, to those who believed in his name, he gave the right to become children of God." (John 1:12 NIV)

2. **I am Clean** – countering shame with restoration.

"If we confess our sins, he is faithful and just and will forgive us our sins and purify us from all unrighteousness." (1 John 1:9 NIV)

3. **I am Chosen with a Purpose** – replacing meaninglessness with significance.

"You did not choose me, but I chose you and appointed you so that you might go and bear fruit –fruit that will last—and so that whatever you ask in my name the Father will give you." (John 15:16 NIV)

4. **I am Powerful** – overcoming powerlessness with agency and strength.

"I can do all this through him who gives me strength." (Philippians 4:13 NIV)

5. **I am Art** - transforming feelings of defectiveness with the truth of being God's masterpiece.

"For we are God's handiwork, created in Christ Jesus to do good works, which God prepared in advance for us to do." (Ephesians 2:10 NIV)

Each of these truths directly addresses a core wound of trauma and helps children move from survival to thriving.

Reminding children they are

CHOSEN, CLEAN, GOD'S CHILD, ART, POWERFUL

MODELLING IDENTITY FOR HEALING

Identity work isn't just for children—it begins with us. Caregivers, mentors, and ministry leaders must first reflect on these truths in our own lives so that we can model them authentically. When we consistently live out dignity, patience, and compassion, children see what safe and healthy love looks like and begin to believe it for themselves.

Sometimes the most healing thing we can do is not to lecture or fix—but simply to be present. Showing up consistently tells a child, “You are worth my time. You are not alone.”

A PATH TOWARD TRANSFORMATION

Renewing identity is not a quick process. It's a lifelong journey of walking alongside children, helping them untangle trauma's lies, and guiding them toward God's truth. In this sacred work, we witness incredible transformation: children once silenced by fear find their voice, those weighed down by shame discover freedom, and those who felt invisible realise they are cherished.

When children are rooted in their true identity, they not only heal - they thrive.



This is one of our therapists helping a child victim of sexual abuse in Zambia to renew their identity in Christ. Sexual abuse is rife in Zambia, especially in more remote rural regions. Some communities believe that having sex with a child will cure/protect a man from HIV.

Reminding children they are
CHOSEN, CLEAN, GOD'S CHILD, ART, POWERFUL

RENEWING IDENTITY: INTEGRATING FAITH AND EVIDENCE-BASED HEALING

Children who have experienced trauma often internalise distorted messages about themselves - messages rooted in shame, fear, and rejection. Healing begins when children are gently reminded of the truth of who they are: chosen, cherished, capable, and deeply loved by God. This identity work is both personal and therapeutic, addressing trauma wounds such as worthlessness, powerlessness, and isolation.

For those who care for and support children, it's important to reflect on these truths personally so we can authentically model them in our relationships. These identity statements are not just words— they're tools that help reinforce safety, dignity, and hope as we walk alongside children on their journey of healing.

TRAUMA-INDUCED IDENTITIES	BIBLICAL IDENTITIES	COGNITIVE BEHAVIOURAL THERAPY (CBT) SELF-IDENTITY GOALS	EVIDENCE-BASED ALIGNMENT
Abandonment	"I am God's Child"	Secure Attachment & Belonging	CBT seeks to promote transcendence beyond trauma and to establish unconditional acceptance. This is based on a foundation for healthy self-worth, not dependent on performance or circumstances. Being God's Child directly reflects this identity as we claim Him and are accepted to be called Children of God (John 1:12).
Shame	"I am Clean"	Shame Resilience & Self-Acceptance	Claiming "I am Clean" directly counters trauma-based shame and self-blame. CBT works to separate identity from traumatic experiences - "I am not what happened to me." By promoting psychological cleansing from toxic shame. 1 John 1:9 clearly states we are "cleansed from all unrighteousness". Also, part of 1 John 1:9 calls for confession. While children are never responsible for their abuse they are often not allowed to be passive participants. Because of this, they carry shame for what they were forced to do. Through "confessing" (or discussing) their feelings of shame with their therapist or caregivers, they can stop blaming themselves and accept their cleanliness.

RENEWING IDENTITY: INTEGRATING FAITH AND EVIDENCE-BASED HEALING

TRAUMA-INDUCED IDENTITIES	BIBLICAL IDENTITIES	COGNITIVE BEHAVIOURAL THERAPY (CBT) SELF-IDENTITY GOALS	EVIDENCE-BASED ALIGNMENT
Meaningless	"I am Chosen with a Purpose"	Meaning-Making & Self-Efficacy	CBT emphasises developing a sense of agency and personal significance. Both the CBT emphasis and biblical identity help children see themselves as valuable contributors rather than victims, fostering hope and motivation for change. John 15:16 states that they are chosen for eternal impact.
Powerlessness	"I am Powerful"	Personal Agency & Empowerment	A core CBT principle that individuals can influence their thoughts, feelings and behaviours is based in personal agency. Powerfulness addresses learned helplessness from trauma and builds confidence to break negative generational cycles. Philippians 4:13 tells them they can have the power to live lives of dignity in all circumstances.
Defectiveness	"I am Art"	Intrinsic Worth & Authentic Self	CBT promotes self-acceptance independent of external validation. This aligns with the biblical truth of recognising inherent value and uniqueness, countering the "damaged goods" mentality common in trauma survivors. Ephesians 2:10 emphasises their uniqueness as God's masterpiece.

PART 3

Rooted Values **LIVING OUT THE TRUTH OF WHO WE ARE**

“Values are the outflow **OF A RENEWED IDENTITY”**

ROOTED VALUES: LIVING OUT THE TRUTH OF WHO WE ARE

When a child experiences trauma, it doesn't just wound their past — it reshapes how they see themselves and how they interact with the world. Healing isn't about restoring something lost; it's about replacing the false and painful identities that trauma creates with healthy ones grounded in truth. As children learn to believe and accept who God says they are — not what the world or their inner narratives tell them — their sense of identity begins to transform from the inside out.

Values then become the outflow of that renewed identity. They are the visible branches and leaves that grow from the deep roots of truth. Values guide choices, shape relationships, influence how we respond to challenges, and anchor resilience in times of hardship.



WHY VALUES MATTER IN HEALING

Identity tells children who they are. Values show them how to live it out.

Kids Alive integrates biblical values with evidence-based practices like Cognitive Behavioural Therapy (CBT). This unique approach helps children not only heal from trauma but also practice healthy ways of living that promote safety, dignity, and connection.

As children learn to embody values such as faith, perseverance, and love, they begin to rebuild trust, form healthy relationships, and discover the joy of living with purpose.

“...not only heal from trauma

BUT ALSO PRACTICE HEALTHY WAYS OF LIVING..”

EIGHT VALUES THAT TRANSFORM

Drawing from 2 Peter 1:5-9, we guide children in cultivating values that directly counter the wounds of trauma:

- Faith – building hope and optimism that change is possible.
- Integrity – aligning behaviour with truth instead of fear or survival responses.
- Understanding – developing perspective and empathy through cognitive flexibility.
- Self-Control – learning to pause, regulate emotions, and choose wisely.
- Perseverance – building grit to endure hardship without destructive coping.
- Devotion to God – anchoring life in transcendent purpose and meaning.
- Brotherly Kindness – practicing healthy relationships through care and compassion.
- Love – embracing self-compassion and the capacity to give and receive care.



VALUES IN PRACTICE

For children overcoming trauma, values aren't abstract ideas. They are concrete, daily practices that change how they think, feel, and act.

When a child has lived in a state of survival, their natural responses often default to fight, flight, or freeze — doing whatever it takes to feel safe. As healing takes root, practicing values becomes a way of retraining those automatic responses. Faith helps a child stay grounded when life feels uncertain. Self-control looks like taking a deep breath instead of lashing out. Love is expressed in kind words, forgiveness, and compassion.

As caregivers and leaders, we are called to model these values first. Children learn most from what we do—not just what we say. When we embody patience, forgiveness, understanding, and kindness, we show them what safe and healthy love looks like — and slowly, those once-instinctive trauma responses are replaced with trust, peace, and connection.

FROM ROOTS TO FRUIT

When values grow from a renewed identity, they produce fruit—lives marked by healing, resilience, and flourishing relationships.

Just as a tree with deep roots can withstand drought and storms, children grounded in truth and nurtured by values can weather life's challenges with strength and hope.



This is the vision we carry at Kids Alive: not only to help children recover from trauma, but to see them thrive as whole, resilient individuals who live out the fullness of who God created them to be.



ROOTED VALUES: LIVING OUT THE TRUTH OF WHO WE ARE

Values are the visible outgrowth of a person’s core identity—the branches and leaves that flourish from the rooted truth of who we are. These values not only reflect internal transformation but also guide outward behaviours, relationships, and choices.

Drawing from 2 Peter 1:5–9, we see a framework of spiritual growth that begins with faith and blossoms into goodness, knowledge, self-control, perseverance, godliness, mutual affection, and love. These values function as both guiding virtues and practical tools for healing—shaping how individuals recover from trauma and rebuild safe, healthy relationships. When consistently practised, they help children and adults alike live out a renewed sense of purpose and belonging.

BIBLICAL VALUES	COMMON COGNITIVE BEHAVIOURAL THERAPY (CBT) BEHAVIOURS/TRAITS	EVIDENCE-BASED ALIGNMENT
Faith	Hope and Optimism	Hope and faith help children develop realistic optimism and belief that change is possible. Biblical faith provides a spiritual foundation for therapeutic hope and capacity for growth so that responses are based on their inner identity.
Integrity	Authentic Self-Expression and Behavioural Consistency	CBT aims for behaviour aligned with true values rather than trauma responses of fight, flight or freeze. Integrity supports honest self-reflection and consistent, values-based actions.
Understanding	Cognitive Flexibility (Curiosity) and Perspective	A primary CBT goal is recognising multiple interpretations of situations. Developing a better sense of understanding helps us achieve this goal.

ROOTED VALUES: LIVING OUT THE TRUTH OF WHO WE ARE

BIBLICAL VALUES	COMMON COGNITIVE BEHAVIOURAL THERAPY (CBT) BEHAVIOURS/TRAITS	EVIDENCE-BASED ALIGNMENT
Self-control	Emotional Regulation and Impulse Management	Self-control is a direct match with CBT’s focus on coping skills, distress tolerance, and pausing between trigger and response. It is fundamental to trauma recovery.
Perseverance	Grit, Distress Tolerance and Resilience	CBT teaches children that they can survive difficult emotions and situations without destructive coping mechanisms. Perseverance builds the capacity to persist through challenges without destructive coping.
Devotion to God	Meaning-Making and Transcendent Purpose	CBT recognises that purpose and meaning beyond oneself promotes well-being. Devotion to God provides a transcendent framework for healing, growth and purpose.
Brotherly Kindness	Social Skills and Healthy Relationships	CBT aims to improve interpersonal functioning and secure attachments. Kindness teaches prosocial behaviours that support healthy connections.
Love	Self-Compassion and Capacity for Connection	CBT reduces self-criticism and shame while building relationship capacity. Biblical love encompasses self-acceptance, self-respect, and the ability to give and receive care.

PART 4

The Power Of Presence **A 7-DAY DEVOTIONAL**

FOR PARENTS TO PRACTICE WITH CHILDREN

WHY PRESENCE MATTERS

Presence is powerful because it reflects the very heart of God. From the beginning, He created us for relationship — to walk with Him, to be seen, known, and loved by Him. The whole concept of presence is modelled after His own nature: a Father who draws near, who listens, who delights in being with His children. When we practice presence with others, especially with the children in our care, we are mirroring His divine design — extending the same communion, safety, and connection that He offers to us.

In a world filled with noise, distractions, and constant demands, children are often left wondering if anyone truly sees them, hears them, or understands them. For a child who has experienced trauma, neglect, or even just the pressures of growing up, the need for safe and loving presence is even greater.

Presence is one of the most powerful gifts we can give. It communicates:

- “You matter more than my busyness.”
- “You don’t have to earn my love.”
- “I see you. I hear you. I’m with you.”

When we show up consistently and calmly, children begin to believe they are safe, valued, and deeply loved. This kind of presence not only strengthens your bond with your child — it also helps restore the foundation of a healthy identity rooted in God’s love that trauma, stress, or fear may have tried to erode.

For you as the caregiver, practicing presence helps you slow down and notice. It creates moments of connection that build trust and joy in your relationship. For your child, presence can be healing. It says without words: “You belong. You are not alone.”

Over the next seven days, this devotional will guide you through simple practices — rooted in Scripture, reflection, and action — that will help you cultivate the power of presence in your home or ministry. As you do, you’ll discover that often the most helpful thing you can offer isn’t a sermon or solution. It’s simply yourself.

What changes

WHEN WE SEE EYE-TO-EYE?

DAY 1: GET TO THEIR LEVEL

Scripture: “Let the little children come to me... and he took the children in his arms, placed his hands on them and blessed them.” – Mark 10:14, 16

Reflection: Jesus didn’t stay distant; He knelt, embraced, and blessed children eye-to-eye. Presence begins with posture.

Action Step: Today, kneel or sit eye-to-eye with your child. Speak gently and let them know: “I see you. I’m glad to be with you.” Just like God communicates to us.



Here our therapist is working with traumatised children in the brutal slums of Nairobi, Kenya. Many have been neglected and/or abused, rarely knowing where their next meal will come from.

How does trust grow

ONE PROMISE AT A TIME?

DAY 2: BE CONSISTENT

Scripture: “The Lord is faithful to all His promises and loving toward all He has made.” – Psalm 145:13.

Reflection: Trauma teaches children that promises get broken. Consistency can counter that and promote feelings of safety and love.

Action Step: Follow through on one small promise today – a snack, a game, a bedtime story. Show them that your word can be trusted. Just like God’s Word can be trusted.

What happens

WHEN CHILDREN FEEL HEARD?

DAY 3: LISTEN MORE THAN YOU SPEAK

Scripture: "Everyone should be quick to listen, slow to speak and slow to become angry." — James 1:19

Reflection: Listening gives dignity. When children feel heard, they learn their voice matters to God and to you.

Action Step: As your child: "What were the best and hardest parts of your day?" Then listen without interrupting, correcting or pushing to fix. Just like God listens to our joys and lamentations.

How can our calm

QUIET THEIR STORMS?

DAY 4: STAY CALM AND REGULATED

Scripture: "Peace I leave with you; my peace I give you." — John 14:27

Reflection: A caregiver's calm can quiet a child's storm. When you model peace, they learn they are safe and can work towards modelling the same.



Action Step: Next time your child feels upset, acts out, or frustrates you, take a deep breath before responding. Whisper instead of raising your voice. Let your calm set the tone. Just like God remains a calming presence during our storms.

What makes a space **FEEL TRULY SAFE?**

DAY 5: CREATE SAFE SPACES

Scripture: “You are my refuge and my shield; I have put my hope in your word.” — Psalm 119:114.

Reflection: Every child needs a refuge — a place where it’s okay to feel big emotions. Safety invites healing.

Action Step: Make a small “peace corner” today: a pillow, blanket, journal, or quiet space where your child can go when feeling overwhelmed or dysregulated. Just like God blesses us with places of refuge and safety when we need Him.

How does grace restore **WHAT SHAME DESTROYS?**

DAY 6: USE GENTLE CORRECTION

Scripture: “Brothers and sisters, if someone is caught in a sin, you who live by the Spirit should restore that person gently.” — Galatians 6:1

Reflection: Correction without shame restores dignity. Guidance rooted in love teaches children they are more than their mistakes or a label.

Action Step: When correcting, try saying: “This behaviour isn’t okay, but I know you are kind and capable of better.” Separate the action from their identity. Just like God does with us.

What happens

WHEN WE JUST SHOW UP?

DAY 7: SIMPLY SHOW UP

Scripture: “Never will I leave you; never will I forsake you.” – Hebrews 13:5

Reflection: Sometimes words aren’t needed. Quiet presence says: “You’re not alone.” This is the heart of God’s love reflected through us.

Action Step: Sit with your child without an agenda. Share a hug, read together, or just be near. Let your presence do the speaking. Just like God’s presence can do for us.

CLOSING ENCOURAGEMENT

Presence is powerful because it reflects God’s unchanging and unconditional love. As you practice these seven habits, you are not only helping your child heal — you are teaching them what God’s love feels like in everyday life.



WHO IS KIDS ALIVE INTERNATIONAL?

Kids Alive is a Christian organisation that cares for traumatised and vulnerable children around the world.

Sign up on our website to receive our e-newsletters and prayer guides.

STAY CONNECTED

