

Palestinian Nonviolence and Peacebuilding:

**Approaches to Educating and
Nurturing the Next Generation**



“I believe in nonviolence because it is the path of the soul.



It honors the sacredness of every human life and reflects the deepest values of humanity. For Palestinians, nonviolence is not just a strategy; It is a way of life that resists injustice, preserves our humanity, and holds fast to hope for a more peaceful tomorrow.”

-Milad Vosgueritchian, House of Hope Vision School Co-Founder and Peace and Education Director, pictured left.

We hope that this summary of House of Hope Vision School’s approaches and philosophy will be a guiding and helpful tool in spreading and strengthening the culture of nonviolence in school communities in Palestine and around the world.

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Forward

This document is an introduction to nonviolence principles as they are seen and applied by educators at the House of Hope Vision School in the West Bank. Our school couples the philosophy, history, and skills requisite for nonviolence education with the research and practices of trauma-informed curricula. The integration of these knowledge realms forms the central underpinning of daily learning in House of Hope Vision School classrooms.

We aim here to provide an overview of that integration for readers interested in the school. We describe the overall vision of the school and introduce the two curricula—for grades K-2 and 3-5, respectively—that dedicate a portion of the school day to specific lessons in nonviolent communication and peacebuilding. Two sample approaches from these continually evolving curricula are also included, along with a section specifically designed for educators and caregivers who wish to learn more.

This window into the school's philosophy and practices is based on an original publication in Arabic written for students' families to provide a bridge between the children's experience at House of Hope and their lives at home. Workshops with parents and community continue to be an integral aspect of the school's work.



Nonviolence is a call for radical social change. At House of Hope, we regard nonviolence as a comprehensive philosophy based on the sanctity of all life, and as a tool for resolving conflicts, both in personal interactions and in collective struggles for freedom.

We see nonviolence as avoiding not only external physical violence but also internal violence against the spirit. In the words of Martin Luther King, Jr., "You not only refuse to shoot the man, you refuse to hate him."

Nonviolence opposes verbal, psychological, and structural violence in society, such as institutionalized harm based on hierarchies of class, race, religion, or gender. It is an ongoing struggle against injustice, sustained by perseverance, faith in the human potential for transformation, and fierce love.

Amid war and Occupation, we realize the enormity of this challenge. We need to nurture a generation that possesses the will, wisdom, courage, and love to embrace a culture of nonviolent social change without fear, dependence, or surrender to bitter reality. We aim to develop influential members of Palestinian society who draw strength from our Palestinian heritage and advance the values of peace, citizenship, democracy, and human rights.

As we fight for the equality and human dignity we all deserve, we must acknowledge that Palestine is a place of religious and political pluralism. Nonviolence calls for mutual understanding among people, regardless of their ethnic, religious, or cultural differences. In developing our movement, we aim to cultivate a participatory leadership style that welcomes diversity within a community while unifying our voice for dignity and equality.

Values, Culture, and the Normalization of Violence

Our work takes place in a context of ongoing political, economic, technological, and cultural changes, many of which are imposed by the Israeli Occupation. Because of these challenges, we observe an increase in violence between children and among the classes of Palestinian society.

This is not unique to Palestinian culture or the current historical moment. For millennia, humans have been attempting to resolve conflicts through violence and war. We are heirs of traditions that have valorized violence and made it beautiful. Across many cultures, "bravery" is defined by the courage to take violent action and is a key component in the ideal of masculinity. The concept of nonviolence is often met with skepticism or even contempt, and there is little encouragement to explore its possibilities. Thus, the practice of nonviolence requires a radical transformation in how we think and act toward others.



Peacebuilding and Pedagogy

Because violence so saturates the worldview and practices of contemporary societies, we believe, along with the French philosopher Jean-Marie Muller, that building a culture of nonviolence must start with the young. We believe that a democratic society, where others are respected and differences are considered natural, will only result from changing how we educate children. This means the values of tolerance and openness, the use of dialogue and self-reflection, and learning how to meet human needs without harming others, must be integral to school life. Peace is the path as well as the destination.

Our school philosophy draws on Martin Luther King's understanding: "Intelligence plus character—that is the goal of true education." We are also rooted in the United Nations' Universal Declaration of Human Rights, which asserts the inherent dignity of all members of the human family and states, "Education shall be aimed at the full maturity of the human personality and at promoting respect for human rights and fundamental freedoms." In this spirit, we not only cultivate academic excellence but also help both children and adults find their voice, empowering them to shine their light in a world darkened by injustice.



Nonviolence Curriculum Approaches at House of Hope Vision School

At House of Hope, education focuses on nonviolence.

- Teaches a philosophy that each human life has sacred value, and that each person has the capacity for positive transformation.
- Teaches skills for building personal resilience, cooperative and fulfilling social relationships, and strong communities.
- Teaches the rich history of nonviolent freedom struggles and strategies.

Our methodology is not only teaching principles but also applying them. In the younger grades of our **Language of the Heart** program, children begin learning ways to resolve conflicts without resorting to verbal or physical violence. In the **Peacebuilding** program for higher grades, students learn to view their friendships and the school community, where they've been developing these skills, as part of a larger world where peace and justice are possible.



Language of the Heart (Grades K-2)

Needs, Feeling, Empathy: Nonviolence Communication Frameworks

Empathy, the capacity to deeply understand and even feel the experience of others, is a central pillar of our program. The skills of empathic communication, grounded in identifying and connecting to one's own feelings as well as listening to others, are the foundation of **Language of the Heart**. In the **Peacebuilding** program, practicing empathy involves recognizing that people everywhere, including those who are different from us, who may even seem like "the other" or "the enemy," share with us the same universal feelings and needs at their core.

Our focus on needs, feelings, and empathy is derived from a process called Nonviolent Communication, developed by 20th-century U.S. psychologist Marshall Rosenberg. Nonviolent Communication rests on these principles:

1. Feelings and needs express what is alive in us.
2. All people want to satisfy their needs, and these needs are universal. They include food, shelter, security, freedom, connection, mutuality, peace, justice, learning, being seen, creativity, expression, belonging, and love. At every moment, we strive to satisfy our needs to the best of our ability.
3. We build sustainable relationships through cooperation, based on a mutual understanding of needs. Violence is a tragic expression of unmet needs.
4. Each of us has remarkable inner resources if we are given the opportunity to connect with them.

Throughout the broader Waldorf-based curriculum for younger students, they are learning skills in sensory, verbal, and moral awareness. In the Language of the Heart lessons, skills in attending to our inner experience are developed and refined, leading to the recognition of specific feelings and an awareness of the needs, both met and unmet, that affect them. Music, art, meditation, and creative games such as emotion charades develop these capacities. In time, they are woven into skills for compassionate communication and conflict resolution.



In Nonviolent Communication, instead of focusing on the person who seems to be blocking our happiness, we learn to recognize all our own feelings and identify our needs in each situation. Children and adults become adept at naming their specific feelings when their needs are met (e.g., happy, excited, calm, intrigued) or unmet (angry, confused, weary, lonely). Rather than turning our attention to judgments or blaming the other person, we allow ourselves to have a deep, compassionate awareness of our own inner experience.

The link between feelings and needs is the pinnacle of awareness of what is happening to us in the depths of our souls. For this reason, it is incomplete not to experience, acknowledge, and name our feelings, including the “negative” ones, as feelings must have needs behind them, whether they have been fulfilled or not.

Through understanding and empathy for our own feelings, we can build a bridge to the person who appears to be the problem but is only trying to meet their own needs. Having connected to what is alive inside us, we gain the capacity to express our needs and feelings in an authentic way. We also learn to make observations (“I heard you call me ‘stupid’”) rather than evaluations (“You are mean and ugly!”), and we develop curiosity—rather than fear or anger—about the other person’s experience. We can ask for what we want more clearly and effectively.

Empathy is central to building the bridge; learning to recognize our own feelings and needs makes empathy for the other possible. These skills do not necessarily come quickly or easily, but learning them is a rewarding, fun, and often joyous experience. Across the lessons in our **Language of the Heart** curriculum, children often engage in activities such as meditation for self-awareness, art, movement, practice with listening skills, imaginative storytelling, and role plays to build familiarity with their own range of needs and feelings, to recognize them in others, and to engage with others in peaceful, productive ways.



Sample Lesson:

Creating a Giraffe Classroom | Grades K-2

Background

The goal of giving a beautiful name to a classroom, such as "Giraffe Classroom," is to create a comfortable atmosphere to carry out the educational process, where teachers and students are in a place where they feel familiar and loved, are happy with what is new to them, and positive interaction occurs between everyone. The room comes to embody these qualities. Each child is allocated her/his own space in the room, and a place on the wall designated for the drawings, articles, games, or poems they have created as they learn about cognitive, empathic communication. The giraffe and the jackal, characters from the animal world, represent the challenges, difficulties, and problems we go through in our daily lives. For better interaction among the participants, the students sit in a circle, where they can clearly see each other as well as their teacher. The language of the giraffe is a powerful language that can influence others and encourage effective communication throughout the year.

Objectives

Students will be able to:

- Learn the characteristics of giraffes and jackals
- Draw a giraffe and a jackal
- Describe how they can interact with each other and with adults more like giraffes and less like jackals
- Describe the classroom as a place where they can practice empathic communication, like giraffes

Materials Crayons or markers, paper, photographs of jackals and giraffes, tape

Activity Steps Show photographs of giraffes and discuss as a group what giraffes look like, how they might act toward each other. Build on the children's prior knowledge but also encourage them to use their imagination.

Provide more information about giraffe behavior. The giraffe, an animal with a big heart and a long neck, can see the future and monitor the results of actions and deeds. They are curious, gentle, and caring of each other and their young. They are not aggressive, but can defend themselves. They are very social creatures and form strong bonds with each other and with their young. Researchers are learning that giraffes have even more social behaviors than we thought, including friendships, daycare practices and grandmother roles.

Do the same for jackals. Show photographs of jackals and discuss what jackals look like and how they might act toward each other.

Provide more information about jackals and their behaviors. They are not pack animals. They are alone much of the time. They don't rely on each other. They are very vocal – they whine, they bark, they growl. They are clever hunters and predators.

Invite the children to draw a giraffe and a jackal. Their drawings don't have to look like the real animals in the photographs. Display these drawings in the classroom in order to remind the children of empathic communication and being in a "Giraffe Classroom" throughout the year.

Ongoing Activity As time goes by, adults and children will identify good "giraffe behavior" in the classroom (i.e., observing, sensing and naming feelings, responding kindly, working together, asking for help). These behaviors can be listed or named on posters around the room or the school.

Conclusion Collect and display students' drawings of the giraffe and the jackal. Consider: How did the children react? How did I do as the adult leader? What will we do next?



Peacebuilding (Grades 3-5)

Our **Peacebuilding** program in the higher grades builds on the self-awareness, healthy self-control, creativity, and ability to connect well with others that have been nurtured in our students since kindergarten, and which they continue to experience throughout each school day. Dialogue and listening have become second nature.

The **Peacebuilding** curriculum may be viewed as **Language of the Heart** writ large. Attention to our own needs and feelings, as well as those of our friends, is expanded to a recognition of shared humanity across our society and the globe. The value of tolerance extends empathy to the interpersonal level, where it is practiced through curiosity, acceptance, and inclusion in the wider world. This means recognizing the full humanity of people who are different from us and reside in various sectors of society, encompassing differences in gender, race, ethnicity, and citizenship. Likewise, human rights (as embodied in the 1948 UN Declaration of Human Rights) recognize that people everywhere share the same human needs and deserve to have them met.



Recognition of our shared humanity is the thread woven through all three areas of focus in our **Peacebuilding** lessons, which are designed to bring alive:

- Ethical and spiritual foundations of Nonviolence
- Traditions of these foundations in the Abrahamic religions
- Expressions of these foundations in social movements for justice and liberation

In the upper grades, through varied group scenarios and discussion, children continue to develop conflict resolution skills from **Language of the Heart** while seeing these skills in relation to the ethical and spiritual values underlying a commitment to nonviolence. We understand these values to include Compassion, Equality and Justice, the Transformational Power of Love, Inclusivity and Tolerance, Moral Courage, and Patience and Perseverance. All are based on a commitment to the sanctity of life.

Peacebuilding and the Three Abrahamic Religions

The three Abrahamic religions (Judaism, Islam, Christianity) emphasize working for justice and peace and aiding in meeting human needs. Learning about these three faith traditions in our region of the world enhances our students' understanding of the values they themselves practice, while highlighting the underlying commonalities among these differing traditions. Taking the time to examine the teachings common to these religions bolsters the faith that a culture of nonviolence isn't just "pie in the sky," but that seeds of it already exist in many diverse contexts.

Nonviolence in Action: Leaders and Movements Immortalized in History

Lessons in the **Peacebuilding** curriculum introduce the students to some of the messengers of nonviolence and formative nonviolent struggles in modern history. Nonviolence has greatly influenced world politics, leading to the reshaping of geographical borders and systemic changes in many countries, such as the fall of apartheid in South Africa and the peaceful revolutions in Eastern Europe, which led to the end of Communist rule. Current research is showing that peaceful methods can be more effective and lasting than violence in achieving social and political change.



The children study pioneers such as Mahatma Gandhi or Martin Luther King, who have led nonviolent resistance movements that succeeded in winning civil, economic, political, and even religious rights for their people. They learn about the wide range of methods and tactics in nonviolence movements, including dialogue, peaceful protests, boycott campaigns, and civil disobedience. (See Appendix 2 for Definitions of Terms) This aspect of our **Peacebuilding** education inspires our children with examples of communities that have embraced the principles of nonviolence to find their power as they struggle for justice, dignity, and freedom. These struggles have been rooted in the ethics our children learn every day at school.



As Palestinians in this time and place—like people everywhere who want peace and freedom—we are still very far from creating the world we envision. Our children and future generations will do it in ways we cannot predict. Providing a safe and caring environment for them so they can know and trust themselves, and teaching them the fundamentals of solving problems creatively, gives them the tools to begin. The leaders and movements incorporated into the curriculum are not models to imitate, but rather examples to learn from and sources of inspiration.

Ethical and Spiritual Foundations for the Practice of Nonviolence

*These concepts provide a “big picture” understanding that supports the lessons comprising our **Peacebuilding** program.*

Inherent Value of Life: Spiritually, nonviolence is rooted in the belief that all life is sacred. Many spiritual traditions, including Hinduism, Buddhism, Christianity, and others, emphasize the sanctity of life and the interconnectedness of all beings. Nonviolence (or "ahimsa" in Sanskrit) is a practice of respect and especially compassion towards all forms of life, reflecting a commitment to act in ways that cause the least harm possible.

Justice and Equality: The practice of nonviolence aims to create a just society. It encourages confronting injustice and discrimination, gaining rights or restoring rights through powerful peaceful struggle (i.e., without harming others). Based on the sanctity of each life, a just society recognizes that the right to human dignity belongs to every individual regardless of race, gender, nationality, ethnicity, religion, or ability level.

The Transformational Power of Love: In conflicts with those we care about, understanding and empathizing with the suffering of others can lead to peaceful solutions. Even in the face of adversaries, love and compassion are forces capable of transforming hearts and minds. Movements led by figures such as Mahatma Gandhi and Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. have demonstrated that nonviolent actions grounded in love can lead to profound social and political changes, fundamentally altering oppressive systems.

Inclusivity and Respect for Diversity: Nonviolence inherently respects diverse perspectives and encourages inclusive approaches to problem-solving. By refusing to use force, nonviolent movements allow for more democratic participation and ensure that all voices, particularly those of marginalized and vulnerable populations, are heard and valued. We recognize that diversity is a universal principle throughout nature; the phenomenon of pluralism is a natural occurrence. Inclusivity and tolerance also imply that we are all vulnerable to error.

Moral Witness and Courage: When one's peers and one's culture condone cruelty or unfairness, standing up for what is right requires courage. In collective struggles for social change, oppressive powers can retaliate with force and imprisonment. The moral courage of those resisting nonviolently builds more support for movements against injustice, either changing the minds and hearts of those in power or eroding their support.

Commitment to Lasting Peace: Nonviolence seeks to address and resolve the underlying causes of conflict rather than merely suppressing its symptoms through force. This approach aims for sustainable peace, eliminating the cycle of violence, such that genuine understanding and reconciliation replace resentment and revenge.

Patience and perseverance: Nonviolent movements require time, patience, and perseverance to win widespread support. Participants in nonviolent struggles must remain steadfast to succeed. Patience and perseverance help participants stay in the struggle and demonstrate to others our willpower and commitment to moral goals.

Personal and Spiritual Growth: The challenges of living according to nonviolent principles require us to grow in empathy, patience, understanding, and resolve. They require us to rely deeply on each other for strength, care, and encouragement, building humility individually and creativity together. This personal growth fosters a greater sense of peace and fulfillment, aligning our actions with spiritual principles in communities of mutual care and support.

Sample Lesson:

Peace and Justice Education

At House of Hope Vision School, teachers integrate a wide range of lessons to help students explore the principles of nonviolence and peace at every grade level. Below are two examples of lessons currently used at the school, which will also be introduced in partner schools across the West Bank in the upcoming school year. In 2026, the Supporting Hope Board will share a comprehensive summary of House of Hope's trauma-informed curriculum and its approaches to nonviolence and peace education.

A "Pledge Tree" of Nonviolence | Grades 3-5

Background

Love, justice, mercy, and tolerance are basic values in raising children nonviolently, especially for the school students at the House of Hope. In grades 3 - 5, with their understanding bolstered from our "Language of the Heart" curriculum for younger children, students can develop a deeper and broader understanding of social relationships and the effects of their actions on others. The lesson illustrates how to be good friends with everyone and solve our problems without getting angry or hitting others. Making a "pledge" or promise and then displaying these pledges in the classroom enables students to continue to practice empathic communication and remind themselves of positive behaviors throughout the year. Nonviolence teaches us to be kind and understanding to others, even if they are different from us or have different ideas. It means that we listen to each other, respect everyone's feelings, and always try to find ways to work together peacefully. This is an interactive activity aimed at teaching students about the culture of nonviolence and how to apply it in their daily lives. This activity relies on teamwork, critical thinking, and creative expression.

Objectives

Students will be able to:

- Gain an initial understanding of the concept of nonviolence by making personal pledges for their own lives.
- Understand the connection between their pledges and the work of nonviolent leaders in our world such as Gandhi and Martin Luther King Jr.
- Use the language of nonviolence to discuss their pledge in life.
- Demonstrate cooperation and teamwork skills.

Materials

A large piece of cardboard or bulletin board, crayons, watercolors, or paint and colorful paper cut into the shape of many leaves. Glue or staples for fastening.

Activity Steps

Prepare the tree: Draw or paint a large leafless tree on a clipboard or bulletin board. The tree should be large enough to accommodate the many "leaves" that students will add.

Begin with a short introduction to nonviolence. Discuss how small actions can contribute to building a more peaceful society. Read about Gandhi and Martin Luther King Jr. and identify key words, including tolerance, peace, compassion, justice, love, kindness, respect, nonviolence, empathy. These are words that may be used in the children's pledge leaves.

Write pledges on leaves: Each student chooses a leaf-shaped piece of colored paper and writes a personal pledge on it that reflects the principle of nonviolence. For example, "I will listen empathetically when my friends talk to me" or "I will use my words to resolve conflicts peacefully."

Decorate the tree: Students paste or pin their leaves to the tree of nonviolence. As they add their papers, they can share their pledges with the class if they wish.

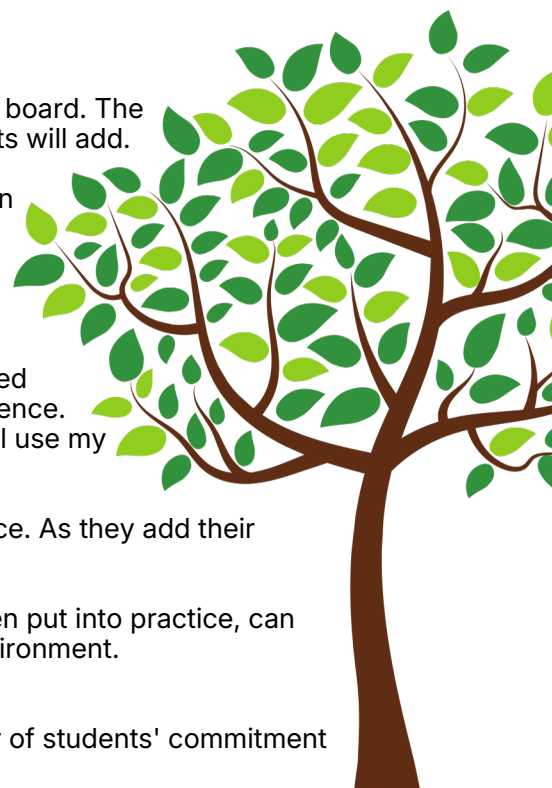
After all students have added their pledges, discuss how these pledges, when put into practice, can contribute to a more peaceful and understanding school and community environment.

Ongoing Activity

The Tree of Nonviolence will remain in the classroom as a constant reminder of students' commitment to building a more peaceful society.

Conclusion

Consider: How did the children react? How did I do as the adult leader? What will we do next?





The activities in the **Language of the Heart** and **Peacebuilding** curricula are continuously being expanded upon as they are shared and repeated. They represent best practice frameworks for implementation throughout the school day and beyond. Both “Giraffe and Jackal” and the “Pledge Tree” of Nonviolence lessons involve multiple activities and may engage teachers and students for several days or weeks. The lessons rely on sensitive, empathic, and confident teachers and school leaders who then help caregivers and families to further support their children’s social, emotional, and psychological growth. These approaches are a work in progress, inviting reflection, assessment, and continuous improvement to impact the lives of children in Palestine positively.



Peace and Justice Education: Educating for Nonviolence in the Occupied West Bank

Peace and Justice Education constitutes the “why” of our work—a vision of a peaceful, just future and the need for nonviolence in fighting for that future. Meanwhile, Trauma-Informed Education offers the “how,” i.e., the strategies to meet students where they are, emotionally and psychologically.

The anxieties and fears resulting from living under Occupation come with children into their classrooms and interfere with the capacity to focus, to imagine, to relax enough to learn and think clearly. For this reason, in alignment with our mission and vision, and out of genuine care for our children, the House of Hope is not only a school but also a place for healing trauma.

Toxic Stress and Palestinian Children

From “The Waldorf Way of Educating for Nonviolence: A Case Study in Al Eizariya, Area C, Occupied West Bank, Palestine” by Manar Ghaleb Wahhab (Master’s thesis awarded by the Academic University College for Non-Violence and Human Rights 2024).

For more information on stressors affecting children and families on the West Bank, see [Appendix 1](#) in this document.

Medical research in the last thirty years has demonstrated that adverse childhood experiences can disrupt brain development, with negative impacts on psychological behavior, memory, and learning. The ever-present threat of violence while living under Occupation alone has a major impact on the brain and nervous system. Family instability, food insecurity, and other acute and chronic adversities in Occupied Palestine are additional sources of toxic stress. How do these stressful and often traumatic experiences cause damage to a child’s developing brain and physiology?

The Biology and Psychology of Toxic Stress and Trauma



We humans have a biological system, called our “stress response,” for responding to challenging or negative events. Our brains release the hormones adrenaline and cortisol into our systems, which raise our heart rate and blood pressure, arousing us from a calm state and into a more alert, defensive state. The stronger the degree of threat we experience, the more chemicals are released by the brain. Drawing on research from the Center on the Developing Child (2022), Manar Wahhab identifies three kinds of stress: The first is positive stress, which in a child’s life could involve, for example, adapting to a new but reliable caregiver, or receiving a vaccination. The stress is relatively brief and unharmed, involving a mild increase in heart rate and in stress hormone levels, considered a “healthy and positive trigger to the stress response system.

The second kind of stress involves situations of greater threat or risk. These may involve “more severe, longer-lasting difficulties, such as the loss of a loved one, a natural disaster, or a frightening injury”. Triggered by these stressors, higher levels of stress hormones are released in the brain, raising our heart rates and blood pressure more significantly and preparing us to fight, flee, or freeze for safety”. If, however, a calm and caring parent or adult is present to soothe and reassure the child, the child can adapt to the situation, and the brain receives the message that the threat is no longer present. The stress hormones that were flooding the brain subside, and then the chemical alert systems in the body return to baseline.

The third kind of stress occurs when there is not enough time for the body’s chemistry to return to normal after experiencing threatening or challenging events. When a child experiences strong, frequent, and/or prolonged adversity— recurring physical or emotional abuse, chronic neglect, caregiver substance abuse or mental illness, repeated exposure to violence, and/or the accumulated burdens of prolonged poverty— then the stress hormones do not have a chance to subside. Constantly being on alert, constantly feeling fearful, angry, or exhausted and defeated by chronic adversity — all this becomes “normal.” This is toxic stress, as defined by the Center on the Developing Child (2022), as cited by Wahhab (2024).

The Impact of Toxic Stress on Brain Development

There are many different pathways-- circuits connecting the nerve cells— waiting to be developed in a young child’s brain. A pathway develops and becomes strong when it is used repeatedly. If not used, it is “pruned away.” The more often threat or fear is experienced and stress hormones are released, the more the brain’s defensive pathways are activated, enabling aggressive or hostile behaviors for self-protection or a condition of shutting down. Repeated over time, aggression or despair can become a child’s automatic response to situations of threat. Pathways in the brain that facilitate calm reflection, behavioral control, and effective problem-solving have a lower chance of developing. With these pathways pruned away, a child has fewer choices in responding to emotional stress. The brain’s ability to respond creatively to challenging, threatening, or difficult situations diminishes.

Healing the Effects of Toxic Stress in Children’s Development

At House of Hope, we base our pedagogy on principles and practices developed by the Waldorf school movement, which align well with the principles of education for nonviolence. Manar Wahhab, certified Waldorf teacher and House of Hope’s Trauma-Informed Education Director, writes: “We create spaces of love by showing up for each other. A child who trusts their community feels safe to learn, grow, and connect.”

We know that supportive relationships with calm and caring adults, as early as possible in life, can prevent or reverse the damaging effects of adverse experiences. (Center on the Developing Child, 2023). But since Palestinian parents in the West Bank are subject to unremitting stressors, they are also experiencing chronic anxiety and often symptoms of trauma. This limits their ability to provide the calm, stable presence that can buffer the effects of toxic stress on their little ones.



Through an environment and activities that are consistent, soothing, and stimulating, House of Hope counters the toxic effects of adversity on our children. In the following three fundamental and interconnected ways, we address and heal their trauma every day, which in turn creates their capacity to be empowered by nonviolence education.

1. Repairing the fears and mistrust from disrupted caregiver relationships.

Relationships with the same teachers sustained over time, in combination with a consistently caring environment, build trust and a sense of security in the children. Waldorf teacher training includes personal work. The teacher's comfort, warmth, confidence, and protection, and the stability of the relationship over time, help a child feel that all is well. They can transition from a state of nervousness to one of well-being.

2. Nurturing the child's capacity to regulate their emotions and handle feelings constructively.

As we've seen, given the toxic stress of our children's lives, their bodies are often flooded with emotions that their brains don't know how to regulate or channel in helpful directions. In countless ways, from mindful awareness to thoughtfully balanced rhythms in the school day, their experience at House of Hope gradually builds healthy self-control and a centered sense of self. When aroused to anger, frustration, or fear by a thought, memory, or social interaction, they can notice what's happening in their bodies, to calm themselves, and to choose consciously how to respond to the situation. This self-awareness and skill set is very satisfying and highly empowering for our children. Further, the capacity to calm themselves and the skills of self-awareness are fundamentally crucial to their ability to benefit from the Language of the Heart program, which in turn strengthens their sense of security and belonging.

3. Increasing Psychological Resources: Building Resilience and Peacebuilding.

Our varied, rich curriculum, throughout the day's academics and in the lessons specific to our Peace and Justice program, encourages children to recognize their strengths and build on them. Children grow in playfulness, self-esteem, curiosity, and creativity, as well as co-operative skills. Confidence and the ability to savor positive emotions grow, which increases well-being and resilience in the face of further adversity.



Another important source of positive emotions and resilience for our children is being grounded in their own culture—their language, story traditions, dance, music, and history—and feeling a sense of rootedness to community and to place. Connecting to their Palestinian cultural heritage begins in kindergarten, deepens in the higher grades, and serves as a powerful source of belonging and security. In the Peacebuilding curriculum, students also develop resilience by learning about the successes of nonviolent leaders and heroes from their own culture and from diverse world cultures.

Nonviolence Education in Schools and Classrooms: Recommendations for School Leaders, Teachers, and Parents/Caregivers

We include here skill-development activities rooted in the House of Hope Vision School's philosophy and geared for adults. These practices can make it easier and more fulfilling to address our children's challenges. Whether at school or at home, this is done by respecting their world and not invading it, seeking to control it, or dyeing it with the color of our cultures and ideologies.



For School Professional Development Leaders:

- Making Nonviolence Education Work

For Teachers:

- Being Role Models: A Few Principles and Skills
- Exercises to Prepare for Implementing a Nonviolence Communication Lesson
- Planning, Teaching, and Assessing a Nonviolent Communication Lesson

For Teachers, Parents, and Caregivers

- More Tools and Resources from House of Hope Vision School



Making Nonviolence Education Work



This list outlines key criteria and recommendations for school leaders to consider when implementing nonviolence education in their schools and classrooms. It could be considered an aspirational checklist and a tool to refer to as approaches to teaching and practicing nonviolence education evolve.

- _____ Create a supportive and safe school environment in which to practice nonviolence education skills and approaches.
- _____ Plan in advance. Start developing training workshops targeting teachers, including an introduction to nonviolent communication, its importance, and practical applications in the school environment.
- _____ Use interactive training methods, such as periodic games, case studies, and group discussions, to make the workshops more engaging and effective.
- _____ Work to integrate nonviolent communication principles into existing curricula, such as social lessons, moral education, or as part of daily classroom activities.
- _____ Encourage teachers to adapt and customize teaching materials for nonviolence education to the needs of their students.
- _____ Help teachers introduce nonviolent communication concepts to students in an easy and understandable way.
- _____ Provide ongoing training programs for teachers to update their knowledge and develop their skills in nonviolent communication. One workshop is not sufficient to make nonviolence education a part of school culture. Teacher training in nonviolent communication requires a long-term commitment and cooperation among teachers, school administrators, students, and parents. By focusing on continuing education and training, schools can foster a learning environment based on mutual respect and understanding.
- _____ Schedule periodic follow-up and evaluation sessions to discuss the challenges and successes in implementing nonviolent communication in the classroom.
- _____ Encourage school administration to adopt policies that support nonviolent communication and foster a safe and inclusive school environment for all students.
- _____ Work to raise awareness of families and involve them in nonviolent communication efforts through workshops and provide materials that help them support their children at home.
- _____ Develop evaluation tools to measure the effectiveness of training programs and their impact on both teachers and students.
- _____ Use the results and feedback from evaluations to improve and modify training programs and materials continuously.

Being Role Models: A Few Principles and Skills

Teachers at House of Hope embody what they teach: the “how” and “what” are integrated. The work of teachers as role models is perhaps the most crucial component in our nonviolent communication curriculum.



Here are a few of the key principles and skills that we expect teachers to incorporate as they work with these approaches. We stress the importance of remembering and applying these values daily, not only in resolving conflicts but in all aspects of life. We encourage teachers to discuss with one another how they utilize these skills and what these practices entail for students.

- _____ Utilize Active listening. Listen carefully to what students say without interrupting, paying attention to body language and the feelings associated with their words.
- _____ Practice sincere empathy. Develop the ability to understand the students' feelings and points of view without issuing judgments. Empathizing with models of nonviolence with students helps to build warmer and more understanding relationships.
- _____ Practice expressing needs clearly to students. In challenging situations, communicate expectations clearly and specifically, avoiding blame or criticism.
- _____ Practice positive conflict management. Utilize tools that constructively manage conflicts, focusing on solutions that meet the needs of all parties involved.
- _____ Use praise and appreciation often. Both reinforce positive student behaviors, creating a more supportive and motivating learning environment.
- _____ Be patient and calm even in the most challenging situations. It provides reassurance and emotional security as well as a positive model for students to emulate.
- _____ Keep learning. Continuous development of nonviolent communication skills as teachers and parents through training courses, workshops, and ongoing reading,
- _____ Practice reflection and self-evaluation. This helps teachers and parents identify areas where they can improve.

Exercises to Prepare for Implementing a Nonviolence Communication Lesson



First exercise

Every day, people have the opportunity to communicate with others, often with those on the street who are familiar but with whom we don't know. Most of us, because of shyness, don't take advantage of this opportunity. When you are leaving the house, try pretending to be bold. For example, if a vendor isn't busy, ask about the circumstances or aspects of their work. Listen carefully, and then ask follow-up questions, such as, "What do you like about your job?"

Second exercise

You may encounter selfish and chaotic people. Remember that your task is not to change them or their behavior, but if you choose to interact, you can seek some level of understanding. First, write down the names of everyone you regularly interact with and whom you find annoying. Then step back and answer the following: Are you very critical? Do you highlight your own problems and project them onto others? Pause to think and then proceed. Be curious and find out what is behind the person's actions; if your curiosity is genuine, the person will experience it as caring.

Third exercise:

When we acknowledge our own imperfections, communication is enhanced. We are connected through our faults and weaknesses. Write down ten embarrassing things about yourself that no one knows. The funnier, the better. Example: "I am an author, and I do not like to read." Or, "Even though I'm an accountant, I use a calculator for simple calculations." Note: When you find yourself among a group of people, you can bring them closer together by exploring what you have in common with others.

Planning, Teaching, and Assessing a Nonviolent Communication Lesson



Planning for Teaching

1. Set a clear goal for the class, such as teaching children nonviolent communication skills and their importance in solving problems and dealing with others.
2. Plan the content and divide it into parts that suit children's understanding and concentration abilities.
3. Prepare appropriate teaching materials, such as posters that explain nonviolent communication concepts or illustrate relevant situations.
4. Prepare worksheets or interactive materials for children to apply the concepts they have been taught.
5. Design interactive methods such as games and educational activities to attract their attention and enhance learning.
6. Select educational activities that align with the age and mental level of children, such as stories, role-playing games, and interactive dialogues.
7. Include practical examples and representations of nonviolent communication, along with guidance on how to handle potential situations in a positive manner.

Teach It

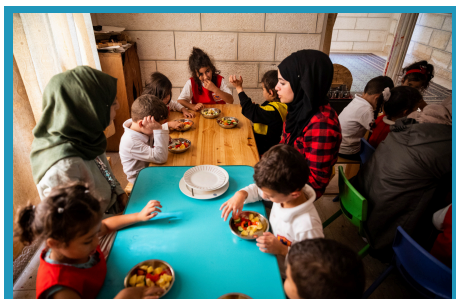
1. Encourage the children's active participation by asking questions and encouraging dialogue among them.
2. Show interest and actively listen to their ideas, opinions, and experiences.

3. Hang student artwork and writing, as well as other visual images in the classroom that represent learning and ideas in nonviolence communication. Such work can serve as a constant reminder of the importance of love, justice, compassion, and tolerance in building a nonviolent society. Displaying student work on the topic of nonviolence not only reminds students of how to deal with conflicts in a positive way, but it also enhances cooperation, self-esteem, and teamwork.
4. Evaluate how the lesson went during and after activities.
5. Assess children's understanding of the topic through practice questions or assessment activities.
6. Make it fun and useful. The children are learning the importance of nonviolent communication in promoting a world of understanding and cooperation, while building enjoyable and healthy relationships with each other as they learn.



After the Lesson

1. Use feedback based on children's performance to inform future lesson improvements.
2. Save resources for the future.
3. Follow-up. After the class, provide constructive feedback to the children and encourage them to practice nonviolent communication skills in their daily lives.
4. Repeating learning sessions to reinforce concepts and further develop skills.
5. Involve parents and educators. At House of Hope Vision School, our teachers and school leaders inform parents and educators about the lessons the children have learned and encourage them to support these positive practices at home. They provide ideas and resources that can aid in applying and integrating nonviolent communication in the home setting.



The Speech Transmission Game:

This is a well-known and popular game that you can play in groups at home, school, or during breaks on a trip. The players sit in a circle, and one of them begins to whisper in their neighbor's ear, who in turn transmits the information to their neighbor, until the circle is complete. You can start with simple sentences and then move on to more complex sentences.

Map and sign communication:

Ask your child to draw a map to go to the toy store, for example. On the way, the child will have to modify or clarify the map through signs and body language.

Reading facial expressions:

This game is designed to help children practice recognizing and identifying different facial expressions. He can also show you expressions on his face for you to identify. Picture cards dedicated to this skill are also available.

The tone of voice exercise:

You can practice this with your child in many situations. For example, at the dining table, ask her to request salad in an angry tone, then ask for it again in a calm and grateful tone. You can also reverse roles in the tone of voice exercise.

Emotional Inverses:

This exercise follows the same instructions as the previous two activities but focuses instead on pairs of contrasting emotional expressions. For example, the facial expressions or tones of voice selected could be joy and sadness, tension and calm, astonishment and boredom, etc.

Closed question game:

Think of a place that your child knows, and he must guess the name of the place by asking questions that require an answer of yes or no. When answering, you adopt a facial expression that indicates whether the child is moving away from or approaching the answer. Then exchange roles. Children can play this game together.

The game of contradictory commands:

This well-known game begins with a series of verbal commands that coincide with physical movements. At some point, the game leader issues a command that contradicts the movement, but the child must adhere to the voice command and not the movement. For example, the game leader says, "Hands up," but she puts her hands down, and the child must follow the verbal command. This game is more fun with large numbers.

Expressive reading:

Expressive reading exercises involve providing the story or text with appropriate sound and movement effects, even if the child has not yet learned to read. It is helpful for the child to engage in expressive reading with you.

Why We Need Nonviolence Education in the Suburbs of Jerusalem and Across Cultures Around the World

The approaches to teaching and learning in the **Language of the Heart** and **Peacebuilding** curricula at House of Hope Vision School empower children individually and strengthen the cohesion and creative potential of our Palestinian community. They serve to:

Build emotional stability and resilience.

- Our students experience reduced stress and anxiety, learn to build on their psychological strengths, and gain tools to meet the enormous challenges they face every day.

Grow from the Heart.

- Understanding the range and universality of human feelings and needs encourages peace, happiness, and a sense of belonging within each child.

Foster a repertoire of cooperative skills.

- Students gain authentic confidence and a desire for social engagement. Students and teachers develop cognitive and emotional skills for navigating hurtful or stressful situations and fostering creative collaborations.

Encourage academic excellence and critical thinking.

- Feeling secure and part of a community frees students to concentrate and learn the critical thinking skills needed to succeed.

Support Palestinian identity and belonging.

- Awareness of Palestinian national aspirations and cultural traditions —such as music, art, food, and their relationship to the land —strengthens our students' sense of who they are and contributes to personal pride.

Strengthen community education.

- Nonviolent communication skills foster a supportive educational environment, where trust and mutual respect reduce violence and bullying. This greatly increases students' desire to participate in their school community, reduces dropout rates, and improves academic achievement.

Develop community leaders.

- Our emphasis on active participation develops children's spirit of citizenship, social responsibility, and desire to participate in community building.

Build leadership development for social change.

- Skills in creative conflict resolution, commitments to values such as compassion, tolerance, and justice, and learning about the successes of nonviolent social movements prepare and motivate students to become effective leaders in Palestinian projects for peace and freedom.

In an era of increasing tension and conflicts at various levels, nonviolence is emerging as a powerful philosophy and set of strategies for positive change and community building. The values and practices of nonviolent communication can strengthen communities by promoting ethics of mutual caring and providing tools for respecting and meeting everyone's needs. Nonviolence education can have a profound positive impact on developing a safer and more compassionate learning environment, in turn positively impacting society.

Adverse Childhood Experiences (ACEs) and Sources of Toxic Stress for Palestinian Children Living Under Occupation

Released in 1997 and followed by subsequent research, the *CDC-Kaiser Adverse Childhood Experiences (ACES) Study* gathered and analyzed data from 17,000 individuals within the Kaiser medical system in California. Researchers identified Adverse Childhood Experiences that may disrupt brain development. These stressful experiences raise the likelihood of developmental delays in children and of later health problems as well, including heart disease, diabetes, substance abuse, aggressive behavior, and depression (Center on the Developing Child, 2022).

A few examples of Adverse Childhood Experiences in children ages zero to 17 include being the victim of violence, sexual or emotional abuse, physical or emotional neglect, poverty, and witnessing violence in the home or community (Prevention, 2020). The ever-present threat of violence alone has a major impact on the brain and nervous system. Family instability, food insecurity, and other acute and chronic adversities in Occupied Palestine are also sources of toxic stress. We list five specific sources of toxic stress that children under Occupation face regularly.

Pervasive Instability

Children need the reassurance of a certain level of stable routines to feel safe and relaxed enough to engage creatively with new learning. Under Occupation, a child “on any given day could wake up to curfew or to an Israeli army raid on his/her home or town.” The ability of parents to make plans and family routines is slammed regularly, not only by direct violent events but also by countless military checkpoints, often unanticipated. Children oftentimes must cross checkpoints to reach their schools, where they are subjected to insults and long waits, or transportation may not be allowed to reach the child’s neighborhood. ... The absence of a regular, stable, and safe routine in their lives makes children tense, vigilant, and oftentimes irritable, leaving little room or energy for learning and development (Srouf, 2005, as cited in Wahhab, 2024).

Military Violence

Experiencing violence directly as well as witnessing violence are sources of trauma. Wahhab writes, “Occupation policies and practices, such as the indiscriminate use of crowd control weapons, result in regular injury to children” (Tamari, 1994, as cited in Wahhab, 2024). On Palestinian holidays such as Land Day, kindergarten and elementary age students must hide in classrooms while Israeli tear gas enters the school. In their homes, Israeli Defense Force (IDF) soldiers can barge in at any hour, issuing orders at gunpoint, arresting, or shooting at family members.

The IDF’s policy of home demolitions to meet its goals creates another level of instability, another erosion of a child’s basic sense of safety and security. These are all “normal” occurrences, and don’t begin to exhaust the ways violence is a pervasive threat. Occupation is meant to be an environment of fear.

Poverty

Recent years have seen the intensified spread of poverty and unemployment. Persistent economic hardship reverberates into all areas of family and social life. High unemployment and lack of social supports exacerbate parental stressors that play a role in the problem of child abuse, especially but not only among teen mothers. Poverty increases the phenomenon of dropping out of school, particularly among girls. The economic situation and high unemployment levels in the Palestinian territories are closely related to the instability of the political situation and Israel's repression of economic growth in multiple sectors.

Disruption of Family Stability

High percentages of fathers, uncles, and brothers in Israeli prisons result in a higher prevalence of depression, anxiety, and PTSD symptoms among family members. (Shehadeh et al., 2015). Children up to 10 years old are particularly affected by the absence of a parent.

The imprisonment of a partner may lead to relational problems for several reasons. In addition, the growing responsibilities of women, their increased presence in the workforce outside the home, and technological advancements have all contributed to a rise in the status of women. This too has destabilized traditional male-female relationships, driving up divorce rates and adding to children's experience of loss and instability.

Inadequate or Harmful Parental Attention

High rates of imprisonment, along with economic stressors, mean that parents, along with extended family, are less present for children. Further, combined with pervasive violence and instability, these factors can lead to chemical addictions, in turn causing neglect or abuse in children's lives. A study done by the Institute of Community and Public Health at Birzeit University in Ramallah, Palestine, in 2005, found high levels of psychological, physical, and sexual abuse.

The Occupation has played a substantial role in the prevalence of substance abuse, mental illness, and ongoing intergenerational trauma originating in the Naqba, as violence and loss of home through demolitions, harassment, and expulsion persist.

**This is a curtailed list of the many stressors affecting children and families on the West Bank. For a more comprehensive and detailed overview, see "The Waldorf Way of Educating for Nonviolence: A Case Study in Al Eizariya, Area C, Occupied West Bank, Palestine" by Manar Ghaleb Wahhab (Master's thesis awarded by the Academic University College for Non-Violence and Human Rights, 2024).*

Definitions and Terms Associated with Nonviolence

Advocacy and support refer to the process by which a legal or political change comes about. Those who are convinced of an idea enthusiastically advocate for it by publicizing it and educating others. They explain and defend the desired change in multiple civil and political contexts, gaining increasing support across society until victory is achieved and the desired change implemented.

Campaigns are sets of steps that carry out advocacy and support in a structured fashion. An issue is identified and researched, following which an implementable goal is set. A plan is developed to mobilize support for the goal, with budgets and fundraising activities to set and meet costs. A timeline is projected, which may include several stages. Moving to the next stage ideally involves evaluation of the preceding one, so no transition to a later stage is made until the prior goals have been achieved.

Civil Disobedience has been used in peaceful resistance movements to Israel's Occupation of Palestinian lands, as well as in popular campaigns to achieve social justice and civil rights worldwide. It is the refusal to obey unjust laws, with a willingness to endure arrest or imprisonment as part of the fight for justice, knowing you are serving your own conscience by breaking the law, while swaying the minds of those who witness your imprisonment or willingness to sacrifice.

Civil Resistance is the general term for the concerted, focused use of nonviolent methods to interrupt ordinary public life to demand social or political change. The term "civil resistance" may apply to protests, strikes, or boycotts that are legal or illegal, while "civil disobedience" signifies refusal to obey an unjust law.

Cooperation refers to joint action between individuals or communities to achieve common goals without resorting to violence.

Demonstrations are collective political acts whose goal may be support or protest. Expressing opinions to address citizens' demands is a crucial aspect of political participation. Effective demonstrations require organization and a clear setting of priorities.

Freedom of expression and assembly is one of the human rights (civil and political) protected by its citizens by a legitimate state. A demonstration may express the need to work, live in dignity, enjoy freedom of movement, and participate in governing. Nonviolent demonstrations do not pose a threat to public safety or national security, although the state may respond to peaceful demonstrations with violence.

Human rights are inherent to all human beings, regardless of their nationality, place of residence, gender, ethnic origin, color, religion, language, or any other status. In a just world, we would have equal access to our rights and be free from discrimination. These rights are interdependent, mutually reinforcing, and indivisible.

Mediation is the use of a third person or agency to help resolve conflicts between disputing parties in a peaceful manner.

Nonviolence, peaceful resistance, or peaceful action is a type of resistance that seeks to bring about social change through symbolic protests, civil disobedience, economic or political non-cooperation, "satyagraha," or any other method characterized by the refusal to harm others.

Nonviolent resistance mobilizes the aspirations and desires of individuals or groups who believe that change is necessary to improve current conditions. It can involve struggling against and resisting social injustices, blind racism, political, economic, or religious tyranny, and any policies (such as the Occupation) that take away rights, freedoms, and human dignity. A wide range of strategies can be used in nonviolent resistance.

Nonviolent Training teaches individuals and groups the philosophy and history of nonviolence, as well as the range of methods they can creatively build upon to challenge injustice, address conflict, and create change through nonviolent means.

Participatory Democracy is a political system that encourages people's participation in political and social decision-making, and which can be achieved by peaceful means.

Peacebuilding addresses the underlying reasons why people fight among themselves. It supports communities in managing their differences without resorting to violence. It aims to prevent outbreaks, escalation, continuation, and recurrence of violence by evolving participatory grass-roots structures and attending to human needs. Peacebuilding is a long-term and collaborative process because it involves changes in attitudes, behaviors, norms, and institutions.

Social Justice signifies equality and fair opportunities for all members of society.

Social movements are defined by sociologists as efforts made by a group of influential people (including grass-roots leaders) to organize masses of supporters to bring about change in one or more aspects of society. Social movements may be characterized by a clear and specific identity. Mobilizing masses of people is the source of a movement's social legitimacy and power.

Tolerance is the acceptance of differences and the desire to understand and coexist with others despite cultural or religious differences.

The Universal Declaration of Human Rights was adopted in Paris by the General Assembly of the United Nations on December 10, 1948, and drafted by representatives from diverse legal and cultural backgrounds worldwide. For the first time in human history, basic rights were identified as a "common standard" that people and nations are still urged to adopt. These rights have been translated into 500 languages, focusing on the rights to life and dignity. Among them are the prohibition of slavery and torture, the right to freedom of movement, political rights such as freedom of expression and association, the right to form trade unions and collective organizations to protect people's interests, and basic rights to food, housing, and health. All humans are born with these rights equally. The Declaration encourages the protection of these rights through nonviolent means.