

Overview of Bala Shanti Children's Parent Sessions

Four sessions were conducted with parents between November 2023 and March 2024, with each session corresponding to one activity from the toolkit. Each session was conducted at multiple physical locations, allowing for parents to attend the meeting closest to them. The locations were mapped roughly to the 9 Bala Shanti Kendras spread across Coimbatore city. While this approach was more labour-intensive, this allowed us to maximize parent engagement.

There were three categories of participants in the parents' sessions:

1. Parent who participated in baseline survey and attended the session
2. Parent who did not participate in baseline survey and attended the session
3. Family member who did not participate in baseline but attended the session

S.no	Village	Total children	Number of parent's attended the baseline survey	Number of parent's attended the 1st session	Number of parents who have not survey attended the session	Number of family members have attended the session	Total	Balance not attended this session 1	Number of parent's attended the 2nd session	Number of parents who have not survey attended the session	Number of family members have attended the session	Total	Balance not attended this session 2	Number of parent's attended the 3rd session	Number of parents who have not survey attended the session	Number of family members have attended the session	Total	Balance not attended this session 3	Number of parent's attended the 4th session	Number of parents who have not survey attended the session	Number of family members have attended the session	Total	Balance not attended this session 4	Number of parent's attended the endline survey	Endline survey Not taken	
1	Adhisakthinagar	19	0	19	13	0	0	13	6	10	2	0	12	7	10	0	0	10	9	4	0	0	4	15	16	3
2	Arivolinar	15	0	15	12	0	0	12	3	8	0	0	8	7	8	0	0	8	7	0	0	0	0	15	12	3
3	BK Pudur	25	1	24	15	6	0	21	3	15	7	1	23	1	15	3	0	18	6	11	4	0	15	9	19	5
4	Gandhinagar	21	2	19	13	1	1	15	4	14	1	2	17	2	14	0	1	15	4	6	0	3	9	10	17	2
5	Kasthurigarden	11	0	11	9	1	0	10	1	8	2	0	10	1	5	1	2	8	3	8	1	0	9	2	9	2
6	Parvathipuram	26	2	24	17	4	0	21	3	18	5	0	23	1	18	1	0	19	5	10	4	1	15	9	21	3
7	Pillaiyar puram	15	1	14	10	1	0	11	3	9	0	0	9	5	10	0	1	11	3	10	0	0	10	4	14	0
8	Senthamilnagar	23	0	23	19	0	1	20	3	19	0	2	21	2	15	0	0	15	8	12	0	0	12	11	23	0
9	Sugunapuram	23	1	22	11	0	1	12	10	13	1	0	14	8	10	0	2	12	10	10	0	0	10	12	19	3
	TOTAL	178	7	171	119	13	3	135	36	114	18	5	137	34	105	5	6	116	55	71	9	4	84	87	150	21

The parent training topics and reports are as follows:

Module	Toolkit Session	Activity	Parent Session	Date	Participants
Module 1: Importance Of Children's Spiritual Development for the Protection of Children from Violence and for the promotion of their Holistic Well-Being	Session 1: Child Dignity and Child Rights	Activity 2: Discovering and Exploring Child Rights	Session 1	November 2023 to January 2024	137

Module 3: Conditions for Nurturing the Spiritual Development of Children in the Early Years	Session 7: Nurturing Positive Relationships between Caregivers and Children	Activity 1: Why are Play and One-On-One Time So Important?	Session 2	February 2024	126
	Session 8: Safe Environments	Activity 2: It Takes a Village to Raise a Child — The Role of Religious and Spiritual Communities in Fostering Spiritual Development in Children	Session 3	March 2024	115
	Session 9: Empowering Experiences	Activity 2: Protecting and Connecting with Mother Earth	Session 4	March 2024	109

Session Overviews:

First Session

The session started with an interfaith prayer, followed by a silent journey to observe the Bala Shanti Kendra and children’s work. This was followed by an introduction to the Toolkit on Nurturing the Spiritual Development of Children in the Early Years and the Convention on the Rights of the Child (CRC). We covered the ways of creating an environment that enables the protection and development of children’s rights and dignity to ensure their holistic well-being and support their spiritual development.

After our first session on child rights and child dignity, participants became aware of child rights. They discussed discrimination and started observing whether places prioritize the child’s best interests. Participants also understood the importance of nurturing spiritual capacities. They agreed that all religions emphasize the same spiritual capacities and recognized that individuals who do not follow any religion still exhibit these spiritual capacities.

Participant Takeaways:

One father enthusiastically endorsed the session. After attending, he actively recommended the session to other parents on their WhatsApp group.

A mother expressed her concern regarding the Juvenile Justice Act (Article 40). She highlighted the potential risk that lenient punishments for this age group might lead them to exploit the provisions of this article.

The group activity facilitated more open dialogue, providing participants with an opportunity to exchange ideas comfortably in smaller groups without hesitation.

Learnings:

Child rights were challenging due to participants' low literacy level coupled with complex language. Time had to be spent explaining each topic and translating them into Tamil.

It was challenging to ensure participants attend the full session. Many were women with young children, therefore arriving late or wanting to leave early. The key learning was recognizing the need to keep the session duration short as their attention span is limited to approximately 90 minutes.

Second Session

Participants understood the importance of play and how it stimulates a child's brain, supporting spiritual, social and emotional development. This session gave parents a broad view about play and the value of considering children's opinion.

Participants fully realized the importance of sport through activity. While playing with the children, they learned what to do and what not to do. The painting done by the parents as a reflection was also an expression of their creativity. An interactive session was also held among parents. They were given opportunities to speak their minds openly. There was a healthy conversation between them as they discussed and played as a group, indulging in all activities contentedly.

Participant Takeaways:

Parents interacted with each other and exchanged ideas as friends regardless of differences like religion, language, and caste.

Parents expressed a desire to increase play time with children and committed to one hour of play a day.

Sports was seen as a means to improve discipline, punctuality, virtue and humanity.

Learnings:

There was reluctance for parents to play in the beginning, and for men and women to play together.

Third Session

We were able to connect the understanding of spiritual capacities with safe and unsafe places for children. Importance was given to connecting with their own childhood experiences, learning teamwork, and learning to rethink if a child's spiritual capacity is nurtured in a particular place.

Participants Takeaways:

Imagining their childhood with their eyes closed helped parents connect with their past and understand the session from a child's point of view.

When creating the community - places they take their children to - parents displayed analytical thinking, discussing among themselves and asking doubts. Their interaction was high when deciding whether a place was safe or unsafe, as some parents thought a place was safe while others thought it was not. One parent shared that a child seems unsafe in the family itself because we keep controlling and shouting at them since we do not know any other way to take care of a child and teach them what is right or wrong.

Learnings:

Participants needed an in-depth understanding of spiritual capacities to identify places that nurtured or motivated children to express spiritual capacities.

Some participants were not mindful and attentive. The introduction needs to address this and make sure it is interactive.

One or two people would take charge of the discussion and activity, and others would not participate. We can encourage non-participating individuals and also split roles and responsibilities within the activity.

The support staff took care of children and encouraged the parents to attend the session.

Facilitators must understand participants, their culture, and literacy level to share fitting examples when delivering the session. They must also translate them accurately.

Feedback & Sharing from Parents:

Despite not being formally educated, a participant felt they gained significant understanding and intended to apply this knowledge in their interactions with their child and others.

This was the participant's first time seeing spirituality beyond traditional prayer and God, recognizing it as encompassing broader spiritual capacities as introduced in the session.

All mothers expressed a common desire to have similar sessions conducted for fathers, indicating a wish for broader family involvement in spiritual development activities.

A grandmother, despite being on her first day of fasting for Ramzan and initially intending to leave early, chose to stay until the end of the session, showcasing her dedication.

A participant shared a poignant memory of her mother passing away when she was just four years old. She recalled her mother asking for water, and despite providing it, she felt guilty for not calling her aunt and grandfather, who were nearby. This memory brought her to tears as she reminisced about the incident.

Another participant recounted the painful memory of their father leaving them, with their elder brother stepping in to take care of them. This story also brought them to tears.

Fourth Session

This session provided an opportunity for parents to think deeply and share their feelings in complete silence. It also emphasized the importance of nature, encouraging participants to integrate nature into their daily lives. Participants were engaged and contributed actively to the session. Many parents expressed their views freely, which encouraged active participation and dialogue.

Participant Takeaways:

Participants became more aware of their differing opinions and showed individuality in their expressions of love for themselves and their loved ones. They reflected on their children's perspectives and discussed how to integrate nature into their activities to support harmony and life skills development.



Learnings:

In this session, a few parents were less vocal, especially those attending for the first time. Despite efforts to elicit their opinions, their limited understanding of the session's content led to more questions and less acceptance of our answers.

It would help to establish a system for regular field visits by trainers to monitor participants' progress. This would allow trainers to check on their activities, address any doubts, and foster better relationships between children and parents.





Shanti Ashram/ Bala Shanti Programme/ **Piloting the Toolkit on Nurturing the Spiritual Development of Children in the Early Years in INDIA by Shanti Ashram's Bala Shanti Programme- Overview of Bala Shanti Children's Parent Sessions 2023-24**