BYGGABROAR

A MODEL TO SECURE CHILDREN'S RIGHTS,

PROMOTE INTEGRATION

AND PREVENT HONOR BASED ISSUES

through a processed oriented dialogue about value systems
FOREWORD

This method and the tools that have been developed in Building Bridges are based on fifteen years of experience of working with violence prevention among children, young people and families in segregated and socially vulnerable environments. The method has been tested and developed through encounters with a large number of personnel, children, young people and parents in preschools and schools, and has been implemented with financial support from the county governments of Skåne, Halland, Västra Götaland and Östergötland.

Building Bridges is mainly aimed at preschool personnel and personnel in schools up to the third grade, but also other professionals who encounter children, young people and parents living at the intersection of various norm and value systems. The method aims to strengthen value systems, attitudes and competence of personnel, and to increase confidence and motivation to conduct knowledge based and process oriented conversations with parents about children’s situations.

The purpose is to prevent honor related violence and oppression, discrimination and alienation, but instead strengthen the influence, responsibility and empowerment of children and parents. The long-term goal is for all children and young people, regardless of gender, social-, religious- and ethnic background to feel included, involved, connected and to have right to a life.

Eva Ohlsson
Founder of Building Bridges
WHAT IS BUILDING BRIDGES?

- **Building Bridges** is a model for long-term and sustainable work with value systems within preschools and schools, as well as other establishments.

- **Building Bridges** is a training in method support that gives educators tangible tools for work with value systems in daily operation.

- The aim is for preschool and school personnel to become secure in encounters with parents and children from an intercultural perspective.

- **Building Bridges** works through illustrations to overcome language barriers and different cultural perceptions.

- The aim is to secure children’s rights, to promote integration and to prevent honor related restrictions and violence.

- **Building Bridges** has its roots in human rights, the Convention of the Rights of the Child, the Social Services Act and the regulatory documents of the preschool and school, as well as other documents that emphasis children’s rights to a life and a life without violence.
THE AIM

The overall aim of *Building Bridges* is to promote a constructive process of integration, prevent honor related violence and oppression, as well as to increase children and young people’s safety, community and fellowship.

*Building Bridges* is mainly aimed at educators and managers in preschool and school up to the third grade, but can also be used by other professionals who encounter children, young adults, and parents in social services, healthcare, SFI, women’s shelters etc.

The reason we have chosen to mainly focus on preschool and the lower grades of school is the daily and regular interactions that personnel have with parents in that setting. The preschool can for that reason, to a large extent, contribute to promotion of integration, prevention of violence and alienation from a holistic perspective of children’s development and education. The aim is for educators and professionals to become more confident and motivated to conduct process oriented and knowledge based conversations about children’s situations with their parents.
THE METHOD

Building Bridges has developed methods and tools for a strategic, long-term and systematic work with value systems in preschools and schools. The basis is to increase knowledge and competence as well as self-reflection, which will influence attitudes, values and approaches, which in turn will lead to more professional and thoughtful conversations with personnel, parents and children.

Building Bridges’ method seeks to raise awareness among educators and parents about the situation of children and to start a process oriented dialogue about value systems, with focus on children and young people, about parenting, sexuality, equality, democracy, gender, power and violence, different norm and value systems, power and resistance, as well as children and young peoples identity development from an intercultural perspective.

“There is other conversations in the staff room now, we dare to approach topics that were previously taboo”
(preschool manager)
Building Bridges assumes that it is possible to emphasize both similarities and differences without stigmatizing or create a ”we and them”-mentality. In the training that we provide, much focus is placed on the educators value systems and approaches towards an inclusive ”we”-mentality. A mentality that is accepting and understanding of different norm- and value systems, while at the same time not legitimizing violence, oppression or violations of children and young people’s rights.
THE MATERIAL

A large number of the parents we meet are lacking or have insufficient reading and writing skills. The inability to read is for many an obstacle to obtaining new knowledge and sharing the information that the school and preschool provide.

Building Bridges has therefore developed visual material to be used as a basis for a process oriented dialogue about value systems between educators and parents. The visual material consists of over 40 symbolic images that portray several topics relating to families’ backgrounds and situations in Sweden, children’s emotions and experiences, as well as several value system themes.

The visual material is structured in a way that allows it to be used in several different ways depending on context. The first images are suitable for initial talks with parents, for example the introduction. These images are all about charting the family’s network of relatives, important events in the family’s history and what their journey to Sweden looked like. Other images focus on how children and young people perceive their situation when relating to different, and sometimes incompatible, social contexts.
Various images seek to encourage conversations regarding views on raising children and situations in school that can cause conflict, such as sex education or joint activities for girls and boys, as well as risks associated with children and young people being excluded. In the latter part of the image series there are potentially sensitive topics: cousin marriages and forced marriages, domestic violence, genital mutilation, views on LGBTQ-people and children and young people with disabilities.

The purpose of the images is not to impose certain values and norms, but to encourage dialogue and reflection based on children’s rights. The image series can be used as a whole by a group of parents meeting regularly. Single images can also be used as a starting point at parent meetings or be at hand at either planned or spontaneous talks with parents where specific themes may come up.
THE STRUCTURE

The **Building Bridges** method consists of:

- Basic education
- Basic lecture
- Support in the implementation process
- Exchange of knowledge

We start out with offering a base lecture targeted broadly to all personnel, entailing for instance:

- Migration and integration process
- Power and violence theory
- Honor related violence
- Young people’s identity development
- Different norm and value systems
- Strategies for dialogue about value systems
- Methods and tangible tools

Particularly interested personnel are encouraged to, in connection with the base lecture, express their interest to participate as key persons.

Key persons are then offered a five-day basic education with subsequent guidance and support from **Building Bridges**. As part of the continuing work with value systems at schools and preschools, key person’s tasks may include communicating to their colleagues the knowledge and reflections from the trainings, planning work with value systems at workplace meetings and educational forums, as well as practically testing the tools together with colleagues, parents and children. Key persons are therefore, together with the managers and **Building Bridges** educators, important resources in the structure of the continuing work at their school or preschool.
A major part of Building Bridges’ methods must be tailored specifically for the business using them. Experience show that entities that shape and implement the methods and tools to fit their own existing routines have the most success. Those who want to start Building Bridges must be aware that it is not a short-term project, but long-term work with value systems.

For the educators to be secure in their roles in the dialogue about value systems, it is important that it has its origin in the school and preschool equality plans and policy documents.

Promotion and Prevention

Building Bridges’ promotion perspective is about working on a structural level with democracy and human rights, gender and equality, increased influence and participation for marginalized groups and to create dialogue and communication regarding norm and value systems, as well as preventing prejudice, discrimination, racism and xenophobia.

On an individual level the work is about meeting and creating dialogue about important questions about value systems with every child and parent based on the individual family’s unique conditions and creating safe and trusting relationships between preschool, school, children, young people and parents.
THE TRAINING

Building Bridges offers five-day training in a group setting for educators, managers and other personnel who are to participate as key persons. The training rests on three pillars:

- Sharing of knowledge within the field through lectures on relevant research, articles, report summaries etc.
- Reflection exercises and dilemma cases where the participants get to work with their own perceptions and values.
- Review of the visual material and the themes the images relate to.

These themes are:

Introductory discussions
- Family tree
- Life-line
- Difference and similarities

Children between different cultures
- What emotions can the children experience?
- What emotions do we want them to experience?
- How do we build bridges and make sure the children are doing well?

Advanced
- Different norm and value systems
- Collectivism and individualism
- Migration and integration processes
- Power and violence theories
- Identity development
- Social, moral and legal norms
- Sexuality education
- Forced marriage
- Gender based violence
- Gender equality and gender segregation
- Female genital mutilation, LGBTQ and disabilities
Evaluations and experience

Evaluations in counties where Building Bridges has been used show that the methods combined with the trainings have resulted in wide and deep development of personnel competence by:

- acquiring new knowledge which lead to improved competence
- developing observation skills and ability to notice relevant aspects in contact with children and parents
- changing attitudes towards people of different cultural backgrounds in a way that facilitates conversations with parents

- feeling more comfortable and secure in conducting talks with parents about potentially sensitive topics
- developing ways to conduct talks with parents and to hold genuine dialogues, which lead to better contact and promotes reflection and insights into important themes in children’s situations.

"By working with my own prejudices, I can meet others with greater openness, and this makes it less resistance when we meet in conversation around the child."

(Preschool teacher)
Some thoughts on social change processes

Building Bridges is about creating conditions for long-term and sustainable change, while taking place in a context where the conditions are in constant motion. The change process is affected by external factors such as financial resource and political decisions. The work is also affected by employee turnover and changes in management. A long-term change process is thus constantly facing new challenges and needs.

Social development efforts are not merely focused on developing well-functioning evidence based practices – there are numeral examples of well-functioning methods becoming shelf warmers – the major challenge is implementing and distributing methods within an operation that is constantly changing. This demands new and altered views on socially sustainable change processes.

The basis for Building Bridges methods is evidence- and process oriented model, which assumes that the target group identifies the need, and the method emerges in the interaction with those affected by the change. Investigations of what is possible are continuously made, as well as openness to new solutions and acting spaces arising from on-going processes of other operators and the society at large.

Specifically, this approach means that local conditions regulate efforts to be made. Building Bridges can be a resource for a social change process, but the method development must be “owned” by those implementing the changes.
FINALLY

Since Sweden is more multi-cultural today than ever before, educators and other personnel require new knowledge, competence, tools and methods to face the challenges and needs of a globalized society.

If we all learn to see and read the warning signs, there are good opportunities to prevent honor-related violence and oppression, including genital mutilation and forced marriages, discrimination and alienation, by working through a process oriented dialogue about value systems while the children are young.

A society where all people are valued equally doesn’t just appear; it is something that we together with determination must work towards every day. However, to achieve it we must challenge ourselves and our values and attitudes, as well as meeting people where they are.

It takes moral courage and courage to confront the deepest identities of others, and ourselves, but every small step contributes to a better future for children.
Contact

Eva Ohlsson
Founder
Tel. +4670 – 954 59 53
eva@acting4change.org

Bahareh Mohammadi
Method developer
bahareh@acting4change.org

Linda Ohlsson
Method developer
linda@acting4change.org

Engella Ameri
Parenting support
engella@acting4change.org

www.acting4change.org
www.byggabroar.nu