



Respecting Children’s Rights in Practice

Do you greet each child personally and positively when they arrive into your care? Do you rub a child’s back when he has trouble falling asleep? Do you make sure sharp and dangerous objects are cleared from play areas? If you answered “yes” to all these questions, these are a few of the many ways you are supporting children’s rights as outlined in the United Nations *Convention on the Rights of the Child*.



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As little people, children are entitled to human rights – those things that allow us to live in dignity as human beings. But children cannot assure their own welfare. They depend on the adults around them to protect their human rights.

To enshrine the conviction that *all children everywhere* deserve to live in dignity and to be treated according to their best interests, the United Nations developed the *Convention on the Rights of the Child* (CRC) in 1989. It outlines the rights of the child, and the responsibilities of families, caregivers and governments to uphold these rights. It is the most ratified human rights document in the world.

The inherent rights of people under age 18 fall into three basic groups:

- **Provision:** their right to an adequate standard of living, health care, education and services, and to play.
- **Protection:** their right to protection from abuse, neglect, exploitation and discrimination.
- **Participation:** their right to express their views about things that affect them and to participate in communities, programs and services for children.

Caregiver as role model

If you provide care to other people’s children, you are an important adult role model to each child. The way you respond to each child’s needs teaches them about their value as people. The way you help them resolve conflict teaches them about balancing and respecting everyone’s rights. When you provide age-appropriate activities based on principles of child development, you build each child’s skills and confidence.

What about children’s responsibilities?

When children learn about their rights, they learn about respecting the rights and freedoms of others at the same time. Children in groups quickly have an opportunity to observe, recognize and learn about the rights and responsibilities entrusted to each person. Learning to share and to take turns, listening and being listened to are ways children learn about respecting each other’s rights. Learning to settle differences when all views are heard helps children feel valued. They begin to understand that with their rights, there is also responsibility – to themselves and to others.

What about parental rights and responsibilities?

A parent has a responsibility to act in the *best interests of the child*. This means providing circumstances that protect, foster and guide each child’s development to his/her potential. The CRC upholds the primary importance of the parent’s role by recognizing and respecting their responsibility to guide their children, including guiding the way their children exercise their rights. However, if a child’s best

interests are not being supported through appropriate parental direction and guidance, others can intervene on behalf of the child. As caregivers, you have an obligation to take action in instances where you suspect children’s rights are being violated.

What about families?

Children have the right to families that support and protect them. Children have a responsibility to respect and learn about their parents, families, values and cultures. The CRC emphasizes the important role of families in children’s socialization. It also protects the child’s right to maintain contact with both parents in cases of separation. Governments are expected to make every effort to keep the families intact, and to provide support and assistance to parents, including child care services, so parents can fulfill their responsibilities.

Activities for Learning about Rights

Wants-Needs-Rights

Help children think about the difference between their wants, their needs and their rights by taking turns completing these sentences.

You might say:

I want [to be a good listener.] I need [to be well-rested.] I have a right [to breathe clean air.]

A child might say:

I want [to be liked.] I need [to have lots of hugs every day.] I have a right [to speak for myself.]
I want [to go to the movies.] I need [help sometimes.] I have a right [to be loved.]

Encourage children to draw pictures or help them to print words that represent their wants, their needs and their rights. Talk about the differences between wants, needs and rights. Can you decide on a definition for each word together?

Ribbons

Provide three colours of ribbon — red, yellow, blue — for children to cut, pin together and wear. Each colour stands for what children everywhere really need, and what you offer every day:

Provision – a red ribbon means caring for me.

Protection – a yellow ribbon means keeping me safe.



Participation – a blue ribbon means listening to me.

Talk about ways we are cared for, kept safe and valued:

I am cared for [when you welcome me with a big hug when I arrive.]

I am kept safe [when you put sunscreen on me.]

I am valued when [you let me choose where I want to sit.]

Special Person

Help children think about ways they are special and ways others are special by using these sentence starters:

I am special [because I am me.]

You are special [because you are you.]

I am special [because I have a baby sister.]

You are special [because you have a bed in two houses]

I am special [because I can tie my shoes.]

You are special [because you wear glasses.]

Friends*

Help children celebrate all sorts of friends by using these sentence starters:

Ways friends can be the same: [My friend Simi likes pepperoni pizza too.]

Ways friends can be different: [My friend Jonathon doesn't like to swing high like I do.]

Ways friends have fun together: [Alice and I like playing dress-up together.]

Ways friends care for each other: [Ben always waits for me when I get ready to go outside.]

**adapt this activity by discussing families.*

Puppets

Encourage children to act out real events that were not rights-respectful using puppets for role play. Perhaps Leslie knocked over Annie's block castle. Have the children act out what happened with the puppets and help them find ways to resolve the conflict in ways that respect everyone's rights.

Helping parents and families learn about children's rights

Model rights-respectful behaviours you want children and families to learn. Support children's rights by learning about the CRC and thinking about how its principles can be mirrored in your everyday practice with young children. Make resource information about children's rights visible and available to parents and families. Display posters that demonstrate children's rights. Ensure that the voices of children and families are heard and considered, even if you disagree with their points of view.

Print Resources

Every Kid's Guide to Understanding Human Rights

Berry, Joy. Chicago, IL: Children's Press, 1987

Explores why children have the right to be themselves, to have basic needs met, to contribute to decisions that affect them and to be responsible.

Dear World/Cher monde

Canadian Children's Project. Agincourt, ON: Methuen Publications, 1986.

Canadian children's drawings, poems and stories explore the question "What would you do to put the world right?"

All Kinds: Who cares about race and colour?

Child's Play. New York, NY: Child's Play (International) Ltd., 1989

Examines similarities and differences between people. Emphasizes the need to care for one another because we are all part of one family.

If You Could Wear My Sneakers!

Fitch, Sheree. Toronto, ON: Doubleday, 1997

Illustrations and children's poems reflect children's rights as outlined in the *Convention on the Rights of the Child*.

For Every Child, A Better World

Gikow, Louise and Ellen Weiss. New York, NY: Muppet Press/Golden Book, 1993

Children learn that some children do not have the basic needs of life met. Vivid illustrations and simple text explain the rights of *all* children.

Non-print Resources

Children First

1996. UNICEF, Reader's Digest, and National Film Board: English video # 96702; French video #96703 (55 minutes; Gr. 3 +)

Animated film addresses the basic rights of all children to a family, food, shelter, peace and dignity.

Degrassi Kids Rap on Rights

1989. UNICEF-Canada: English & French (7 minutes; Gr. 3+)

A rap song enhances children's awareness of the need for universal human rights for children throughout the world.

Kidzone III Your Rights

Vancouver, BC Knowledge Network (20 minutes)

Four short video stories address: cultural diversity; special needs and education; children's rights; environmental pollution; and the right to be heard.

Kidzone IV Child Rights

Vancouver, BC Knowledge Network (20 minutes)

Four short video stories address: children's right to privacy and the need to protect all rights; different families; environmental protection; and propaganda about different cultures.

Rights From the Heart/Droits au coeur

Hull, PQ: Canadian International Development Agency, and National Film Board. NFB # 0092093 (33 minutes)

A collection of seven wordless animated vignettes demonstrate children's right to learn with dignity, to be heard, to play, to adequate food, to be respected and to have a family, and that all children have the same rights.

Rights On!

1991: UNICEF Canada and YTV. (English). (20 minutes/segment; Gr. 3+)

Three video segments address participation of children and youth in Canada and in developing countries. Informal discussions explore youth opinions relating to the rights of the child.

Online Curricula

Global Schoolhouse

UNICEF Canada www.unicef.ca

Lists curriculum resources by theme for various age groups; some are online, some for ordering. Learning activities available for download and much more.

Children's Rights Centre

University College of Cape Breton <http://faculty.uccb.ns.ca/~gcarre/children>

Full curriculum available for grades 6 and 8. These rights curricula are part of Nova Scotia's education system. Site also offers information and many resources for kids, parents and educators.