

Children's Rights

What are the rights of the child?

The rights of the child are **specific rights** that aim to protect all human beings **younger than 18 years old**.¹

The human rights proclaimed in the *Universal Declaration of Human Rights* apply to all human beings regardless of their age, and as such children benefit from the same rights as adults. However, because of their vulnerable position in society, children also have specific rights that afford them special protection.

What is the purpose of having children's rights?

Children's rights aim to ensure that each child has the opportunity to **reach their full potential**. Children's rights stipulate that all children – without discrimination (Article 2) – should be able to develop fully, have access to education and health care, grow up in an appropriate environment, be informed about their rights, and participate actively in society.

Children's rights are a tool to **protect children** from violence and abuse.

Children's rights foster **mutual respect** among people. Respect for the rights of the child can only be fully achieved when everyone, including children themselves, recognizes that every person has the same rights, and then adopts attitudes and behaviours of respect, inclusion and acceptance.

What is the *Convention on the Rights of the Child*?

The *Convention on the Rights of the Child* is an **international treaty** that recognizes the civil, political, economic, social and cultural rights of children. This treaty was adopted by the United Nations on November 20, 1989.

In December 1991, Canada ratified the *Convention on the Rights of the Child* and thus committed itself under international law to respect, protect, promote and fulfil the rights of children in Canada.

The Convention requires governments from around the world to respect and uphold children's rights, particularly through the laws they develop at a national level. However, in order for children to fully enjoy their rights, the fundamental principles of the Convention must be respected and promoted by all members of society from parents, to educators, to the children themselves.

To consult the *Convention on the Rights of the Child* or for more information about children's rights, visit UNICEF's website: <http://www.unicef.org/crc>.

¹ In the Convention on the Rights of the Child, a child is defined as a person younger than 18 years old unless the laws of a particular country set the age of majority at a younger age.

What are the guiding principles of the *Convention on the Rights of the Child*?

The four guiding principles outlined here represent the underlying requirements for any and all rights of the Convention to be realized. These principles must be respected in order for children to enjoy their rights.

1. **Non-discrimination and equal opportunity** (Article 2)

All children have the same rights. The Convention applies to all children, whatever their ethnic origin, religion, language, culture, or sex. It does not matter where they come from or where they live, what their parents do, whether they have a disability, or whether they are rich or poor. All children must have the same opportunity to reach their full potential.

2. **Best interests of the child** (Article 3)

The best interests of the child must be the primary consideration when making decisions that may affect children. When adults make decisions, they should think about how their decisions will affect the children.

3. **Right to life, survival and development** (Article 6)

Children have the right to life. Children must receive the care necessary to ensure their physical, mental, and emotional health as well as their intellectual, social and cultural development.

4. **Participation** (Article 12)

Children have the right to express themselves and to be heard. They must have the opportunity to express their opinions regarding decisions that affect them and their opinions must be taken into account. This being said, the child's age, level of maturity, and best interests should always be kept in mind when considering the ideas and opinions of children.

Adapted from Information on Guiding Principles:
http://www.unicef.org/crc/index_30177.html



The Convention on the Rights of the Child in Child Friendly Language

1. Everyone under 18 has these rights.
2. All children have these rights, no matter who they are, where they live, what their parents do, what language they speak, what their religion is, whether they are a boy or girl, what their culture is, whether they have a disability, whether they are rich or poor. No child should be treated unfairly on any basis.
3. All adults should do what is best for you. When adults make decisions, they should think about how their decisions will affect children.
4. The government has a responsibility to make sure your rights are protected. They must help your family to protect your rights and create an environment where you can grow and reach your potential.
5. Your family has the responsibility to help you learn to exercise your rights, and to ensure that your rights are protected.
6. You have the right to be alive.
7. You have the right to a name, and this should be officially recognized by the government. You have the right to a nationality (to belong to a country).
8. You have the right to an identity – an official record of who you are. No one should take this away from you.
9. You have the right to live with your parent(s), unless it is bad for you. You have the right to live with a family who cares for you.
10. If you live in a different country than your parents do, you have the right to be together in the same place.
11. You have the right to be protected from kidnapping.
12. You have the right to give your opinion, and for adults to listen and take it seriously.
13. You have the right to find out things and share what you think with others, by talking, drawing, writing or in any other way unless it harms or offends other people.
14. You have the right to choose your own religion and beliefs. Your parents should help you decide what is right and wrong, and what is best for you.
15. You have the right to choose your own friends and join or set up groups, as long as it isn't harmful to others.
16. You have the right to privacy.
17. You have the right to get information that is important to your well-being, from radio, newspapers, books, computers and other sources. Adults should make sure that the information you are getting is not harmful, and help you find and understand the information you need.
18. You have the right to be raised by your parent(s) if possible.
19. You have the right to be protected from being hurt and mistreated, in body or mind.
20. You have the right to special care and help if you cannot live with your parents.
21. You have the right to care and protection if you are adopted or in foster care.
22. You have the right to special protection and help if you are a refugee (if you have been forced to leave your home and live in another country), as well as all the rights in this Convention.
23. You have the right to special education and care if you have a disability, as well as all the rights in this Convention, so that you can live a full life.

The Convention on the Rights of the Child in Child Friendly Language (continued)

24. You have the right to the best health care possible, safe water to drink, nutritious food, a clean and safe environment, and information to help you stay well.
25. If you live in care or in other situations away from home, you have the right to have these living arrangements looked at regularly to see if they are the most appropriate.
26. You have the right to help from the government if you are poor or in need.
27. You have the right to food, clothing, a safe place to live and to have your basic needs met. You should not be disadvantaged so that you can't do many of the things other kids can do.
28. You have the right to a good quality education. You should be encouraged to go to school to the highest level you can.
29. Your education should help you use and develop your talents and abilities. It should also help you learn to live peacefully, protect the environment and respect other people.
30. You have the right to practice your own culture, language and religion – or any you choose. Minority and indigenous groups need special protection of this right.
31. You have the right to play and rest.
32. You have the right to protection from work that harms you, and is bad for your health and education. If you work, you have the right to be safe and paid fairly.
33. You have the right to protection from harmful drugs and from the drug trade.
34. You have the right to be free from sexual abuse.
35. No one is allowed to kidnap or sell you.
36. You have the right to protection from any kind of exploitation (being taken advantage of).
37. No one is allowed to punish you in a cruel or harmful way.
38. You have the right to protection and freedom from war. Children under 15 cannot be forced to go into the army or take part in war.
39. You have the right to help if you've been hurt, neglected or badly treated.
40. You have the right to legal help and fair treatment in the justice system that respects your rights.
41. If the laws of your country provide better protection of your rights than the articles in this Convention, those laws should apply.
42. You have the right to know your rights! Adults should know about these rights and help you learn about them, too.

Articles 43 to 54.

These articles explain how governments and international organizations like UNICEF will work to ensure children are protected with their rights.

This child-friendly version of the *Convention on the Rights of the Child* was produced by UNICEF. For more information on the *Convention on the Rights of the Child*, consult the UNICEF website: <http://www.unicef.org/crc>.