



Respecting Children’s Rights at Home

Do you get up in the night to soothe your crying infant? Do you crouch down to listen to your child tell you what happened at the playground? Do you buckle up your child when driving? If you answered “yes” to these questions, these are a few of the many ways you are supporting your child’s rights as outlined in the United Nations *Convention on the Rights of the Child*.



NATIONAL Child Day

Children are people too. As such, they 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 adults for their survival. They need adults to provide for them, to protect them from harm and to guide them. They need adults to love and care for them, and to respect and listen to them.

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 *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:** children’s right to an adequate standard of living, health care, education and services, and to play. e.g., You provide your child with a balanced diet, a warm bed to sleep in, medical care when sick, opportunities to play and access to schooling.
- **Protection:** children’s right to protection from abuse, neglect, exploitation and discrimination. e.g., You provide safe places for your child to play; you use behaviour guidance techniques that teach consequences by focusing on the behaviour, not the child; your expectations for your child are age-appropriate.
- **Participation:** the right to participate in communities, programs and services for children e.g., You introduce your child to libraries and other community programs; you encourage your child to share his opinions, listen respectfully to them and value them; you take your’s child’s opinions into consideration when making decisions whenever possible.

Your child’s first model

A child’s first lessons about the world come from you. Through you, a child learns what it means to be human. The way you respond to your child when she needs something teaches her whether she is valued. The way you treat a pet teaches your child about how to value those who depend on you. What you expect your child to be able to

do teaches your child about his limits. How you respond either takes away from or adds to his confidence and self-esteem.

Rights or Responsibilities?

When children are taught appropriately about their own rights, they learn about the rights and freedoms of others at the same time.

As their own self-respect grows, so too does their respect for others, including peers, parents and other adults. For example, they understand that they have a right to express their views, *and* they have a responsibility not to hurt others when doing so.

What about parents’ rights and responsibilities?

Parents’ primary responsibility is to act *in the best interests of the child*. This means providing circumstances that protect and promote your child’s development to his/her fullest 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.

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 how important families are in children’s socialization. When parents are separated, the child’s right to maintain contact with both parents is protected. Governments are expected to make every effort to keep the families intact, and to provide support and assistance to parents so they can fulfil their responsibilities.

Why is the CRC a useful tool?

When parents understand the *CRC*, they can build better families. Parents can be better models to their children. They can better protect their child’s rights, viewpoints and best interests. This may involve speaking up for your child’s right to be included. It may involve pressuring governments for resources to support a child with special needs.

Even young children are entitled to know about their human rights. Families can engage in activities that help children learn about their rights and that help them put their rights and responsibilities into practice as they prepare to be responsible citizens.



Activities for Learning about Rights

Wants-Needs-Rights

What do we really need to live and grow? Think about the difference between wants, needs and rights by completing these sentences:

I want [to be the best father I can be.] I need to have [friends.] I have a right to [feel safe.]

I want to [learn to fly an airplane.] I need to do [things with my imagination.] I have a right to [decide what is best for me.]

Now engage your child by asking them to talk about their wants, needs and rights using the same sentence starters.

Your child might say:

I want [a new doll.] I need [to brush my teeth.] I have a right [to go to school.]

Make three lists — one called wants, another needs and another rights. Talk about the differences between the three lists. Can you decide on a definition for wants? for needs? for rights?

Do a similar activity about how we all take responsibility: You might say, “I have a responsibility to [take care of you when you are sick.”] Your child might say, “I have a responsibility to [walk the dog every day after school.”]

Responsibilities

Help your child think more about responsibilities by talking together about ways you each do good things without being told. [I took you to early morning hockey practice.] [I set the table.]

Get your child to think about helping by asking what s/he does to help get ready for bed... for dinner... to help his/her best friend feel happy. Share with your child ways you help her.

Special Person

We are all special. Let your children know how special they are by taking turns sharing some of the ways you are special to each other.

I am special [because I am me.]

You are special [because you are you.]

I am special because [I can bake a cake.]

You are special because [you can tie your shoes.]

I am special because [I have blue eyes.]

You are special because [you have glasses.]

I am proud of myself because [I made my bed.] I am proud of you because [you sing really well.]

I have special feelings about [my baby sister.] You have special feelings about [grandpa.]

Families

Help children verbalize what they know and understand about families. Talk together about how families are the same and how they are different. Discuss how pets are part of a family and have rights too. Explore ways that you can respect each other's rights as family members. Talk about what you can do together as a family, and do together to show respect for others in the community.

Did you know?

November 20th is a special day set aside each year to honour and respect children – National Child Day. In 1993, the Canadian Government chose this date to commemorate the adoption by the United Nations of two human rights documents on that date: the *Declaration of the Rights of the Child* in 1959 and the *Convention on the Rights of the Child* in 1989.

Convention on the Rights of the Child

Article topics

Article 1	definition of a child
Article 2	non-discrimination
Article 3	protection of best interests
Article 4	responsibility for implementation
Article 5	parental guidance & evolving capacities
Article 6	survival & development
Article 7	name & nationality
Article 8	preservation of identity
Article 9	separation from parents
Article 10	family reunification
Article 11	illegal transfer abroad
Article 12-13	freedom of opinion & expression
Article 14	freedom of thought, conscience & religion
Article 15	freedom of association
Article 16	protection of privacy
Article 17	access to appropriate information
Article 18	parental responsibilities & child care
Article 19	protection from abuse & neglect
Article 20	special protection for children in care
Article 21	adoption
Article 22	refugee children
Article 23	disabled children
Article 24	health & health services
Article 25	periodic review of treatment
Article 26	social security
Article 27	adequate standard of living
Article 28-29	education
Article 30	cultural identity & minority/indigenous populations
Article 31	rest, leisure, play, recreation & cultural activities
Article 32	economic exploitation and dangerous labour
Article 33	drug abuse
Article 34	sexual exploitation
Article 35-36	sale, trafficking, abduction & exploitation
Article 37	torture and deprivation of liberty
Article 38	armed conflicts
Article 39	rehabilitative care
Article 40	administration of juvenile justice
Article 41	respect for higher standards
Article 42-54	implementation & force of articles UNICEF Canada