

CHILDREN'S RIGHTS AT YOUR SCHOOL

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Your school is beginning to explore children's rights through UNICEF Canada's Rights Respecting Schools initiative.

It's an engaging and valuable process that helps increase student participation, and helps principles of inclusivity and respect take deeper hold in the classroom.

It involves examining children's rights, learning about good practices for respecting rights in schools, and developing actions to bring rights to life in the school.

Staff, students and you, the parents or guardians, can find out what it means to incorporate rights into your school through school-based workshops, curriculum-connected classroom activities, and a multitude of resources.

Studies have shown that Rights Respecting Schools see a decline in bullying, an increase in higher order thinking among students, and greater concern among children for themselves, their peers and children in other parts of the world.

To learn more about Rights Respecting Schools visit www.globalclassroom.ca

WHAT ARE CHILDREN'S RIGHTS?

Your school community is centered around its children. Parents, educators and administrators all care for their well-being and are all working to nurture their development. Because of this, it's important to know about children rights and to understand what they mean for our children – and for the adults in their lives.

We're all familiar with human rights, and know them to be the basic standards that must be met for all people, in order that they can live with dignity. For example, we know that all human beings are equal, have the right to be heard and to participate fully in society. Rights are part of our daily lives, framing not only our laws and policies, but our attitudes and actions as well.

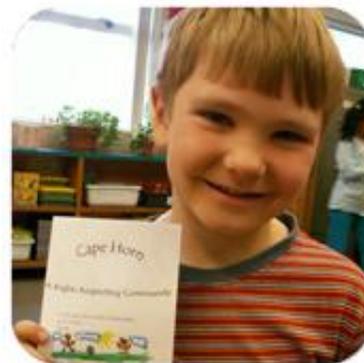
Children's rights are a distinct category of human rights that address the particular situation of children in the global human family. They address children's vulnerability, but also their capabilities and the value of their perspectives.

They are spelled out in the Convention on the Rights of the Child – the most widely acknowledged human rights treaty in the world. In short, the Convention says that all children have the right to survive, the right to develop to their fullest potential, the right to protection from harm, neglect and exploitation, and the right to participate fully in family, cultural and social life.

There are many resources available to learn more about the Convention on the Rights of the Child. The UNICEF Canada Web site is a good place to start: www.globalclassroom.ca

EXPLORING RIGHTS WITH YOUR CHILD

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Your child's first and deepest lessons about the world come from you, and the Convention recognizes the primary importance of your role as parent to protect and guide your children.

Below are some ideas for engaging them in the exploration of their rights. They are framed by the four guiding principles of the Convention.

If you have other ideas for activities and discussions to explore children's rights, please be sure to share them with your school.

NON-DISCRIMINATION

- Have your child tell you the ways in which she is special because she is a unique individual. Then discuss other children in your life and how they are unique. Discuss what it means to respect another person and what it means to be respected.
- Explore something new about an unfamiliar culture. Visit an unfamiliar place of worship, attend a cultural festival, read a book together that is set in another country, or find a recipe from another culture and try making it at home.

BEST INTERESTS OF THE CHILD

- Discuss decision-making based on 'best interests'. For example, look at conscious choices you make in your home that are in the best interest of the environment. Make some conscious decisions together for energy conservation or waste reduction and talk about how these are in the best interest of the planet.
- Make a wants vs. rights list. Discuss the differences with examples such as wanting a bag of candy and having the right to nutritious food. Fill in the list and post it in the kitchen.

RIGHT TO LIFE, SURVIVAL AND DEVELOPMENT

- Explore your home and community for evidence of action to keep children safe – such as a cross-walk guard, car seats, bike helmets, or lifeguards at the swimming pool.
- Visit the Food and Nutrition section of Health Canada's Web site and explore information about food labelling and the Canada Food Guide.
- Talk about the health-care system during your child's next visit to the doctor.

RESPECT FOR THE VIEWS OF THE CHILD

- Encourage your children to express their thoughts and feelings. Ask if there are environments in which they find it hard to express themselves, and ask if there are ways you can support them in making their voices heard.
- Find opportunities for your child to take the lead in planning an activity. Help him solicit the opinions of others and then make decisions.
- Discuss the difference between the right to have your opinion heard and considered versus wanting to have things your own way. Revisit previous discussions about wants versus rights, best-interests, and respect.

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