

Why should I teach my children about their rights?

When young people learn about their rights they usually have an intuitive understanding that yes, they have rights but so do others.

Children who have learned about their rights in a rights respecting environment, compared with those who have not:

- have a more accurate understanding of what it means to have rights and responsibilities
- show greater acceptance of children who are different than themselves
- have better relationships with their classmates and teachers
- tend to have higher self-esteem
- are less likely to be victimized and more likely to stand up for others

What is the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child?

The United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child (UNCRC) is an international treaty that sets out a wide range of rights for children under the age of 18 plus the obligations of governments in promoting and protecting those rights. The UNCRC was ratified by Canada in 1991 and is the most widely ratified Convention in the world. These rights represent a global consensus on what childhood should be.

The Convention specifically articulates the rights of children. These rights are indivisible and inalienable—a child can neither give up nor lose their rights, regardless of their behaviour or social context. The rights describe what children need to be safe, to be healthy, to be heard, and to be themselves, all without discrimination of any kind. For more information about child and youth rights, visit www.everychild.ca.

About SCY

The Society for Children and Youth of BC (SCY) is a unique provincial advocacy organization dedicated to promoting the full realization of children's rights in British Columbia through **education**, **advocacy**, and **community engagement**.

We offer many resources including:

- Child & Youth Friendly Community Toolkits which help communities and governments evaluate the child and youth friendliness of their communities and then plan for action
- Rights-based posters to help encourage your child's healthy development
- Youth-led rights monitoring toolkit
- Policy alternatives for youth in care and youth in conflict with the law

... most are free for download on our websites!

To learn more about SCY or to join our child rights network visit:

www.scyofbc.org

To learn how to take action for children's rights visit:

www.everychild.ca



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Parents' Frequently Asked Questions

everychild.ca

Do children's rights take away my authority as a parent?

No! The UNCRC repeatedly upholds the important role parents have in the lives of children and says that governments must respect the responsibility of parents for providing guidance to their children.

Specifically, the Convention supports:

- Parents/caregivers in raising their children, consistent with the evolving capacities of the child. (Article 5)
- The recognition that the child has the right to preservation of identity, including nationality, name, and family relations. (Article 8.1)
- The recognition that children have the right to know and, when possible, to be cared for by their parents. (Article 7.1)
- The recognition that parents have the right to guide the religious development of their children. (Article 14)
- The recognition that both parents have the common responsibility of raising their children. (Article 18)

Won't children backtalk adults if they are taught about their rights?

They might, but like adults, children have the responsibility to respect the rights of others. Children tend to understand this. If they want their rights respected, they know they must also respect the rights of others. One of the aims of a child rights education is the development of respect for everyone, their values, and their culture.

We gratefully acknowledge Drs. Katherine Covell and Brian Howe for providing the answers to these FAQs. Brian and Katherine are both child rights experts and parents.



Won't children try to use their rights to get what they want?

They might try, and it is our role as adults to teach children how rights are implemented. If your child challenges you with knowledge of their rights in a way that is inappropriate, be heartened this is a normal part of learning the difference between rights, needs, and wants. A child may want a snack and say that they have the right to food. These moments where your child is challenging you are teaching moments.

You can explain the difference between rights and wants. You can talk about how being a parent means that you have the responsibility to look out for their well-being, and spoiling a dinner appetite would not serve in upholding their rights.

When should I start teaching my child about their rights?

When a child understands or says *'that's not fair'*, they are ready to learn about rights.

Can the UNCRC help me?

The UNCRC is an excellent advocacy tool parents can use to support themselves and their children. Because the Canadian government ratified the UNCRC, there is a responsibility for the provincial and federal governments to support parents, caregivers, and families with implementing child rights.

What does government support for parents look like? This usually means providing supportive policies that enrich family life in the form of affordable childcare and parenting programs (like Nobody's Perfect, My Tween and Me, and Parent-Child Mother Goose!), legislating fair wages so families can afford the things they need, and creating systems to protect vulnerable children, all with the lens of putting the rights of young people and their families first.

How can I support the rights of my child?

Family participation through activities and discussions not only makes the learning process more enjoyable for the child, but also strengthens family ties. Show your child that you view him or her as an active partner in your family, and as a valuable person with rights.

As with most things, the learning of rights, respect, and responsibility begins at home. Children learn what they see and hear. By becoming involved in your child's learning and showing an interest in who he/she is and what he/she is doing, you help your child learn the importance of giving and sharing with others.

- Set boundaries, routines, and rules. Children need to know what is expected of them. Having clear expectations also makes it easier to reward the child for good behaviour and let them learn what behaviours you don't like.
- Give your child choices rather than commands. For example, *'Would you like to brush your teeth before you get your pajamas on or after?'* This empowers children and avoids a power struggle.
- Ignore unwanted behaviours and reward wanted behaviours. Children sometimes misbehave to get attention. Ignore misbehaviours unless someone is getting hurt. Give your child attention for good behaviours and you encourage your child to repeat them. When you need to respond to misbehaviour use time-out or take away a privilege.
- Criticize the behaviour, not the child. Explain what you don't like about the behaviour and why you don't like it. Avoid criticizing the child. For example, *'When you leave your coat on the floor it gets dirty and I am afraid someone will trip on it and fall'*, rather than *'you are such a messy kid.'*
- Have family meetings. Explain the issues and let everyone discuss the problems together to reach mutually satisfactory solutions to conflicts.