I have rights, you have rights, he/she has rights ...

Everyone has rights. Moreover, as a boy or girl aged under 18 you have certain specific rights. A list of these rights, as well as steps governments must take to help you exercise them, is set out in the 1989 United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child.

Your survival, your protection and your development

- You are entitled to have your interests protected in all decisions that concern you and not to be discriminated against, for example because of your origins, opinions, beliefs or sex.
- You have the right to life and to a balanced and healthy physical, mental, spiritual, moral and social development.
- You are entitled to have your basic needs such as food, clothing, housing and health looked after.
- You have the right to protection against all forms of exploitation, abuse and physical and psychological violence, including what happens in the family and establishments that look after children.
- You are entitled to a high standard of education.
- You have the right to a wide range of objective information.
- If you have a mental or physical disability, you have a right to lead a life of dignity so that you can integrate into society, develop your personality and enjoy maximum autonomy.
- You have a right to rest, leisure, play and recreational, artistic and cultural activities.

Your identity, your private life and your family

- You have the right to a name, a nationality and the protection of your identity. If you belong to an ethnic, religious or linguistic minority you may not be deprived of your right to lead your own cultural life, practise your religion or use the language of your group.
- You are entitled to protection of your privacy: your home, your correspondence, your honour and your reputation are protected by law.
- Your parents have joint responsibility for your upbringing and development. They have the right and the duty to offer you guidance in how you should exercise your rights.
- You have a right to know who your parents are and to be brought up by them, unless this is not in your interests.
- You have a right to know where your parents are and to enter another country to join them. Your parents have the same right towards you.
- In the event of separation, you are entitled to be consulted on all decisions concerning your relations with your parents. If you are separated from your parents, or one of them, you have the right to see them regularly, unless this is not in your interests.
- Adoption may only be authorised if it is in your interests.

Your freedoms

- Freedom of opinion: as soon as you are capable of doing so, you are entitled to give your opinion on anything that concerns you. Your opinion must be taken into account.
- Freedom of expression: you have the right to express yourself freely and to seek, receive and disseminate information.
- Freedom of thought, conscience and religion.
- Freedom of association: you are entitled to associate with other persons and take part in meetings.
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You and the state

- Freedom of choice: as soon as you are capable of doing so, you are entitled to choose your occupation, your family and your leisure time.
- Freedom of movement: you have the right to move freely within your own country and to leave it, unless this is not in your interests.
- Freedom from discrimination: you are entitled to live free from discrimination and to have an equal opportunity to develop your personality.
- Freedom from arrest or detention: you may only be arrested or detained if there are serious grounds for believing that you have committed a crime, and you must be informed of the reasons for your arrest or detention.
- Freedom from torture or cruel or degrading punishment.
- Freedom from arbitrary discrimination.
- Freedom from violence: you are entitled to protection against violence, whether inflicted by an individual, an organised group or the state, and to be free from discrimination by others.
- Freedom from discrimination in the law: you are entitled to be treated equally before the law.
- Freedom from discrimination in the administration of justice: you must be treated equally before the courts and tribunals.

What if these rights are not respected?

The exercise of certain rights may be restricted for valid reasons, but some rights may never be restricted, even by parents or teachers. If you think your rights have been violated you may:

- speak to someone you trust;
- call a special telephone number for child victims of violence to speak to a person who will be able to advise you;
- go to the police, make a complaint and ask for protection from the state;
- contact a children’s ombudsperson or a voluntary association that defends children’s rights;
- in certain circumstances you may even take your case to the European Court of Human Rights.