

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 are entitled 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 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.
- There are limits to these freedoms. You must respect the rights and freedoms of others, and must not pose a threat to society or yourself.

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.

You and the state

- The state must do whatever is necessary to enable you to exercise your established rights and freedoms.
- If you have suffered violence, the state must give you assistance and help you live a normal life again.
- The state must help your parents or those who look after you by setting up institutions and services.
- If you cannot live with your family, the state must protect and help you. It must find a solution that takes account of your past and your culture, and you will be entitled to have your situation regularly reviewed.
- You are entitled to justice. The state must ensure that the justice system is adapted to your specific rights and needs.
- You may not be subjected to torture or cruel or degrading punishment. You may not be executed or imprisoned for life.
- You may not be arrested unlawfully. Detention must be the last possible option. It must be as short as possible and take account of your needs and your age. In detention, you must be separated from adult detainees or prisoners and, other than in exceptional circumstances in your own interests, you will have the right to remain in contact with your family.
- In wartime, the state must protect and care for you. If you are under 15 you may not be recruited into any armed forces.

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.

www.coe.int/children

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