

The Children's Bill of Rights

April 20, 1996

We, Children from seven countries and three continents, having communicated with each other over the Internet, agree that the following are natural rights of Children all over the world, and hereby ratify them:

Preamble

We believe that a successful society invests its best resources and hopes in the success of its children. An unsuccessful society ignores or maltreats its children.

Children are the future of our species. How a society treats its children is a direct reflection of how that society looks at its future. The Children's Bill of Rights proposes rights for children that all adults on Earth should honor, so that we may help create the very best future for ourselves and, in turn, our own children.

A moral and competent society is one that respects and upholds the rights of its children. A society that fails to do so is immoral and incompetent.

Articles of the Children's Bill of Rights

Section I: Articles that are implemented immediately

1. Children's universal rights

As compared to adults, children until the age of 18 have the right to receive special care and protection.

Children all have the same rights, no matter what country they were born in or are living in, what their sex is, what their race is, or what their religion is.

2. Right to inherit a better world

Children have the right to inherit a world that is at least as good as the one their parents inherited.

Children have a responsibility to think about how they will leave a better world to their children, and, when they become adults, they have the right and duty to act on this.

3. Right to influence the future

Children have the right to participate in discussions having to do with the directions our society is taking -- on the large political, economic, social, and educational issues and policies -- so that children can help create the kind of world they will grow up in.

Adults have an obligation to communicate their views of these large issues in terms that children can understand, and provide children with the same information that is available to all adults.

Children have the right to understand how things change within society, and to learn how to influence these changes.

4. Right to freedom of thought, opinion, expression, conscience, and religion

Every child has the right to express his or her opinion freely, and adults should address that opinion with the child in every decision that affects him or her. Children have the right to carry out research to help form these opinions.

Children have the right to express their views, obtain information, and make ideas or information known.

Children have the right to form their own views in matters of conscience and religion.

5. Right to media access

Children have guaranteed access to all important communications media so that they may communicate nationally and internationally amongst themselves and with adults.

6. Right to participate in decisions affecting children

Children have the right to participate in all committees and decisions that make plans and set policies that directly or indirectly affect children.

7. Right to privacy

Children have the right to privacy to the same extent adults have.

8. Right to respect and courtesy

Children should be treated with respect and courtesy by adults, as well as by other children.

9. Right to an identity

Children separated from their birth parents at birth or at an early age have the right to know that this happened. Children have the right to know their name, who their birth parents are, and when and where they were born.

10. Right to freedom of association

Children have the right to meet with others, and to join or form associations, equivalent to that held by adults.

11. Right to care and nurturing

Children have the right to have nurturing and caring parents or guardians.

12. Right to leisure and play

Children have the right to leisure, play, and participation in cultural and artistic activities. Children have the right to a joy at least a few hours every day when they are free from worries.

13. Right to safe work

Children have the right to be protected from work that threatens their health, education, or development.

Children have the right to have pocket money so that they may learn to manage money.

14. Right to an adequate standard of living

Every child has the right to a standard of living adequate for his or her physical, mental, spiritual, moral, and social development, no matter how wealthy his or her parents are.

15. Right to life, physical integrity and protection from maltreatment

Children have the right to be protected from all forms of maltreatment by any adult, including a parent. This includes but is not limited to: physical abuse, including torture, violence, hitting and slapping; harmful drugs, including alcohol and tobacco; mental abuse; and sexual abuse.

Infanticide is prohibited.

No child shall be forced into marriage.

16. Right to a diverse environment and creativity

Children have the right to have many different things, people, and ideas in their environment.

Children have the right to listen to music of their choice.

Children have the right NOT to have their creativity stifled.

17. Right to education

Every child has the right to education, education that aims to develop his or her personality, talents, and mental and physical abilities to the fullest extent, no matter how wealthy the child's parents are.

Education should foster respect for a child's parents, for the child's own cultural identity, language and values, as well as for the cultural background and values of others.

Children have the right to an excellent education in any school. Schools will differ not in the quality of the education they offer, but only in their philosophies of teaching, and what professional specializations they stress.

18. Right to access appropriate information and to a balanced depiction Of reality

Adults have the obligation to provide children with information from several different sources.

Children should be protected from materials adults consider harmful.

Children have the right to have reality presented to them in a balanced and accurately representative fashion.

19. Right not to be exposed to prejudice

Children have the right NOT to be taught that one group (racial, national, religious, etc.) is superior to another.

Section II: Articles that require social or national policies

20. The right to a clean environment

Children have a right to a clean environment (water, air, ground, sea).

21. Right to a small national debt

Governments and countries must decrease national debt which will have to be paid for by future generations.

22. Right to vote

Children over 14 have the right to vote on issues that directly affect children, in all local, regional, national and international elections.

23. Right to medical care

Children have the right to be kept alive and in the best health and medical care science can provide, no matter how wealthy their parents are.

24. Legal rights

Children accused of crimes have at least the same legal rights as adults.

No child shall be institutionalized against her or his will without due process rights.

25. Right not to participate in war

Young people under 21 have the right NOT to go to war.

The Children's Bill of Rights

Background

In 1996, several hundred children from around the world drafted The Children's Bill of Rights. The Bill lists the rights that all Children have so that they can grow up free from abuse, thrive in the world, and participate in influencing the shape of their future.

Children's Rights

Prevention of Child Abuse is Original Focus

Over the past several years, we have become increasingly aware of the difficulty the world is having ensuring that children are brought up in a way that enables them to thrive. Initially, such concerns focused on obvious forms of child abuse: wars that targeted non-combatants and children, inter-ethnic genocide, child malnutrition, diseased environments, and social and even parental abuse. Efforts were made by some countries, the United Nations, and a plethora of private philanthropic organizations to tackle these abuses, and the first pioneering notions of children's rights emerged. But the children, themselves, had yet to be heard from.

As our understanding of these issues deepened, the concerns went beyond abuse to address more systemic, inter-generational problems. Not only did people become increasingly concerned with whether kids would be able to flourish in today's world, but whether they would be able to flourish to tomorrow's world, a world that will differ in fundamental ways from today's, yet in ways that today we don't still fully understand.

Children's Rights Take On a Larger Perspective

In 1995, an effort was launched to address children's rights and their roles in society from this larger perspective, and to do it through the ideas, needs, and voices of kids themselves. This effort is called The Kids' Campaign. The first project was to design a Children's Bill of Rights. This was accomplished in the Spring of 1996 through the extraordinary medium of the Kidlink, an Internet organization that brings together hundreds of school children around the world and provides them with a 'space' in which to express themselves and share their ideas through a wide variety of projects.

The Children's Bill of Rights

The Children's Bill of Rights was drafted and ratified by over 650 children from seven countries. The Rights range from the traditional abuse-prevention ones, to those that will ensure kids the ability to influence the shape of their own future. The Children's Bill of Rights does not ask adults or governments to ratify the Bill before it takes effect. It is adopted by the children themselves, and serves as the basis for their demand that adults treat them as partners in the processes of human progress.

Children, adults and organizations are invited to support the Children's Bill of Rights, and may list your support formally, if you wish, with the CBOR Secretariat.

The CBOR Secretariat

A Children's Bill of Rights (CBOR) Secretariat has been established to coordinate activities surrounding the CBOR, including its broad dissemination and the formation of strategic alliances with other children's organizations.

The Secretariat may be contacted by postal mail at
5504 Scioto Road, Bethesda, Maryland, 20816, USA

Or, via the Net, at:
lenar@tenet.edu, or
debivort@umd5.umd.edu

The Children's Bill of Rights may be freely reproduced and distributed provided it is done so in its entirety and unaltered, and with this paragraph attached. As of April 20, 1996, children from 7 countries and 3 continents had ratified The Children's Bill of Rights. If you are under 18 years of age and would like to ratify the CBOR, please contact us at the above addresses.