

Children's Rights in the Early Years Settings

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This chapter will start by looking at the UN Convention of the Rights of the Child (UNCRC) and will consider how this can be embedded in early years settings and support children's learning through play. There will be some practical activities and suggested resources that will support adults to include Children's Rights in the early years curriculum.

"Everyone, children and adults, should know about Children's Rights" Article 42 UNCRC

What are the Rights of the Child?

The simplified summary covers the articles of the UNCRC that are specific to working with children in the early years.

Articles 1 & 2

All children throughout the world have these rights

Article 6

Children have a right to live

Articles 7 & 8

Children should have a name

Article 9

Children should live with their parents or someone who cares for them

Article 12

Children should be listened to and be able to say what they think about things

Article 13

Children should be able to find out things

Article 14

Children should be able to worship as they wish

Article 15

Children should be able to meet together and have friends

Article 19

Children should be safe from harm
No child should be hurt by a grown-up or child

Article 23

Children in need of special care should get it

Article 24

Children should have clean water, food that is good for them, a clean place to live and good health care

Article 28

Children should be able to go to school

Article 31

Children should be allowed to play

Article 32

Children should not be allowed to do dangerous work

Article 36

Children should be protected from activities which stop them from growing up in a healthy happy way

Article 42

Everyone, children and adults, should know about Children's Rights

Taken from First Steps to Rights UNICEF

The UNCRC has been ratified by all but two countries of the United Nations and it *applies to everyone, whatever their race, religion, abilities; whatever they think or say, whatever type of family they come from* (article2). Using the UNCRC as a foundation provides settings with a values framework that supports and guides the adults, permeating the whole ethos of the setting. In using a holistic approach which

starts with values and attitudes that put children's rights at the centre of planning children are supported in developing their skills, knowledge, attitudes and values that will in turn enable them to make sense of the world.

A setting that embraces this 'Rights approach' will value all members of the community and their contribution. It will be reflected by the way that adults relate to one another, how they interact with the children, how children interact with one another and how partnerships are built with the whole community. In a Rights Respecting Setting individuals are respected and valued and are enabled to understand about their own and other peoples' rights. They have opportunities to develop the knowledge, skills and values required to support one another in recognising that with Rights there are also Responsibilities to ensure that everyone has an opportunity to reach their full potential.

Through becoming familiar with the UNCRC adults will recognise that the articles support the basic needs of all children. By incorporating the UNCRC and using a 'Rights approach' to planning for *Enabling Environments in the Early Years* adults will ensure that it permeates all areas of provision providing equal opportunities for all and that this supports the individual in their learning.

Understanding the UNCRC

The UNCRC recognises that all children have basic needs and it is their universal right to have these met to ensure each child in the world can develop to their full potential. The Articles of the UNCRC fall into four specific categories:

- rights for survival
- rights for development
- rights for protection
- rights for participation

These categories are the basis of *Every Child Matters* and in the diagram *Linking the UNCRC and ECM* it can be seen how these inter-relate.

Linking the UNCR AND ECM

Be healthy	Achieve economic well-being	Stay safe	Make a positive contribution
↑	↑	↑	↑
Enjoy and achieve			
↓	↓	↓	↓
Rights for Survival	Rights for Development	Rights for Protection	Rights for Participation
Article 6	Articles 7 & 8	Article 9	Article 12
Children have a right to live	Children should have a name	Children should live with their parents or someone who cares for them	Children should be listened to and be able to say what they think about things
Article 19	Article 13	Article 19	Article 14
Children should be safe from harm	Children should be able to find out things	No child should be hurt by a grown-up or child	Children should be able to worship as they wish
Article 24	Article 23	Article 32	Article 15
Children should have clean water, food that is good for them, a clean place to live and good health care	Children in need of special care should get it	Children should not be allowed to do dangerous work	Children should be able to meet together and have friends
	Article 28	Article 36	Article 31
	Children should be able to go to school	Children should be protected from activities which stop them from growing up in a healthy happy way	Children should be allowed to play
Article 42: Everyone, children and adults, should know about Children's Rights			
UNCRC applies to all children whatever their race, religion, abilities; whatever type of family they come from			

What can children learn through children's rights?

“ Education should develop each child's personality and talents to the full ” Article 29 UNCRC

As with global education it is often said that very young children cannot understand rights but from an early age children have a strong sense of fairness and an ability to develop skills to understand complex concepts. In the early years it is essential that adults understand the UN Convention of the Rights of the Child so that they can help young learners to understand their rights through the activities and provision in their settings. Using the values framework of the UNCRC the adults will ensure that the ethos of the setting puts children at the centre of their learning so they can learn about themselves and others, widening it to their community and building out to the wider world. In all areas of the early years curriculum there are opportunities to incorporate the language of rights. Often this will be modelled by the adults in the way they interact with each other and with the children, e.g. children learn to listen to each other by recognising that they are given the opportunities to be heard and to express their own opinions (article 12). As children develop an understanding of their rights they will also learn their responsibilities to ensure that all children everywhere are able to access their rights.

For example:



To help adults and children to understand the basic rights the *Needs & Wants* activity produced by UNICEF is a good starting point. These are a set of cards that can be sorted into what we really need and things that we would like, eg water or fizzy drinks; fruit and vegetables or crisps and sweets. For very young children it is best to use a smaller selection of the cards that can be used to sort or as starting points for talking about the things we need. You may also consider making multiple sets of cards so that they can be used for matching activities and games.

Through working as a rights respecting setting the adults are ensuring that all issues relating to diversity and equal opportunities are addressed. And as children learn their rights and recognise that these are also the rights of all other children in the world the children learn to view others through '*rights lenses*' as evidenced by this Foundation Stage child at a school in Hampshire, UK: "*We are not all the same, but we have the same rights.*"

Planning for children's rights in play

“ All children have a right to relax and play, and to join in a wide range of activities “ Article 31 UNCRC

A rights respecting setting will be one that puts the Rights of the Child at the centre of their planning.

The curriculum will reflect the needs of all children within the setting and enable them to enjoy their rights with a growing understanding of how they can help others to access their rights. The curriculum will be interactive, experiential and accessible for all, with activities that link across the different areas of learning. This enables children to develop their understanding of rights in different contexts. The provision in all areas of the setting should not only reflect the diversity within the setting but also of its community and the wider world enabling children to understand that Children's Rights are not only for them or just the children in their setting but for all children wherever they live.

It has already been stated that the UNCRC offers all settings the opportunity to develop a values framework and provide a learning environment that respects the Rights of the Child. Within the convention governments are tasked with ensuring that all parents and children know and understand the UNCRC (article 42) therefore this responsibility becomes that of the adults within the setting. It is not possible nor is it appropriate to allot different articles of the UNCRC to individual areas of learning but it can be seen that many of the articles are a common thread through all areas of learning. When planning for learning outcomes it is essential that consideration is given to how the UNCRC links to these areas.

- Will children be able to have free choice and be able to access a wide range of resources?
- Will they be able to express themselves and share their opinions with others?
- Does the provision provide for the individual needs of the children

The way the setting is run and resources should reflect the principles embedded in the UNCRC as well as children having opportunities to learn about specific rights e.g. the need for clean water; nutritious food; a clean environment as set out in article 24. In the diagram *What connections can we make?* there are some questions to consider in planning a rights learning environment.

What connections can we make?

Areas of learning	UN Convention on the Rights of the Child	Some questions to think about
<p>Personal, social and emotional development</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Articles 7 Children should have a name 	<p><i>Do I know how to pronounce the names of all the children?</i></p>
<p>Communication, language and literacy</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Article 12: children should be listened to and be able to say what they think about things 	<p><i>Do I provide opportunities for children to make their own decisions?</i></p> <p><i>Do I listen and hear what the children are saying?</i></p>
<p>Problem solving, reasoning and numeracy</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Articles 13 14 and 15 these rights enable children to access information, learn about different things and participate 	<p><i>Do the children have opportunities to find things out for themselves through different media?</i></p>
<p>Knowledge and understanding of the world</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Article 24: provides for a healthy life style 	<p><i>Do the children know why we need clean water?</i> <i>Do the children know why we should save water?</i></p>
<p>Physical development</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Articles 28 and 29: right to education that should develop each child's personality and talents to the full. 	<p><i>Have I considered a rights respecting approach to conflict resolution using rights and responsibilities for adults and children?</i></p>
<p>Creative development</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Article 30: children have the right to use the language and customs of their families • Article 31 children should be allowed to play and join in a wide range of activities • Article 42: Everyone, children and adults, should know about Children's Rights 	<p><i>What opportunities do I give children to learn about other cultures? Do I challenge stereotypes?</i></p> <p><i>Does my provision reflect differences and similarities between people locally and globally?</i></p> <p><i>How can I be sure that the UNCRC is reflected in my setting? How do I do this in a way that young children will understand?</i></p>

In considering how to develop play opportunities that ensure the Rights of the Child are being met it will also be useful to refer to chapter XXX that covers the global dimensions in play. The diagram on page??? gives starting points for themes and ideas that could be incorporated in the planning of areas of play. Other useful starting points for helping young children to understand the basic rights required for survival and development are Families, Homes, Food, Water and Play. These are relevant topics that provide opportunities for both child initiated and adult initiated activities to raise issues.

As you plan the areas of play think about the way children will use the materials:

- are you giving them opportunities to make choices
- to decide for themselves which areas they will work in
- what they will do in those areas
- what resources they will use
- are you listening to what they are saying and what they think? (article 12)
- providing them with materials from different cultures (article 29)

For example if you are setting up a kitchen area does this include cooking utensils from other countries and do you provide opportunities for children to explore how these can be used

In setting up the different areas are you:

- reflecting the cultures of the children (article 30)
- providing for the different needs of the children (articles 29 & 23)
- considering what experience they may have had and how you will build upon their experiences

Resourcing children's rights in play

In the setting there should be photographs, books and artefacts that reflect the lives of children both locally and in other communities across the world and providing children with opportunities to see and handle objects. Young children enjoy relating and comparing the similarities and differences in their everyday lives to those in other parts of the world. Make sure that you include books that have dual text even if you don't have children that speak another language. Children will begin to recognise that there are different ways of doing things and appreciate similarities and differences laying the learning foundations for active global citizens.

Collections of photographs and objects that represent children's rights are also excellent resources as children can talk about them and develop their understanding of what are Rights and what are the Responsibilities. A variety of objects put together in a Feelie Bag or a Treasure Basket encourage the development of language and communication skills and provide opportunities for developing greater understanding of the global dimensions and children's rights.

Use photographs of the children participating in different activities that reflect different Rights and add an appropriate caption for example in the snack area there could be a picture of the children sharing healthy food and the caption might say *all children have a right to good food*. Where they wash their hands there could be a picture of children from another part of world and the caption could say *Look everyone needs clean water*. Presenting Rights in this way provides opportunities for children to talk and share their ideas and for you to share these with the parents as they collect their children or visit the setting.

A preschool in Gosport developed a welcoming display with comments from children, parents, and grandparents that reflected many of the articles of the convention. Here are quotes from parents:

- *as a preschool you are adapting the terminology associated with the children's rights so that children can accept and understand them, by doing this you are already facilitating the principles of Article 17*
- *you help us parents by working with us to consider what is best for our children (article 18)*
- *giving children the freedom to make choices increases their self-confidence, making them more likely to respect others, building a better generation (articles 12 & 29)*

Many of the resources in the chapter on global education will also be useful to support children in learning about their Rights but here are some additional ideas:

- **First Steps to Rights – activities for children aged 3-7 years**
pub: Hampshire DEC & UNICEF UK
An excellent handbook packed with ideas and activities that introduce young children to the basic rights of all children contained in the UNCRC. 15 colour photographs are included and instructions for developing a Feely Bag to introduce rights and responsibilities in a practical way to very young children
- **For Every Child – the rights of the child in words and pictures**
Pub: Hutchinson in association with UNICEF isbn: 0-09-176815-2
Beautiful picture book illustrated by several well know children's illustrations including John Birmingham and Shirley Hughes. The simple text covers fourteen core rights.
- **Young Children's Activity Book**
pub: Children's Rights Alliance for England www.crae.org.uk
This colourful young children's activity book takes children – and their parents/carers – through the rights in the Convention on the Rights of the Child using different themes such as 'be the best you can be', 'be happy' and 'be safe'. It includes easy-to-use stickers and is packed with other hands-on activities. Individual books £4.50 each including postage or a set of five for £20 including postage.
- **What makes me happy**
www.savethechildren.org.uk
DVD Save the Children & Ragdoll Foundation
6 films inspired by from round the world – young children can relate to the similarities in other children's experiences
- **Letterbox Library**
www.letterboxlibrary.com
carries a good selection of non-sexist, multicultural books that include children's rights

- **UNICEF UK**
www.unicef.org.uk
 on line resources and catalogue of resources relating to the UNCRC

This chapter has shown that the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child provides a values framework for the early years setting; that adults who understand the Convention and are familiar with the Rights of the Child can plan for a learning environment that has children at its centre and where everyone is valued. It can be seen that in a Rights Respecting Setting adults model a culture of respectful rights by the ways in which they interact with each other and the children; children have opportunities to learn about their rights and the rights of others and are given opportunities to express themselves and to listen to each other. Both adults and children learn that by having Rights they also have Responsibilities to ensure that these Rights are achievable for all.

Reflective questions

How will someone coming into your setting know that is it a Rights Respecting Setting?

How will you model respecting children rights when interacting with the children in the different areas of provision?

How will children and families benefit from a Rights Respecting Setting?

How will the staff benefit from a Rights Respecting Setting?

Can you get recognition for being a Rights Respecting Setting?

UNICEF has developed an award for settings that want to embed children's rights in their settings. Through working towards the award settings find they are on a journey with the children, staff and parents in creating excellent provision for the early years and a good foundation for children to develop to their full potential and recognise their place in the world as a global citizen. For further information on the Early Years Rights Respecting Settings Award go to www.unicef.org.uk

References

Hand, Pam 2003 *First Steps to Rights* pub UK: Hampshire DEC & UNICEF UK