

The Convention on the Rights of the Child

Plan's work internationally is focused on "Child Centered Community Development." This means that children are the center of everything we do. They are consulted on what life is like in the community, the problems and challenges they face, and the work that they would like to do in their communities. They are given the opportunity to put those ideas into motion. It is not only the well-being of the world's children that is important to Plan, it their VOICES that are essential.

The UN Convention on the Rights of the Child has been signed by 193 countries. It shares Plan's work putting children center stage and valuing their voices as full stakeholders in finding solutions to problems in their communities and their world.

Children's Rights touch every issue YUGA works on, globally and locally. So, learn more about the Convention and get active in time to celebrate its **20th Birthday on November 20th!**



How You Can Get Involved!

1. Educate
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 - i. A few definitions
 - ii. What is the Convention on the Rights of the Child?
 - iii. The Debate on the Convention on the Rights of the Child in the US
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 - a. Pass on the Child Rights Challenge! What do your friends know about children's rights?
 - b. Hold a debate
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 - d. A Day of Silence
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 - a. Join 2 fellow YUGA members and children from around the world in their call for child participation in the United Nations.
 - b. I have a voice!
4. Fundraise

The Convention on the Rights of the Child

Helpful Definitions

Convention on the Rights of the Child = CRC. An international human rights agreement specifically designed for children. It not only provides protection and provision for basic needs, but it also provides children the opportunity to participate in decisions that affect them.

Convention- A convention can also be called a treaty. It is an international agreement on something. When countries agree to a convention, it is a law in that country. As when countries sign a peace treaty after a war, countries signing a convention on human rights or anything else are internationally expected to follow the agreements in it. **(Convention = Treaty)**

Human Rights- Are basic rights and freedoms that all people are entitled to enjoy no matter race, religion, nationality, gender, culture, sexuality, or any other identification they may be discriminated against because of. They include civil and political rights, like the right to vote, as well as economic, social, and cultural rights like the right to work and to an education. They are protected by big organizations like the United Nations and by laws in individual countries.

NGO- Non-Governmental Organization. These are organizations like Plan who work on a wide variety of things. Many work on human rights in specific countries or globally. Because the organizations are not a part of the government of the country they work in they have more freedom. They can do their own work, they can question or protest against a government, and do advocacy work. An NGO can also work with governments depending on what will help most.

Ratify- To formally approve, agree, or accept. After the United Nations wrote the CRC countries could voluntarily choose to join it. Formally approving (ratifying) the Convention *makes it a law that the country must follow*.

- For some countries just signing it was enough to join the Convention. For the United States and some other countries, signing the document is not enough to make it official. That must be followed by Congress voting on the document. Once the Senate and the House of Representatives have approved it, the US will have ratified (or formally accepted) the CRC.

United Nations- The United Nations, or the UN, is an international organization set up after World War II where countries could meet in an attempt to maintain peace. The UN has expanded a lot in 64 years, and today the UN has offices in New York City, Geneva Switzerland, Vienna Austria, and Nairobi Kenya. 192 Countries are members of the UN. They work on a wide range of issues and projects from peacekeeping missions, humanitarian assistance like the World Food Program, and climate change, to the political work that needs to be done to keep it all going, like unifying international mail policies and monitoring human rights. The UN is not however, a government, it only has as much power as the governments who belong to it give it. It is a large and complex organization that can be slow moving and under funded, but they also manage to accomplish a lot of good work. Check out www.un.org for more details on the many aspects of the UN.

What is the Convention on the Rights of the Child?

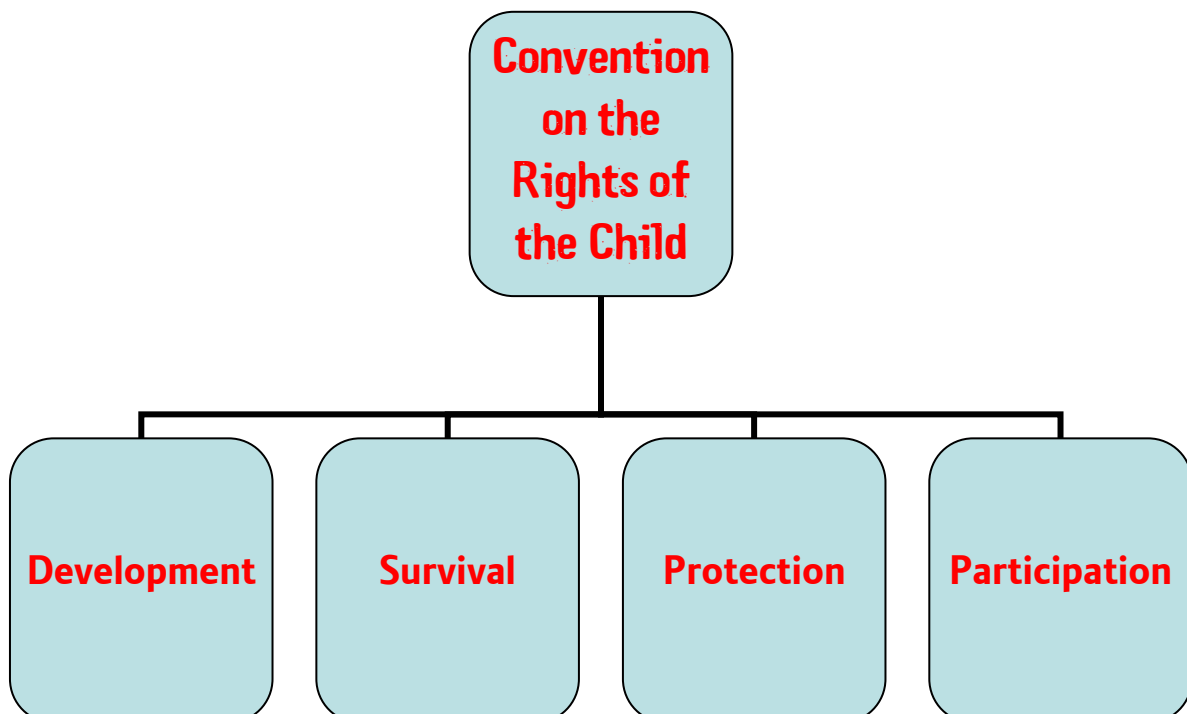
The Convention on the Rights of the Child (the CRC) is a Human Rights treaty. The creation of the document was started in 1979 by Poland and continued over 10 years until it was finally finished in 1989. Joining Poland, most other member states (countries) of the United Nations worked together along with Non-Governmental Organizations (NGOs), like Plan, to create the CRC. The CRC is similar to the UN Declaration of Human Rights, it is a list of human rights that all children have.

Human rights are something that every person has. They cannot be lessened or taken away. People have human rights simply on the basis that they are people and all lives should be valued equally and treated fairly. Human rights and documents like the Declaration of Human Rights, already apply to children. However, the Convention on the Rights of the Child was written to make sure that special needs of children were addressed, and to highlight the rights of children so they are not overlooked.

The Convention on the Rights of the Child is stronger than the Declaration of Human Rights though. The Declaration of Human Rights cannot be used in court or enforced in laws, the CRC can. The CRC is a Convention, an international treaty, meaning that all countries who sign it and ratify it, agree to make it law and must take actions to ensure it is followed in their country.

What does the CRC say?

Non-discrimination (that all children are equal and entitled to their rights), listed in article 2, is the overarching principle for human rights generally, and the CRC. Then, the CRC has **42 articles** that list human rights for children. These articles can be **divided into 4 main themes** or types of rights that children are entitled to. All four are equally important and they support each other.



Survival rights are rights that most people and countries can easily agree on. These rights include not only the very right to life, but to sufficient food and nutrition, clothing, shelter, and to an identity and nationality.

Development rights are the things needed for a child to fully mature as a person. They include education, play, fully experiencing and engaging in their culture, religious freedom, self-expression, and a healthy environment.

Protection rights are necessary because children, especially young children, can be particularly vulnerable to abuse and exploitation. These rights include not only freedom from abuse, violence, and exploitation, but also the protection of the family as the ideal safe environment, and special protection for refugee children and families divided by conflict.

Child participation is connected to all rights, but it is highlighted in article 12 in the CRC, which says that countries must ensure that all children who are capable of forming an opinion have the opportunity to express those views in all things that affect them. So, children have the right to voice their opinion on issues that matter to them, and to have their voices respected and taken into consideration. This touches every other right they have. The right to education, to survival, to practice their culture, to be free from abuse and exploitation, all of these should take the children themselves into account before creating laws or programs that will affect them. Children know best their own situations and have a lot to offer in finding solutions to their problems. Child Participation is meant to increase as a child's maturity and ability to participate evolve.

- Read the [child friendly version of the Convention on the Rights of the Child](#) for yourself, or have a look at the [complete version of CRC](#).

What does it mean that there is a Convention for Children's Rights?

The Convention includes articles that create a special committee to make sure children's rights are being protected. The Committee is a part of the United Nations and has its offices in Geneva, Switzerland. Every 5 years countries should present a report to the Committee. The report covers the laws in the country that affect children, and all the ways that children's rights are (or are not) being protected. The country will try to write their report as positively as it can, but the Committee also encourages countries to include areas and examples of where they are struggling or facing challenges. The Committee responds and offers suggestions to the reports, but cannot punish countries or enforce changes.

So while the CRC does become law in each country that ratifies, there is little that can be done to force countries to protect children's rights. No country is perfect and children's rights can be better protected everywhere. However, the CRC offers advocates for children a strong starting point. Because these rights are supposed to be laws, NGOs like Plan and advocates like you can use the CRC to point out failures, offer solutions, and work toward fully meeting every child's human rights.

Interesting Fact!

While the CRC applies to all children through the age of 18, the original article banning child soldiers set the age lower at only 15 years old. This meant that children could join armies and be used as soldiers at 15 instead of being protected until adulthood at 18.

Many countries had a problem with the age being lower than 18 and allowing countries to bring young people still considered children into wars. These countries put a reservation on the article meaning that they had a problem with that particular article and would not follow it. Instead of the reservation taking something away from children's rights (which can sometimes be seen as a problem with UN Human Rights Conventions), they meant to strengthen the article. They said their country would not allow children to fight in the army until age 18. The result was an Optional Protocol, a second document countries could choose to sign, being added to the CRC which raises the minimum age for fighting in armed services to 18.

The United States joined the Optional Protocol against Child Soldiers. In 2007, YUGA led an advocacy piece encouraging the US congress to support that action by passing the Child Soldier Prevention Act which keeps the United States from giving aid to countries who are known to use child soldiers. The Child Soldier Prevention Act was passed.

The Debate on Children's Rights in the United States

The Convention on the Rights of the Child was signed by the United States under President Clinton in 1995. However, it was not voted on by Congress therefore it was not ratified (see definitions) by the US. This means that the US is not bound to follow the CRC and grant children these rights. It is not law in the US.

The United States and Somalia are the only 2 countries who have not ratified the CRC. Somalia however, does not have a functioning government and cannot sign the Convention. There are many good reasons on both sides of the debate in the US.

What do you think?

For the CRC

- Promotes good child development in:
 - Education
 - Health
 - Participation & Responsibility
 - Culture
- Clearly defines children's rights that may have gone overlooked in previous human rights conventions. Children are included in general human rights documents, but children have special needs as well.
- Ensures child protection & government action to protect children. This ranges from refugees and family reunification to child abuse cases.
- Recognizes children as people who deserve full respect and support.
- Promotes community development by improving the lives of children & giving them a voice in their communities.
- US ratifying the CRC would offer an opportunity to model good human rights behavior that it holds other countries to.
 - Standing by 193 global peers who have ratified and are working toward fulfilling it.

Against the CRC

- Giving children rights may take away from parent's rights.
 - The CRC is too radical. Allowing children a voice in all matters affecting them could be taken as granting children the right to over-rule their parents in all decisions.
 - Child participation actually has a negative affect and promotes irresponsibility.
- Ratifying the CRC gives some of the United States' authority over its own laws to the United Nations.
 - The US must submit reports on US law and treatment of American children to the UN Committee on the Rights of the Child.
- The CRC will give too much power to the federal government over states and parents.
- Many people say that the US already offers excellent protection to its children, or that US laws already meet the requirements of the CRC.
- Many countries who have signed and ratified the CRC fail to meet its standards and have horrible human rights records. This is seen as the CRC having little actual effect on children's rights.



Whose Responsibility?

my right, my responsibility!

Objective:

Gain a better understanding of what it means to have rights
Explore more closely who is responsible for protecting human rights
Take responsibility for YOUR rights!

Activity:

1. Choose one right that you would like to look at from the Convention on the Rights of the Child. The example included is **Article 28: The right to education**. You could also look at **Article 12: The right to participate and be heard**, **Article 14: The right to practice your religion**, **Articles 32-36: Against exploitation, violence, and abuse**, or any other article you find interesting.
2. Talk about what that right means for your life.
What parts of your life would it affect? How does it affect children and young people both in developed and developing countries? What are the benefits? What are the challenges?
3. Discuss these questions before filling out the diagram provided:
What actions or activities need to happen to protect this right?
Who is responsible for doing those things?
How do actions and words in your day to day life protect or fulfill that right? (for example, being supportive of someone who is being bullied)
What is your role as a child to protect your rights?
4. Fill in the diagram with your answers. In the top circle place things that governments need to do to protect the right. In the left circle write things that parents need to do to protect their children's rights. In the right circle write down things children and young people themselves need to do to protect their rights. Where the circles overlap, put down anything that both or all three of the groups are responsible for.

Example:

The right to an education

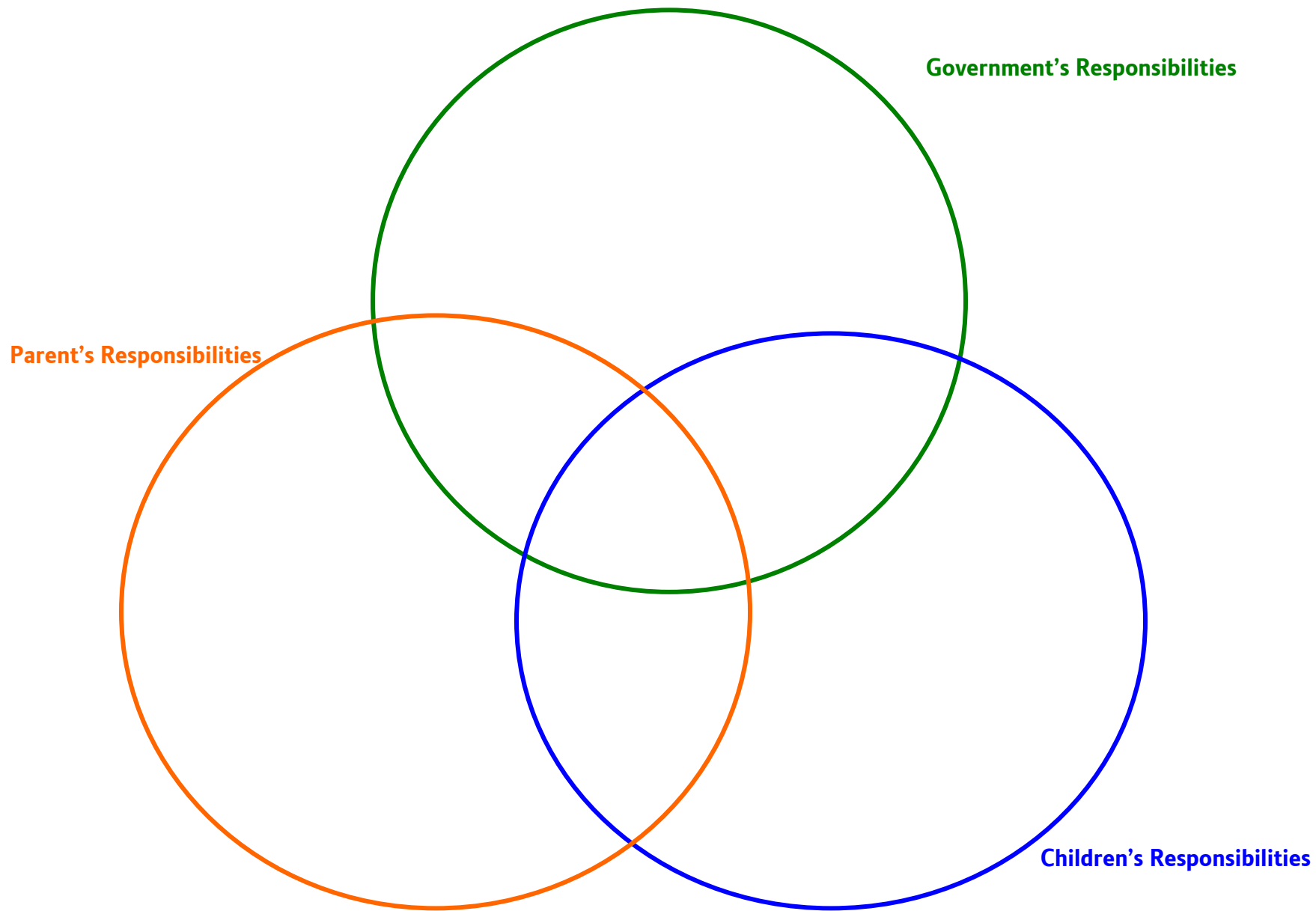
Governments: providing schools, paying teachers

Parents: allowing their children to go to school, paying taxes

Children: going to school and participating

EVERYONE: keeping violence and bullying out of schools so children are safe

- This is just a start; there are many more things that go into getting a good education!



Government's Responsibilities

Parent's Responsibilities

Children's Responsibilities



CRC Card Sort

Activity

- Divide students into small groups
- Give each group a packet with the 42 Articles cut into individual cards and the header cards, SURVIVAL, PROTECTION, PARTICIPATION and DEVELOPMENT
- In the small groups read the articles and discuss their meanings. While doing that, put each card under the header the group thinks it fits best
- The group may disagree on where it belongs or may decide that it belongs in multiple headings or half way between headings, but have a reason to share!

Follow up discussion questions

- Which cards did you place under SURVIVAL? Why? (Repeat for PROTECTION, PARTICIPATION and DEVELOPMENT).
- Did any cards belong in more than one pile? Why?
- Did any cards belong in every pile? Why?
- Why are there four types of rights?
- Do you think there would be a difference in which types of rights wealthy and poor countries make a priority? (Wealthy countries tend to take survival and protection for granted more, while poorer countries tend to focus on these at the expense of participation and development).
- Do some rights conflict with other rights? Other children's rights? Other adults' rights?
- How might conflicts between rights be resolved? Does having a right mean that you are entitled despite rights others have?
- Do the rights stop at 18? (No, they are followed by the UN Declaration of Human Rights.)
- Why might it be important for everyone to agree to the CRC with these particular rights and this particular wording?
- Do adults have a responsibility for children's rights? Do children have responsibility?

Summary of the **Survival** Articles
UN Convention on the Rights of the Child

Article 1

Everyone under 18 years of age has all the rights in this Convention.

Article 2

The Convention applies to everyone, whatever their race, religion, abilities, whatever they think or say, whatever type of family they come from.

Article 3

All organizations concerned with children should work towards what is best for each child.

Article 4

Governments should make these rights available to children.

Article 5

Governments should respect the rights and responsibilities of families to direct and guide their children so that, as they grow, they learn to use their rights properly.

Article 6

All children have the right to life. Governments should ensure that children survive and develop healthily.

Article 7

All children have the right to a legally registered name, the right to a nationality and the right to know and, as far as possible, to be cared for by their parents.

Article 8

Governments should respect children's right to a name, a nationality and family ties.

Article 9

Children should not be separated from their parents unless it is for their own good, for example if a parent is mistreating or neglecting a child. Children whose parents have separated have the right to stay in contact with both parents, unless this might hurt the child.

Article 18

Both parents share responsibility for bringing up their children, and should always consider what is best for each child. Governments should help parents by providing services to support them, especially if both parents work.

Summary of **Development** Articles
UN Convention on the Rights of the Child

Article 10

Families who live in different countries should be allowed to move between those countries so that parents and children can stay in contact or get back together as a family.

Article 22

Children who come into a country as refugees should have the same rights as children born in that country.

Article 23

Children who have any kind of disability should have special care and support so that they can lead full and independent lives.

Article 24

Children have the right to good quality health care and to clean water, nutritious food and a clean environment so that they will stay healthy. Rich countries should help poorer countries achieve this.

Article 25

Children who are looked after by their local authority rather than their parents should have their situation reviewed regularly.

Article 26

The Government should provide extra money for the children of families in need.

Article 27

Children have a right to a standard of living that is good enough to meet their physical and mental needs. The Government should help families who cannot afford to provide this.

Article 28

Children have a right to an education. Discipline in schools should respect children's human dignity. Primary education should be free. Wealthy countries should help poorer countries achieve this.

Article 29

Education should develop each child's personality and talents to the full. It should encourage children to respect their parents, and their own and other cultures.

Article 30

Children have a right to learn and use the language and customs of their families, whether these are shared by the majority of people in the country or not.

Article 31

All children have a right to relax and play, and to join in a wide range of activities.

Summary of **Protection** Articles
UN Convention on the Rights of the Child

Article 11

Governments should take steps to stop children being taken out of their own country illegally.

Article 19

Governments should ensure that children are properly cared for, and protect them from violence, abuse and neglect by their parents or anyone else who looks after them.

Article 20

Children who cannot be looked after by their own family must be looked after properly, by people who respect their religion, culture and language.

Article 21

When children are adopted the first concern must be what is best for them. The same rules should apply whether the children are adopted in the country where they were born or taken to live in another country.

Article 32

The Government should protect children from work that is dangerous or might harm their health or their education.

Article 33

The Government should provide ways of protecting children from dangerous drugs.

Article 34

The Government should protect children from sexual abuse.

Article 35

The Government should make sure that children are not abducted or sold.

Article 36

Children should be protected from any activities that could harm their development.

Article 37

Children who break the law should not be treated cruelly. They should not be put in prison with adults and should be able to keep in contact with their families.

Article 38

Governments should not allow children under 15 to join the army. Children in war zones should receive special protection.

Article 39

Children who have been neglected or abused should receive special help to restore their self-respect.

Article 40

Children who are accused of breaking the law should receive legal help. Prison sentences for children should only be used for the most serious offences.

Article 41

If the laws of a particular country protect children better than the articles of the Convention, then those laws should stay.

Summary of the **Participation** Articles
UN Convention on the Rights of the Child

Article 12

Children have the right to say what they think should happen, when adults are making decisions that affect them, and to have their opinions taken into account.

Article 13

Children have the right to get and to share information, as long as the information is not damaging to them or to others.

Article 14

Children have the right to think and believe what they want and to practice their religion, as long as they are not stopping other people from enjoying their rights. Parents should guide their children on these matters.

Article 15

Children have the right to meet together and to join groups and organizations, as long as this does not stop other people from enjoying their rights.

Article 16

Children have a right to privacy. The law should protect them from attacks against their way of life, their good name, their families and their homes.

Article 17

Children have the right to reliable information from the mass media. Television, radio, and newspapers should provide information that children can understand, and should not promote materials that could harm children.

Article 42

The government should make the Convention known to all parents and children.

Article 1

Everyone under 18 has all these rights.

Article 2

You have the right to protection against discrimination. This means that nobody can treat you badly because of your color, sex or religion, if you speak another language, have a disability, or are rich or poor.

Article 3

All adults should always do what is best for you.

Article 4

You have the right to have your rights made a reality by the government.

Article 5

You have the right to be given guidance by your parents and family.

Article 22

You have the right to special protection and help if you are a refugee. A refugee is someone who has had to leave their country because it is not safe for them to live there.

Article 23

If you are disabled, either mentally or physically, you have the right to special care and education to help you develop and lead a full life.

Article 24

You have a right to the best health possible and to medical care and to information that will help you to stay well.

Article 25

You have the right to have your living arrangements checked regularly if you have to be looked after away from home.

Article 26

You have the right to help from the government if you are poor or in need.

Article 6

You have the right to life.

Article 7

You have the right to have a name and a nationality.

Article 8

You have the right to an identity.

Article 9

You have the right to live with your parents, unless it is bad for you.

Article 10

If you and your parents are living in separate countries, you have the right to get back together and live in the same place.

Article 27

You have the right to a good enough standard of living. This means you should have food, clothes and a place to live.

Article 28

You have the right to education.

Article 29

You have the right to education which tries to develop your personality and abilities as much as possible and encourages you to respect other people's rights and values and to respect the environment.

Article 30

If you come from a minority group, because of your race, religion or language, you have the right to enjoy your own culture, practice your own religion, and use your own language.

Article 31

You have the right to play and relax by doing things like sports, music and drama.

Article 11

You should not be kidnapped.

Article 12

You have the right to an opinion and for it to be listened to and taken seriously.

Article 13

You have the right to find out things and say what you think, through making art, speaking and writing, unless it breaks the rights of others.

Article 14

You have the right to think what you like and be whatever religion you want to be, with your parents' guidance.

Article 15

You have the right to be with friends and join or set up clubs, unless this breaks the rights of others.

Article 32

You have the right to protection from work that is bad for your health or education.

Article 33

You have the right to be protected from dangerous drugs.

Article 34

You have the right to be protected from sexual abuse.

Article 35

No-one is allowed to kidnap you or sell you.

Article 36

You have the right to protection from of any other kind of exploitation.

Article 16

You have the right to a private life. For instance, you can keep a diary that other people are not allowed to see.

Article 17

You have the right to collect information from the media – radios, newspapers, television, etc – from all around the world. You should also be protected from information that could harm you.

Article 18

You have the right to be brought up by your parents, if possible.

Article 19

You have the right to be protected from being hurt or badly treated.

Article 20

You have the right to special protection and help if you can't live with your parents.

Article 37

You have the right not to be punished in a cruel or hurtful way.

Article 38

You have a right to protection in times of war. If you are under 15, you should never have to be in an army or take part in a battle.

Article 39

You have the right to help if you have been hurt, neglected, or badly treated.

Article 40

You have the right to help in defending yourself if you are accused of breaking the law.

Article 41

You have the right to any rights in laws in your country or internationally that give you better rights than these.

Article 21

You have the right to have the best care for you if you are adopted or fostered or living in care.

Article 42

All adults and children should know about this convention. You have a right to learn about your rights and adults should learn about them too

Participation

Survival

Protection

Development

Making Space

Background

The Convention on the Rights of the Child says in Article 12: Children have the right to say what they think should happen, when adults are making decisions that affect them, and to have their opinions taken into account.

This right requires mutual respect between children and adults to listen to each other and make the best decision possible for the people involved, children included. It also means that children have to be given the opportunity to have their voices heard in a space where they feel safe and respected.

Materials

Plain paper, pencils, markers or color pencils, or anything creative you'd like to work with

Activity

1. Think about all the places in your life where decisions are made, make a list on a brainstorming page. These could be the principal's office, the school overall, the city government, your home, anywhere where decisions that affect your life are being made. (You can also think of yourself as a part of a group of young people, like the student body, or your class)
2. Choose one place that stands out for you in your life, which ever place you'd like to work on.
3. How friendly to children is that place? Is it easy for you to go to the person or people making decisions and voice an opinion? Are you heard and taken into consideration when decisions there are made?
 - Divide the paper in half, on the first half, **Draw (or list)** the place you're thinking about and include any obstacles that you face to being included as a voice that matters in decisions being made that affect your (or your group's) life.
4. After thinking on these questions think about what would you change to make that place more youth friendly? What would make you able to speak in that space so that you felt your opinions were respected?
 - **Draw (or list)** on the other half of the paper how you think that place should look with all the things that would help you and other young people be a part of it.

Raise Awareness about the Convention on the Rights of the Child

Challenge your Peers!

Take the facebook quiz on children's rights, post your score and challenge your friends. All the information you need to pass with flying colors is in the toolkit. So, here's your chance not only to show up your friends, but to share some information about the issue!

Hold a Debate

The CRC hasn't been ratified in the United States and there is still a lot of controversy over it 20 years after it was written. Find out why and explore the issues with a class, the school, your chapter, or your community. Divide into teams of a few people each and research both the reasons to support the CRC and the reasons to vote against it. Then with someone to moderate, either a teacher or a student, have the sides debate. Give each side fair uninterrupted time to state their case before giving time to respond to the problems raised from both. At the end open it up for questions and discussion. *Respect is key to a successful debate!*

*It may not be easy to get enough people to fill both sides. Remember its ok to present a side you disagree with during the debate, but leave time afterward for people to talk about how they personally feel and to talk about the experience.

Poster the school with children's rights

This can be as simple as one right per poster, an A to Z of children's rights (keeping with the children's theme), or something more challenging like different benefits of children's rights or child participation.

Hold a Day of Silence

Engage your school in children's rights by running a day of silence to spread awareness about children that don't have rights. Design t-shirts or wear a specific color to look uniform and pledge to remain completely silent for the entire school day. This is a metaphor for the millions of children around the world who do not have a voice in what happens to them.

Advocate!

2 YUGA members joined 4 other young people from the Bronx, NY, Ghana, and Norway at the United Nations on October 15th 2009. Together they created a presentation and the importance and results of Child Participation to inform ambassadors to the UN as they write this year's resolution Children's Rights.

Read more about their experience being a part of the panel and speaking at the UN. [Youth Speak Up at UNICEF!](#)

Now, you can support their call for action to the United Nations Third Committee (who deals with human rights). What they're asking for:

- Making government more accessible to young people
- Youth parliaments and advisory boards
- Mandatory training of representatives to the United Nations on how to work with youth (since often youth already know how to work with adults!). This is to make a more friendly and safe environment for child participation.

Email YUGA@planusa.org to add your thoughts and your voice to the petition.

Secondly,

I have a Voice!

Plan Europe is taking your voice to the European Parliament. Decisions by European policymakers affect millions of children all over the world. You may be too young to vote on those decisions (or similar decisions made by your own governments), but your voice counts!

Add your voice to this campaign by the week of November 16th-20th and have it taken directly to the European Parliament in celebration of the 20th anniversary of the Convention on the Rights of the Child!

Go to www.ihaveavoice.eu to add your voice and upload a photo if you wish.