What is the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child (UNCRC)?

The countries of the UN have written conventions which say they agree to make the world peaceful and fair. The convention of the rights of the child means that governments should make sure that every child is treated fairly and equal. This is a promise made by governments to children to ensure that children’s rights are respected, protected and fulfilled.

What is Article 31 of the UNCRC?

Article 31 is a promise made by almost every government to children and young people. It says that children have the right to rest, play and take part in art and cultural activities. In particular, this says that every child has the right to play.

We have been listening to what our friends and other children have to say about their right to play and telling adults what they think.

We are using the information gathered to share with governments, council, teachers and parents to help them understand what they should do to make the right to play a reality for children in Northern Ireland and make it a better place.

As part of this project we have developed this poster on the UNCRIC General Comment 17 on Article 31 to make it easier to understand. Article 31 is about the right to rest, play and leisure as well as taking part in art and cultural activities. This information focuses particularly on the right of every child to play.
Most children and young people said they did have access to places where they could have some free time, and they appreciated that there were schools and after-school clubs there to give them an opportunity to relax and belong.

In many parts of the world, people think play is a waste of time. Parents, carers and Governments think: ‘do your homework’ and ‘study instead’. Many children and young people have had less time to play because of too much school work, too much home-work, too much pressure to prepare for tests or to do well in exams, too much work, too much pressure to listen to adults, too much pressure to be protective over children, too much pressure to be over-protected and kept indoors. This limits their freedom to play.

Some children and young people themselves possess a threat: to other children. The threat may be from threats of bullying, peer pressure to carry out high risks of taking risks by, or being压倒式 abusive to, other children.

Children must not be harmed. They do need some risk and challenge as this is a big part of play and close contact. Balance is needed: ‘good risk’ in play. Some supports for children’s learning growth and development.

Many children and young people in low-income urban areas must be left out of access to enough green spaces.

Most children and young people said they would like to see less cars, traffic and safer roads. Some people said that they want a better park, less grumpy [people], less rubbish and more youth clubs.

Mature adults do not know how to help with children’s play. Adults don’t understand that play is a natural part of childhood. It is important for children and young people’s health and development. In many parts of the world, children are going out in the evening, they complain about noise, they set too many rules for outdoor play and won’t let children hang out in shopping malls. Children playing out are seen as a nuisance and criticised even though they have done nothing wrong. Older children in particular are viewed as a threat and are moved away from areas.

For many children, their right to play is limited because they have to do adult-led activities after school like compulsory EFL, extra-class or domestic chores which leave no time for free play.

Children are entitled to free time that is not controlled by adults, even if doing nothing if they want. It is not good for children’s health and well-being for them to spend all their free time on programmed or competitive activities.

Many approaches to working with children tend to focus on health, nutrition and education. Getting a better understanding of the benefits of play is needed. Play supports and complements a range of areas for children and young people’s development.

In many parts of the world, children are denied their right to play because they are under too much pressure to do well in school. For example:

- Extra classes and homework may take up all children’s free time.
- School time-tables generally don’t recognise the importance of play.
- Teachers may not make opportunities for learning through play.
- Even nursery classes set targets and focus on formalized learning.
- So children have less chance to play.
- Contact with nature is decreasing in many schools with children having to spend more time indoors.

Children need to be able to go out to places that are free, and to socialise with their peers, Governments need to see what play looks like and where play takes place there for children, their right to play and their exploration of identity and belonging.

In places where there have been wars, children can be harmed by landmines and unexploded bombs. Children’s natural desire to explore increases the risk of them potentially stepping on a landmine.

Other things that put children in danger include high levels of crime and violence, community unravelling, drugs, gangs, risk of kidnapping and child trafficking, foods and water pollution.

Even where there are parks and playgrounds, they are often in places where children are unprotected and exposed to danger, so it is not a safe place for children to play. The only places where children are likely to find a place free from violence is at home with their parents.

What must Governments do to respect and protect children’s right to play? The right to play is a human right and it is a basic need of all children.

Schools must be child-protective policies for everyone involved, including children. They must protect children from bullying. They must also protect children from bullying. They must increase children’s access to the internet, but make sure they are safe online. Help children learn to protect themselves on-line and to allow a child to report any unsafety.

Respect & Fulfil Rights: Children have the right to play in a safe and secure environment. They should be allowed to play in places that are safe and free from harm.

Respect & Fulfil Rights: Governments must not stop children from enjoying their right to play.

Fulfil Rights: The government must make sure everyone gets the necessary services, provision and opportunities to help them enjoy their right to play.

In some schools with children having to go to school, Governments need to make sure children can enjoy their right to play, and must never do anything that stops the enjoyment of the right.

To make sure the right to play is respected, the government must:

- Provide support and guidance for parents and carers to help them understand the importance of play and create environments to allow children to play freely.
- Place public spending priorities on value of play and to change the negative attitudes which stop children from enjoying their right to play.

To make sure the right to play is protected, the government must:

- Make laws to make sure every child has access to natural space, parks and playgrounds without any kind of discrimination.
- Make laws to make sure that all organizations and businesses respect children’s right to play. The industry must protect working children, and better safety standards for playgrounds, toys and games etc.
- Protect children from harm. School staff must also protect children from bullying.
- Increase children’s access to the internet, but make sure they are safe online. Help children learn to protect themselves on-line and to allow a child to report any unsafety.
- Respect children’s right to play in open and disaster situations.
- Make laws to make sure children can stay so as to have normal life at home. There are many times, homes should be made available so they can go out and enjoy their play safely.
- Control the advertising of toys on television, especially those that encourage violence or emotional display. This is a form of violence and does not respect children’s rights.
- Protect children from violence. They should be large open spaces and nature, where children have priority over cars.
- Ensure children can play safely within their area by putting in road traffic measures, including speed limits, less noise or pollution, better lights, effective adult supervision.
- Make sure there are clubs, sport facilities, organized games and activities for both girls and boys of all ages that children can join.
- Make sure the environment is child-friendly and promotes children’s well-being, both in towns and in the countryside. This includes parks, community centres, sports fields and playgrounds which are safe and accessible to all children. These should be large open spaces which children can play in.
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