

# PARENTING THE 'RIGHTS' WAY:

**AN EDUCATIONAL  
RESOURCE FOR  
ONTARIO  
PARENTING  
COURSES**



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# FOREWORD FOR TEACHERS

## INTRODUCTION TO THIS CURRICULUM RESOURCE

Young people can improve both the quality of their lives and their educational experience by learning about their rights under the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child (the Convention). By engaging in a practical, active and thorough exploration of the Convention through Ontario Parenting courses, participating students will gain a deeper understanding of their rights and inherent responsibilities. This will in turn help provide a framework for their positive interactions with young children as caregivers or future parents.

This resource guide, *Parenting the 'Rights' Way*, adopts a children's rights framework, and the curriculum-connected activities enable students to explore the benefits of incorporating a rights-based approach in their work with children in a variety of settings.

The resource focuses on children's rights of particular relevance to those who plan to interact with children as caregivers, parents, teachers, etc.

## GOALS OF THE MANUAL

- Introduce the Convention and the concept of children's rights.
- Introduce a rights-based approach to parenting and working with children and youth.
- Introduce terminology related to human development.
- Introduce a range of socio-economic and cultural factors related to families and parenting.
- Provide practical, rights-based, child-centered activities.

## WHAT ARE CHILDREN'S RIGHTS?

The most basic assumption of the Convention on the Rights of the Child (the Convention) is that, like adults, children have rights because they are human beings. Thus, the principle of children's rights in Canada predates the UN Convention. It is a part of the Canadian Charter of Rights and Freedoms, human rights codes and acts across the country, and Canada's official policy of multiculturalism. What is unique about the Convention, is that it focuses specifically on children — defined as all human beings below the age of 18. The Government of Canada signed the Convention in 1990 and Parliament ratified it in 1991.

In signing the Convention, Canada is legally obligated to comply with each of the articles on the rights of the child and to report to the United Nations every five years, detailing how Canada is meeting its obligations.

The Convention assumes that each of the articles is of equal importance. It also assumes that with rights, come the responsibility to respect the rights of others. In practice, as children experience respect for their own rights, they are, in turn, more likely to respect those of others.

Under the Convention, Canada is obligated not only to respect the rights of children, but also to inform

both children and adults of these rights as outlined in the Convention. Teachers and schools play a key role in children's lives and can, therefore, be instrumental in educating them about their rights.

*Reference: Cape Breton University Children's Rights Centre*

## WHY A CHILDREN'S RIGHTS APPROACH?

There are two important reasons why a rights-based approach was chosen for teaching young people enrolled in Ontario parenting courses.

**Empathy versus charity** — When children and youth learn that the Convention has been ratified almost globally, they are readily engaged by the fact that it applies to all children. They come to identify with children and other young people around the world, and show increased levels of socially-responsible behavior and respect for the rights of all others. They realize that if the rights of other children can be violated, so can their own. This impels an understanding of global issues such as discrimination, for example, as a violation of inalienable, fundamental rights that they share with all children, and prompts an empathetic, rather than a charitable, response.

**Empowerment** — Action to reduce the infringement of children's rights is facilitated by rights-based pedagogy because it is participatory and democratic. Children learn the skills required for democratic action and they become more empowered to act. In previous children's rights initiatives, children have successfully initiated school breakfast programs after learning that children have the right to nutrition and realizing that, for many children in their community, this right was not realized.

For more information on the benefits of using a rights-based approach in your classroom, refer to: Howe, R.B. & Covell, K. (2005/2007). *Empowering Children, Children's Rights Education as a Pathway to Citizenship*, Toronto: University of Toronto Press.

## CURRICULUM EXPECTATIONS

All of the activities in this guide have been created to support the Ontario Parenting course curriculum expectations. Many of the activities can be used to contribute to a term grade.

✓ = **Activities for Term Grades** — Activities suggested for marking will be indicated by the ✓ symbol beside the activity title. Student reflections may also be used to contribute to a term grade (see Appendix D for a reflection template and rubric).

**R = Reflection** — Suggested activities for students to reflect on will be indicated by an **R** beside the activity title. Note, not all reflections need be marked; students may benefit from writing a private reflection. Students should be informed prior to writing their reflection whether or not they will have to share it with the teacher or other students. Teachers should be aware of sensitive issues that students may wish to reflect on privately.

The curriculum outcomes are stated in the following section. Outcomes reference points are provided for teachers throughout the resource to facilitate the monitoring of student progress and the assessment of student ability, knowledge, and understanding. The activities contribute to the following general learning outcomes:

### Parenting (HPC 30)

- Identify the laws that regulate children and parents in society (e.g., legislation governing child protection, child care, school attendance, child labour).
- Demonstrate, in practical settings, the appropriate use of a variety of techniques for parenting and disciplining young children (e.g., setting limits, establishing routines, offering choices, encouraging independence, helping children understand the logical consequences of behaviours, fostering mutual respect).

- Explain how communication influences parent-child relationships (e.g., promotes attachment, fosters mutual respect).

### Living and Working with Children (HPW 3C)

- Demonstrate an understanding of the universal rights of children (e.g., the right to food, shelter, safety, a peaceable existence).
- Summarize the laws and safety requirements that apply to parents and those who work with children.
- Correctly use terminology related to living and working with children.

### Human Growth and Development (HHG 4M)

- Demonstrate an understanding of the effects that various economic, political, and social factors (e.g., poor nutrition, low birth weight, illiteracy, technological change) can have on human development.
- Identify various human development initiatives that will assist countries in preparing themselves to meet new global challenges (e.g., as outlined by Keating and Hertzman and by McCain and Mustard).
- Correctly use psychological terms (e.g., bonding, attachment) and socioeconomic terms (e.g., poverty, social status) associated with human growth and development.

### Parenting and Human Development (HPD4E)

- Compare the changing needs of individuals and families throughout life.
- Identify how the needs of individuals and families are met at various stages of the life cycle.
- Describe the role of the community in meeting individual and family needs during childhood and adolescence, on the basis of practical experience in a community setting.
- Analyze the role of peers, youth workers, and others in the social and emotional development of school-age children and adolescents, as observed in a real-life setting.
- Demonstrate an understanding of the different ways in which children and adolescents perceive right and wrong (e.g., children view right and wrong in terms of reward and punishment; adolescents have internalized a code of moral behaviour).
- Compare how children of different ages demonstrate moral thinking (e.g., by taking a stand, showing empathy, recognizing injustice, demonstrating tolerance).
- Demonstrate an understanding of how the parental responsibility for the nutritional well-being of children and adolescents is best fulfilled.
- Explain how parents gradually increase the responsibility of children and adolescents for making informed decisions (e.g., offer toddlers two choices, offer preschoolers more choices, allow school-age children to decide for themselves).
- Explain the role of social-service organizations in supporting children and families when problems arise.

## PEDAGOGY

### Principles of a Rights-Based Pedagogy

UNICEF Canada supports the use of a rights-based, participatory and action-oriented pedagogical approach. Activities included in this resource are intended to expand students' critical and creative thinking skills. There is much room for interpretation so that teachers can easily adapt activities to best suit their classroom. Despite the flexibility of activities, each activity puts considerable emphasis on open-ended questions, interpretation, role-playing and discussion for both students and teachers. In consultations with youth during the development of these activities, there was a general consensus that activities featuring opportunities to discuss and role-play were more engaging, enjoyable and memorable for students.

To facilitate this we suggest that you set and post guidelines for group and class discussions. These should be developed with the students, linked with their rights, and can include such behaviours as listed below.

### GUIDELINES FOR GROUP AND CLASS DISCUSSIONS

- **You have a right to freedom of association. Establish group memberships.** The students should have input into decisions about group composition. Ideally groups should comprise about five students to enable each to participate fully. Maintaining the same group for a semester is beneficial as it allows for a comfortable and predictable environment in which to learn, and it avoids the need to repeatedly spend time determining groups.
- **You have a right to talk and a responsibility to listen.** When one person talks, the rest of the class looks at and listens to the speaker. The teacher can help by modeling listening.
- **You have a right to participate and a responsibility to promote the participation of others.** Each member of the group should have equal opportunity to express ideas. It can be helpful to have some sort of object that denotes turn-taking in the group that is passed around to each member of the group. The student speaks when holding the object and listens when not. If there is a dominant group member, the group may want to limit time - an egg-timer in the middle of the group can work here. Note also that the right to participation does not mean that the student must participate. A student's decision to not contribute at certain times or in relation to certain issues should be respected. Students also can be given the option of written comments that are kept confidential.
- **You have a right to freedom of expression and a responsibility to respect the rights of others.** The speaker may always disagree with others, but must never insult, ridicule or make judgmental comments. These violate the rights of the listeners. Similarly, rights to freedom of information are restricted by the need to respect the rights and reputations of others.

*Reference: Cape Breton University Children's Rights Centre*

### Performance Assessment

The use of an extensive range of assessment strategies, both reflective and traditional, allows for ongoing feedback to students and teachers, to ensure that intended learning outcomes are met. Assessment strategies should reflect the full range of student learning in relation to children's rights, and therefore must incorporate a variety of assessment activities. By giving students a variety of opportunities to demonstrate their knowledge and skills, the diverse backgrounds, needs, and learning styles of individual students may be taken into consideration.

Performance assessment may include, but need not be limited to:

- Formal and informal observations
- Teacher-made and other tests
- Oral and written communication tasks
- Self-assessments
- Learning logs/journals (what I did, what I learned, what questions I still have)
- Reflective writing
- Questionnaires
- Student-teacher interviews
- Peer feedback/assessment (perhaps ask what students think their friends who have not taken the curriculum would do in a particular situation vs. what they, themselves, would do)
- Activity-based tasks/problems
- Observation of what students do and say, making anecdotal records

- Development and application of specific criteria to assess student performance (e.g., rubrics, rating scales, checklists)
- Examination of students' work and application of criteria in assessment.

Reference: Cape Breton University Children's Rights Centre

## TIPS FOR TEACHING GLOBAL EDUCATION

- **Avoid Us vs. Them** — Avoid activities that teach an Us vs. Them mindset. (e.g., white vs. black, rich vs. poor, developed world vs. developing world).
- **Teach Complexity** — Challenge yourself to find both the positive and negative. Avoid showing only negative images/views and generalizing about huge categories of people, like Africans, or the developing world. This 'otherizes' people and can lead to stereotypes.
- **Beyond Charity** — Get students to identify activities and actions that go beyond giving money, by exploring local and national connections to global issues and including critical analysis of global systems that lead to unequal distribution of resources.
- **Foster Critical Literacy** — Foster critical thinking skills and the ability to see complexity in all issues. Avoid seeing issues in black and white terms (e.g., you're either with us or against us).
- **Take Multiple Perspectives** — Have students take multiple perspectives on an issue — try to have more than only two perspectives. Ask students to identify and explore perspectives other than their own.
- **Encourage Self-Reflection** — Encourage students to make connections between themselves, their own communities and countries, and global issues.
- **Foster Student Agency** — Use activities where students can apply their learning by taking concrete actions inside *and* outside the classroom.
- **Encourage Complex Identity Exploration** — Encourage activities where students can explore, appreciate and critically reflect upon the multiple communities and groups to which they belong (e.g., race, class, religion, local community, multiple nations, sexuality, ethnicity).
- **Connect Local to National and Global** — Encourage students to find connections between issues at their local level (e.g., school, neighbourhood) to larger national or global issues.
- **Go Beyond Social Studies** — Global education is not just for social studies. Encourage students to 'think globally' in all topics and across all grades and subject areas.
- **Don't Escape Debate** — Sometimes an aversion to conflict steers us away from tackling issues that may provoke disagreement and debate. Help students learn to disagree respectfully. Respectful debate and disagreement is a healthy part of a democratic classroom, and society!
- **Build On Students' Knowledge** — Research suggests that students of all ages — even primary students — are exposed to real life issues and are interested in learning more. Draw out their existing knowledge about global issues to help connect them to these issues.
- **Encourage Active, Inquiry-Based Learning** — Give students choice in what and how they learn, and find ways to promote democratic decision-making in your classroom and school.

## Dealing with Sensitive and Controversial Issues

The activities in this guide provide the opportunity for students to address some sensitive and potentially personal issues. Below are some suggestions and references for teachers who would like support in dealing with sensitive issues in their classroom.

### Dealing with abuse

The Ontario Human Rights Code requires all teachers and youth workers to report any evidence of child



abuse to the proper authorities. The Children's Aid Society's Web site provides a good overview of adults' responsibilities, contact information and processes on its FAQ page:

[oacas.org/childwelfare/faqs.htm#when](http://oacas.org/childwelfare/faqs.htm#when)

It is also important to provide students with ways to seek help on their own. The Kids Help Phone offers counseling and referral services for children and teens. For more information, contact: 1 866 863 0511 (TTY 1 866 863 7868); [kidshelpphone.ca/teens/home/splash.aspx](http://kidshelpphone.ca/teens/home/splash.aspx)

### Dealing with sensitive issues

If students learn to listen to and respect the thoughts and feelings of others, then handling sensitive issues is less problematic. Meaningful dialogue requires an environment that feels safe.

Nonetheless, there may be issues raised for discussion that can cause discomfort to either students or teachers. Although some may prefer to avoid dealing with sensitive issues, their discussion in the classroom allows for invaluable learning about diversity and tolerance in a safe environment. When students are dealing with controversial issues, it is particularly important that they understand that it is acceptable to ask questions and to seek further information. They must also understand that it is important to listen respectfully to all opinions, with the underlying premises that there is no one right way to think and that there is no such thing as a stupid question.

If students present thoughts that are obviously 'wrong' or biased (e.g., anti-gay comments), the teacher should respond by asking questions in a non-judgmental way to challenge the students' assumptions, and to promote research into learning more about the issue. Of course, no student should be pressured to divulge personal information.

Students, when uncertain, may ask for the teacher's opinion. It usually is preferable for the teacher to state that there are a variety of perspectives and offer more than one before redirecting the question to the rest of the class. Remember, the teacher should talk with the students rather than at them.

### GUIDELINES FOR DEALING WITH SENSITIVE OR CONTROVERSIAL ISSUES IN CLASS

- Set clear objectives for activities (e.g., provoke debate, learn conflict management skills, express opinions clearly and respectfully, learn to disagree respectfully).
- Set clear ground rules for class discussions with students.
- Don't avoid or escape disagreement. This shows discomfort.
- Create a mutually respectful classroom climate from the beginning.
- Encourage students to see multiple perspectives on an issue – not just one or two.
- Foster active listening skills (e.g., have students rephrase or write down others' opinions).
- Encourage students to see that no one person has the 'correct' or only answer.
- Encourage students to recognize the differences between opinions, feelings, beliefs, perspectives and facts.
- Encourage students to reflect on their own perspectives and how their backgrounds, biases and beliefs affect their reactions and opinions in relation to controversial topics.
- If conflict does erupt, remind students of your agreed ground rules.

For further information and resources on dealing with sensitive issues in your classroom, the Toronto District School Board has released Guidelines for Dealing with Controversial and Sensitive Issues – [tdsb.on.ca/\\_site/ViewItem.asp?siteid=15&menuid=8975&pageid=7864](http://tdsb.on.ca/_site/ViewItem.asp?siteid=15&menuid=8975&pageid=7864); as well as a Teaching Resource for Dealing with Controversial and Sensitive Issues – [tdsb.on.ca/wwwdocuments/programs/Equity\\_in\\_Education/docs/CSI%202003.pdf](http://tdsb.on.ca/wwwdocuments/programs/Equity_in_Education/docs/CSI%202003.pdf).

# Family Role Play



## PURPOSE:

By the end of the activity, students will have:

- Learned and evaluated some solutions to conflict
- Discussed techniques used in child care
- Discussed some of the challenges faced by parents or caregivers.

## RESOURCES:

- One photocopy of the role card for each student
- Teachers may wish to do this activity in the jigsaw format

## ACTIVITY

1. Have students form groups of three and give a different role card (A, B or C) to each member of the group. Instruct them to read these over in silence without showing the others in the group.
2. Ask students to argue their own perspective while discussing ways to resolve this situation. They should use the questions below to guide their discussion.

### Discussion Questions

- What concerns you about this particular situation?
- What do you view as the cause of your situation?
- What needs are not being met?
- What would you change to make this situation better for you?
- How could you change this situation to make it better for everyone involved? Be sure to consider Joey's rights as a child when discussing this question.



### A. Babysitter

I do not really enjoy babysitting. I'm not very good at it. I do not like Joey, the 4-year-old I typically babysit. He always throws a temper tantrum when his father leaves for work. I don't know how to calm him down. If I'm in a good mood and have patience, I will try to bribe him to calm down by offering to play his favorite game – which usually takes two long hours to play – or I'll offer to bake cookies for him. Sometimes, if I've had a bad day at school, I don't have the patience to negotiate with him. Instead, I'll just yell at him and send him to his room where he'll cry. I may quit if Joey continues to be such a brat.

### B. Father

Being a single parent is hard. Joey's mother is not in the picture and I have no family to help with child care when I'm working. All of the daycare facilities have waiting lists and it's hard to find a babysitter to work past 10:30 p.m. (most available babysitters are in high school and have a curfew). Because of this, I can only work afternoon shifts from 3:00 p.m. to 10:00 p.m. I do not enjoy working in the afternoon, but I do love spending lots of time in the mornings with Joey. Unfortunately, Joey gets very upset when I have to leave for work. I hate to see him cry, so I try to sneak out while the babysitter distracts him.

### C. Joey

I love my dad so much. We have so much fun playing together every morning. I hate when he has to go to work and sometimes it makes me cry. It makes me really sad when I don't even get to say goodbye to him before he leaves. I try not to cry but I can't help it and sometimes my babysitter will yell at me. I wish my dad didn't have to work and we could play all day.