CONVENTION ON THE RIGHTS OF THE CHILD
THE UNITED NATIONS
CONVENTION ON THE
RIGHTS OF THE CHILD
– THE CHILDREN’S VERSION

The United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child is an important agreement by countries who have promised to protect children’s rights.

The Convention on the Rights of the Child explains who children are, all their rights, and the responsibilities of governments. All the rights are connected, they are all equally important and they cannot be taken away from children.

This text is supported by the Committee on the Rights of the Child.
A child is any person under the age of 18.

All children have these rights, no matter who they are, where they live, what language they speak, what their religion is, what they think, what they look like, if they are a boy or girl, if they have a disability, if they are rich or poor, and no matter who their parents or families are or what their parents or families believe or do. No child should be treated unfairly for any reason.

Governments must do all they can to make sure that every child in their countries can enjoy all the rights in this Convention.

Children must be registered when they are born and given a name which is officially recognized by the government. Children must have a nationality (belong to a country). Whenever possible, children should know their parents and be looked after by them.

Children should not be separated from their parents unless they are not being properly looked after – for example, if a parent hurts or does not take care of a child. Children whose parents don’t live together should stay in contact with both parents unless this might harm the child.

Children have the right to their own identity – an official record of who they are which includes their name, nationality and family relations. No one should take this away from them, but if this happens, governments must help children to quickly get their identity back.

Children can join or set up groups or organisations, and they can meet with others, as long as this does not harm other people.

Parents are the main people responsible for bringing up a child. When the child does not have any parents, another adult will have this responsibility and they are called a “guardian”. Parents and guardians should always consider what is best for that child. Governments should help them. Where a child has both parents, both of them should be responsible for bringing up the child.

Governments must protect children from violence, abuse and being neglected by anyone who looks after them.

When children are adopted, the most important thing is to do what is best for them. If a child cannot be properly looked after in their own country – for example by living with another family – then they might be adopted in another country.
Children who move from their home country to another country as refugees (because it was not safe for them to stay there) should get help and protection and have the same rights as children born in that country.

Every child who has been placed somewhere away from home - for their care, protection or health - should have their situation checked regularly to see if everything is going well and if this is still the best place for the child to be.

Children have the right to education. Primary education should be free. Secondary and higher education should be available to every child. Children should be encouraged to go to school to the highest level possible. Discipline in schools should respect children's rights and never use violence.

Children have the right to use their own language, culture and religion - even if these are not shared by most people in the country where they live.

The government should protect children from sexual exploitation (being taken advantage of) and sexual abuse, including by people forcing children to have sex for money, or making sexual pictures or films of them.

Children have the right to be protected from all other kinds of exploitation (being taken advantage of), even if these are not specifically mentioned in this Convention.

Children who are accused of breaking the law should not be killed, tortured, treated cruelly, put in prison forever, or put in prison with adults. Prison should always be the last choice and only for the shortest possible time. Children in prison should have legal help and be able to stay in contact with their family.

Children accused of breaking the law have the right to legal help and fair treatment. There should be lots of solutions to help these children become good members of their communities. Prison should only be the last choice.

Children have the right to the best health care possible, clean water to drink, healthy food and a clean and safe environment to live in. All adults and children should have information about how to stay safe and healthy.

If the laws of a country protect children's rights better than this Convention, then those laws should be used.

Governments should actively tell children and adults about this Convention so that everyone knows about children's rights.

These articles explain how governments, the United Nations - including the Committee on the Rights of Child and UNICEF - and other organisations work to make sure all children enjoy all their rights.