

A few simple suggestions for celebrating the twentieth anniversary of the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child on 20 November

Things pupils can do:

- **make and send out anniversary greetings cards to your MP and local councillors wishing them a 'Happy Children's Rights Anniversary'**

Children could design their own anniversary cards and send these out to their local MP and councillor.

- **start a children's rights 'pledge' wall**

Pupils could start a pledge wall inviting children, parents, teachers, governors and visitors to the school to make their own personal commitments about what they are going to do for children's rights. The pledge wall could also be used for people to leave messages of support for children's rights.

- start collecting messages of support for children's rights
- **write to editors of local newspapers asking them to only report positive messages about children and young people on 20 November, and say why they are doing so**

Specimen letter:

Dear Editor

RE: 20 November 2009 - Twentieth Anniversary of the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child

Twenty years ago the United Nations adopted its Convention on the Rights of the Child. In doing so, it made a solemn commitment to all the children of the world about the rights that we are all entitled to.

On this special day, we are writing as pupils from [] School to ask that in support of our rights your newspaper agrees to report only positive messages about children.

We thank you for your time and consideration.

Yours sincerely,

[signed]

Things schools can do:

- **making a pledge to support children learning more about their rights**

Under Article 42 of the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child the Government must make sure that everyone, including children, are told about their rights under this convention. One way of addressing this is through schools, and many are already taking this forward through Unicef UK's 'Rights Respecting Schools' programme. In addition, as part of this twentieth anniversary pack, CRAE has put together some information on a range of teaching resources that are available to schools.

- **setting off anniversary balloons at 11am on the day**

Why not order a set of sky blue balloons (from any good High Street retailer!) and show solidarity with other schools and services around the country by launching these at 11am.

- **Making children's rights the theme of the 20 November school assembly** (below are five suggested themes)

Suggested Theme 1: What do we mean by rights?

Specimen script:

Some people feel uncomfortable with the idea of rights. They think that they lead to conflict or unreasonable demands from particular groups. Some think that rights should have to be earned. Everyone, including children, have rights because they are human beings. Rights are only basis statements about how people should behave towards each other. Some rights exist because Parliament has passed laws – the right to education, to free healthcare or to a lawyer if charged with an offence. These rights apply to people in this country. However, there are also rights which apply to all the children of the world. For example, in 1987, the United Nations agreed a set of rights in what it called its Convention on the Rights of the Child. This has been agreed by almost every country in the world. The rights in the Convention are universal – they apply to children wherever they are - whatever their age, whatever their background. In 1991, the Government signed up to the Convention, meaning that it should take action to ensure that all the rights in the Convention are respected for children in this country.

Suggested Theme 2: Why children's rights are important

Specimen script:

- *The values upon which our society is based is very much about respect for basic human rights. Respect for human rights sets standards for the way we treat each other. And, these principles are just as important for children as they are for adults.*
- *Parents, teachers and other adults have to make decisions on behalf of children. If we do not listen to children, and take their views seriously, we cannot make effective decisions on their behalf.*
- *Children need protection. They need adults who will keep children safe until they are old enough to provide it for themselves.*
- *As children grow they gradually take on more responsibility for themselves. To be able to take responsibility children need to be helped and encouraged to participate in making decisions that affect them. They need opportunities to learn and to exercise rights and responsibilities safely, sometimes taking risks and sometimes getting it wrong.*
- *Children learn through the experience of having their rights respected how to respect the rights of others. They learn that with rights comes that responsibility.*

Suggested Theme 3: "Haven't children already got too many rights?"

Specimen script:

Of course children in this country do have many rights. By and large we do provide for our children and we have introduced laws to ensure that children are protected. We no longer allow children to work in factories or up chimneys. We have banned caning in schools. We have systems for trying to protect children. We deal with children in trouble with the law differently from how we treat adults. We are free education and healthcare for all children. The government wants to make this the best place in the world for children to grow up.

But we still fail children in many ways. Just look at the number of children living in poverty (3 million); the number who experience violence, abuse and neglect; and, the number who are homeless. It then becomes clear that for some children their basic human rights are not respected. And too often children are not listened to and their views are not heard – by politicians, by parents, by teachers, by the media or even by their families.

Although attitudes towards children have begun to change for the better, many children still feel excluded by the adults around them. They often feel that adults don't bother to find out what they think. Yet, we know that there are benefits to both children and adults when children are consulted and involved.

Suggested Theme 4: The importance of listening to children

Specimen script:

The right to have your opinion applies to all children who are able to express a view. It does not mean that children should be allowed to do whatever they want. But, what it does recognise is that, although children may not know as much as adults, they do know how they feel about things and what is important to them. It is children that have to live with the consequences of decisions made about them. They should have the opportunity to say how they feel and what they would like to happen. Those views should be listened to with respect.

Some adults find it difficult to listen to children, believing that 'adults always know what is for the best'. But adults who are confident enough to ask children for their views often find that children are generally more thoughtful and responsible than we often give them credit for. When you listen to children you are telling them that they matter.

Suggested Theme 5: Our pledge for children's rights

Specimen script:

Almost all adults want to do what is best for children. Respecting the rights of children is all about doing what is best for them. Rights inform the relationships that children have with important adults in their lives. If followed, this can only make the quality of children's lives better. Our commitment to children's rights can be summed up by five key messages:

➤ ***Listening to pupils***

Children should be allowed to express their views on issues that concern them and their views should be treated with respect and consideration.

➤ ***Respect for pupils***

Children should be encouraged and helped to make decisions for themselves, where they are able and confident to do so. The demands we make on children should expect them to make decisions that they do not feel comfortable having to make.

➤ **Negotiate but then stick to agreed boundaries**

Allowing children to express views does not mean that they always get their own way or that decisions have to be renegotiated all the time. Once decisions have been discussed and decided it is reasonable to expect them to be respected.

➤ **Allow positive and consistent discipline**

All rules and punishments should be to encourage positive behaviour, give children consistent messages and never involve anything likely to cause harm.

➤ **Accepting children as individuals**

Children, whilst being part of the school, are nevertheless individuals within the school and their personal identity should always be respected.

• **Join in the national campaign for inclusion of the UNCRC in UK law**

Schools can become members of CRAE in their own right for the 'special' anniversary price of only £40 per annum.

Membership entitles schools to access a range of materials supporting children's rights, gives them access to acknowledged expertise in the field and provides good links for getting pupils experience of campaigning at national level.

It also makes a commitment to the rights of children that is likely to be recognised by both Ofsted and Schools Councils UK.