

RIGHTS RESPECTING SCHOOL AWARD: CLASSROOM CHARTERS OR AGREEMENTS

Establishing and building shared values for a rights respecting classroom.

The collaboration between children and adults in age- and ability-appropriate ways to agree the behaviours for a rights-respecting classroom / school area has proved to be a very valuable part of the process of making the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child (CRC) a real and meaningful guide to action on a day-to-day basis.

1. WHAT IS A CLASS CHARTER / AGREEMENT?

A charter / agreement for a right respecting classroom (or any other part of the school) sets out:

- those rights selected from the CRC which are deemed to be most relevant. The rights should be worded in language that is meaningful to the children.
- beside each right, the actions agreed between all children and adults to ensure that the rights can be realised and enjoyed by everyone
- who agreed to the charter. This is often done by all signing it.

What is agreed is then set out in a way that can be easily seen around the room / area.

Charters / agreements can be developed with the active participation of children from infant onwards. They act as a reminder of the shared values and principles based on the CRC and are applicable to all.

2. WHAT IS THE AIM OF THE CHARTER / AGREEMENT?

The aim is to make the Convention a real and meaningful guide to action on a day-to-day basis. This means that both the initial process of creating the charter / agreement and its subsequent use should be inclusive and unite the children and young people and adults in the class. The charter / agreement develops a sense of ownership of the classroom and learning. Once developed it becomes a point of reference for the class and once signed by the teacher, assistants and pupils it signifies a shared enterprise and acts as the 'social glue' which binds everyone together. We would recommend that children also have a say in where and how it is displayed. These decisions will be influenced by the setting, area and age of those involved.

3. HOW SHOULD THE CHARTER / AGREEMENT BE CREATED?

Children and adults in a class or tutor group familiarise themselves with the articles of the CRC (using child friendly summaries if appropriate) Those rights they decide are the most important in relation to what is done in that classroom / area are selected and voted on. This should be done in a way that is age and ability appropriate. (There are examples of possible approaches below).

The **process** of developing a shared charter / agreement is as important as the end product. The process should be participatory, inclusive and build on prior learning about the difference between wants and needs and the importance of everyone's rights being respected. For very young children rights may need to be reworded (using linguistically appropriate words such as 'need' or 'should').

There is guidance on using effective participation with children and young people in the Primary resources course within the RSA support website.

Pupil Voice Wales has developed an interactive session looking at and prioritising rights. There are also resources available on the **Lets get it Right** website.

www.uncrcletsgetitright.co.uk
www.pupilvoicewales.org.uk

An approach to developing a class charter / agreement with primary school pupils (developed by Portway Junior School and Gwyrsoydd Primary School)

- Recap on the CRC
- Consolidate why the convention was agreed upon and why it exists, and the importance of all children under 18 having rights. Extend to include the Human Declaration of Rights for adults and the similarities and differences.
- Choose the articles, from the CRC, that specifically relate to their lives in school (for example, Articles 3, 12, 13, 15, 16, 17, 19, 23, 24, 27, 28, 29, 30, 31, 37, 39) then get the children to discuss how and why these relate to life in school.
- Diamond nine the children's choices making sure they can justify their reasons (these have differed in each class depending on the cohort, ethnic backgrounds etc).
- Use the 6 most popular and reasoned article for the class charter / agreement; the children need to identify the behaviours to be considered by EVERYONE in the class to ensure ALL children can enjoy the rights identified.
- Agree the wording and ownership by the class / tutor group or school. Vote democratically about its design and placement within the school / class. Allow time for discussion around any issues that the children have – for example not signing, wording, if new people arrive.
- Link the wording on the charter / agreement to the CRC
- Regularly revisit and tweak the charter / agreement as a class, a good exercise if new people join the class, good for circle time and Philosophy for Children activities and helps with children settling into a new class / school.

4. A RIGHTS BASED APPROACH

The three main points to remember are:

- Rights are something everyone has as a result of being born. No one has power to give them to you or take them away from you. There are no conditions attached to them.
- When we learn about rights, we learn that not only do we have them ourselves, but everyone else has them too. When we are enjoying our own rights, therefore, we have a duty to make sure that we do so in a way that doesn't deny other people theirs. A rights-based approach encourages responsible behaviours.
- Adults working with children need to model rights respecting behaviour and use rights respecting language in order to reinforce the benefits of this values system.

It is important that adults and children alike learn not only that all children should be rights respecting but also that **adults** bear the responsibility for ensuring these rights are known about, understood and realised (article 42).

This means that:

- parents and carers are responsible for ensuring they model rights respecting behaviour in bringing up their children
- schools are responsible for promoting a rights respecting environment
- children learn to become rights respecting global citizens

As children mature, their understanding of a rights respecting way of life grows more profound. They learn to distinguish between absolute and relative rights. They see the importance of adults and young people upholding the values and principles in the charters / agreements to which they have subscribed both in day-to-day matters and in terms of issues locally and globally. This will be reflected in the increasing sophistication of the charters / agreements.

The end product itself should be subject to review by the class / school from time to time in order to reinforce / refresh commitment and, importantly, to allow for refinement of understanding and expression. Even if a school decides to adopt an overarching charter / agreement for a rights respecting school, there should be provision for a regular revisiting, and refreshing of commitment to it by all.

Additionally, children who have been using charters / agreements for a length of time have provided extremely positive feedback on the impact they have had. Children and young people have reported that classroom charters / agreements have been beneficial as they understand that everyone has rights and the reasons behind classroom / school rules.

"I now understand that everyone has rights not just me, which has made a big difference to the behaviour in our class"

Year 5 pupil, Cantref Primary School

5. IN WHAT WAY IS IT DIFFERENT FROM 'GOLDEN RULES' OR 'CODES OF BEHAVIOUR'?

The class charter / agreement is **not a direct behaviour management tool**. It indicates that a significant part of the role of the school and the teacher is to help realise the rights of the child. Rules are something which are often externally imposed, whereas charters / agreements are democratically negotiated using an internationally agreed values framework. A charter / agreement should begin a process of replacing rules with mutual agreement.

"When we had class rules we didn't know why and they meant nothing to us. Now we have a classroom charter, we understand what we have to have (rights) and how our behaviour can affect somebody else from having their rights. I now understand how my behaviour can affect other children"

Year 6 pupil, Pembrey Primary School

6. HOW MIGHT THE CHARTERS / AGREEMENTS BE PRESENTED?

The charter / agreement should always be rooted in articles of the Convention with pupils selecting and expanding on the articles that they consider are most appropriate.

It is crucial during all the work on charters / agreements that staff and children fully understand that rights are unconditional; adults are duty bearers to ensure children's rights are realised. The classroom charter / agreement is to ensure children appreciate the effect THEIR OWN behaviour can have on either providing or denying another child of THEIR OWN right.

Examples of charters

Three columns showing the behaviours to be considered by EVERYONE in the class to ensure ALL children can enjoy the rights identified

One suggestion is to set out the selected rights in one column and then add two more columns to allow children and adults to set down what actions they will take to ensure these rights are realised and enjoyed by all:

What children agree to do	CRC	What adults will do to realise this right
Play in a way that does not stop others playing	Article 31 (leisure, play and culture). Every child has the right to relax, play and join in a wide range of cultural and artistic activities	Ensure provision for range of play opportunities

Two columns showing rights and actions to realise rights

Creating two columns: one each for 'Rights' and 'Actions to realise rights' has been a popular approach. With this form of charter / agreement it is important, however, to avoid overloading the Actions column and to ensure that children do not end up with a charter / agreement that only refers to their actions.

When looking at actions to realise rights it is not unusual for children / young people to identify more than one action. It is quite reasonable to have more than one action allied to a right.

Right	Actions to realise rights
<p>All Children have this right:</p> <p><i>To be heard and opinions listened to</i></p>	<p>Children should:</p> <p><i>Listen to others speaking and respect other people's opinions</i></p> <p>To ensure all children in the class enjoy the same right. By not allowing others to speak, children can deny another child from enjoying this right</p>

Venn diagram showing the actions to be considered by EVERYONE in the class to ensure ALL children can enjoy the rights identified

Another approach illustrated in the example below uses a Venn diagram. Each article is set out and underneath the article **children / young people** and **adults** list the actions they need to take to realise the right. In the middle is a circle showing the actions to realise the right that **both** parties need to take.

The example below is from Wallasey Secondary School:

Wallasey School Charter

Article 19 of the UNCRC - Children and young people have a right to be protected from violence, abuse and neglect.

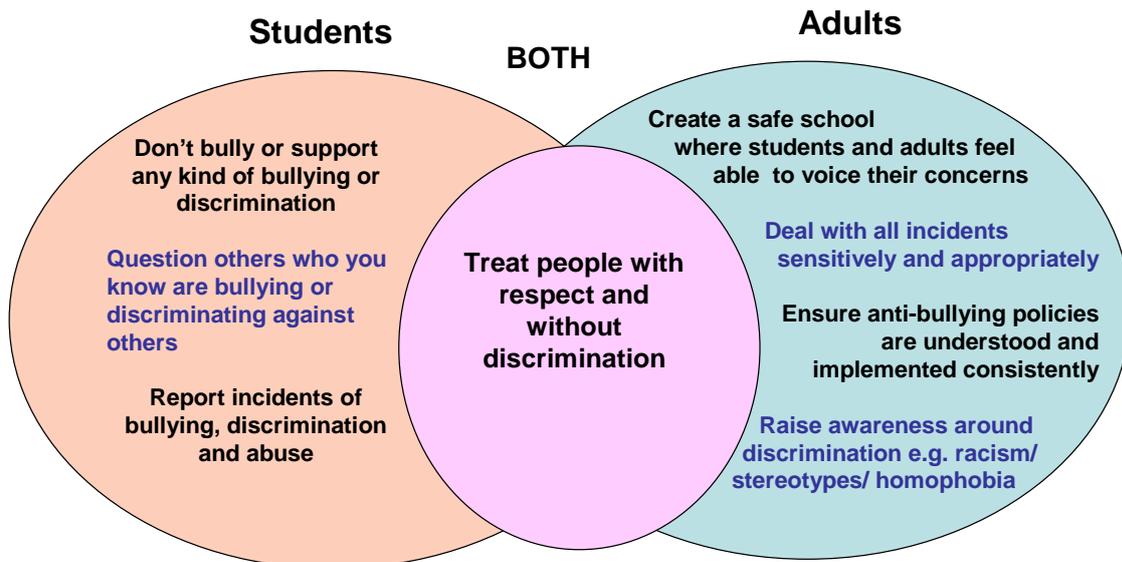
This covers:

Safety

Bullying

Discrimination

SEAL



7. DO CHARTERS / AGREEMENTS VARY WITH THE AGE OF CHILDREN?

Yes, initially with very young children they may be very simple and use images instead of words or in addition to words. As children move into upper Key stage 2 children make more references to the articles in the convention.

In secondary schools tutor groups / year groups can generate charters/agreements at the outset, depending on the extent of support from teachers and assistants. Due to the way most secondary schools are structured, however, they should look at ways of securing agreement to which all children, perhaps through their tutor groups have been able to contribute and to which everyone agrees to sign up. This can then be the point of reference for the whole school.

8. WHY DO ADULTS SIGN?

This is more than a symbolic gesture. It is about indicating to children and reminding adults that the whole experience of teaching and learning is a shared enterprise and will work best if everyone keeps to the class charter / agreement. It strengthens the relationship between children and adults.

This is also true of charters covering lunch times, play areas, extended school spaces.

“It just makes sense. Having the charter has helped to address low level behaviour in a language which children understand. It has provided the children with a real sense of understanding and reasoning to why certain classrooms behaviours are asked”.

Class Teacher, Gwrysydd Primary

9. ADDITIONAL EXAMPLES

- Teachers could also link the development of a rights respecting charter to lessons to improve social and emotional literacy. SEAL materials could be used for support if needed.
- Children should be encouraged to see how they could link any involvement in whole-school initiatives such as Eco Schools, Healthy Schools, the School Council or Anti-bullying groups into the actions column of the agreement.
- Note also links to the Citizenship and Personal and Social Education Objectives such as:
 - Research & debating issues / events
 - Know why / how rules/laws are made
 - Discuss anti-social behaviour
 - Take part in making / changing rules
 - Resolving differences
 - Explaining choice