

EARLY YEARS GUIDANCE

For practitioners and those working with younger children



This guidance for Early Years practitioners is designed to support staff working within a wide range of settings across the UK. These may be stand-alone settings or be integrated, to a greater or lesser extent, within an Infant, First or Primary school. Increasingly school based settings accommodate children as young as two years old and some settings incorporate childcare provision from an even earlier age. Within all these settings children will usually experience a combination of indoor and outdoor play and learning environments. For settings on their RRSA journey, incorporating children's rights and respect for rights should be clearly visible, across learning environments and through adults' actions and language. A commitment to an approach underpinned by the CRC should also be evident through a setting's strategic documentation and visible through everyday practice.

In Rights Respecting Schools children's rights are promoted and realised: adults and children work towards this goal together. Staff and children learn about children's rights, putting them into practice every day. The Award is not just about what children do but also, importantly, what adults do. Whilst knowledge of rights amongst staff working with very young children should be consistent with those that accommodate older pupils, our expectations of young children differ from those of older children, based on their evolving capacities.

Rights Respecting Schools has always been clear that while the outcomes expected at each stage of the Award remain unchanged, the accreditation process will be flexible in order to accommodate different educational contexts.

About the UNCRC

The [UN Convention on the Rights of the Child \(CRC\)](#) is the most complete statement of children's rights ever produced and is the most widely-ratified international human rights treaty in history. Every child has rights "without discrimination of any kind, irrespective of the child's or his or her parent's or legal guardian's race, colour, sex, language, religion, political or other opinion, national, ethnic or social origin, property, disability, birth or other status" (Article 2).

The Convention should be thought of as a whole: each of the rights enshrined within it are inter-linked and no right is more important than another. Therefore, the right to relax and play (Article 31) and the right to freedom of expression (Article 13) have equal importance as the right to be safe (Article 19) and the right to education (Article 28).

In relation to the Convention children are known as 'rights holders' and the state and all those that work for them as 'duty bearers.' As a duty bearer those working with children have a responsibility to respect, protect and fulfil children's rights.

You might choose to use the term 'right' rather than 'article' when referencing the CRC with children and you will focus on natural links to rights that children experience. By making 'rights real' for the children you work with you are empowering them with the understanding of their entitlements and supporting their ability to raise concerns. This will help them to develop respectful relationships and develop confidence in their ability to play an active role in their learning and as they grow up the community.

How to use this guidance:

This document highlights some of the links between our outcomes, articles of the CRC and your practice. It has been devised in conjunction with Early Years practitioners and following a study of the Early Years curricula in England, Northern Ireland, Scotland and Wales to see how the curriculum you are required to deliver compliments the outcomes of the RRSA.

- This is **not** a definitive guide but a starting point for your rights respecting work. If you are already on your rights respecting journey, use and adapt these ideas to develop your practice.
- Work through the ideas in order or pick and choose elements that will work in your setting. Please tailor the activities and language to ensure they are accessible to your children and develop explicit links to articles across all relevant activities, over time.
- It may be useful to save photos, videos, comments and observations from staff and children when engaging in activities that support learning about, for and through rights, as a way of collecting evidence for the RRSA. Check out the RRSA [evidence template](#).
- Do continue to develop your action plan/evaluation form and refer to the specific outcomes at Silver and Gold.
- Remember: all staff in RRSA member settings have access to our [e-learning training](#) which will support you to develop your understanding of the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child (CRC) and the RRSA outcomes.
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STRAND A: TEACHING AND LEARNING ABOUT RIGHTS

The United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child (CRC) is made known to children, young people, and adults, who use this shared understanding to work for improved child wellbeing, school improvement, global justice, and sustainable living.

Outcome 1: Children, young people and the wider school community know about the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child and understand how it impacts on their lives and on the lives of children everywhere.

Adults in your setting will explore the CRC as a whole. It won't be appropriate to do the same with children in your early years setting. Although all rights are equally important, we recommend that you spend time as a staff team discussing practice in relation to children's rights and choosing the articles that are most relevant to be your focus. Bring in other articles where relevant and when appropriate.

Making rights explicit through discussion

- Discuss the things that all children need. Make the link to specific articles from the CRC. You may find our [Want and Needs cards](#) useful.
 - When exploring 'people who help us' link to relevant articles and the role of duty bearers.
 - Discuss the rights or the denial of rights for characters in books or through current affairs.
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Rights in action (child or adult led activities)

Explicit links can be made to relevant articles in activities, for example:

- Taking time to consider key articles that are most relevant to your setting. Start by introducing these one at a time in line with the abilities and understanding of the children involved. See our [Article of the Week](#) resources for ideas.
 - Providing children with some props that represent key articles e.g., bottles of water, toys, fruit snack. Take photos of the children with these items. You could create a display or use as postcards to send messages home engaging families with the CRC or develop a feely bag.
 - Developing a Rights Respecting mascot. Your mascot or teddy bear can be introduced whenever rights are being discussed and can be used as a tool for exploring rights.
 - You could send your mascot home (with a guide for families) encouraging children to talk about rights and share how they enjoy them at home. Images can be added to a book to show the mascot enjoying rights such as: playing, keeping safe, eating healthy food. For example: Ronnie the Rhino has a right to be safe. Show him how you keep safe. Families may include a photo of Ronnie crossing the road or wearing a seat belt.
 - Playing memory games with a small number of rights. You could use the [CRC icons](#) and see the [card game guidance](#) for more ideas.
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STRAND B: TEACHING AND LEARNING THROUGH RIGHTS – ETHOS AND RELATIONSHIPS

Actions and decisions affecting children are rooted in, reviewed and resolved through rights. Children, young people and adults collaborate to develop and maintain a school community based on equality, dignity, respect, non-discrimination and participation; this includes learning and teaching in a way that respects the rights of both educators and learners and promotes wellbeing.

Outcome 2: In school children and young people enjoy the rights enshrined in the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child.

In a rights respecting setting, as duty bearers, staff will promote the key concepts that underpin the CRC: Children’s rights are universal and unconditional, they are for all children, without discrimination and do not have to be earned. As a staff team celebrate the good practice in place that ensures rights are lived and breathed by children. Then consider how you can strengthen this practice by making explicit links to the CRC.

Making rights explicit through discussion

- Use the CRC icons or symbols to generate discussion. (See weblinks in the resources section.)
 - Use images of your mascot or children to show rights in action. Ask them to identify what is happening. Explore how children engage with the specific article. For example, in relation to Article 31 children will have different games/activities they enjoy.
 - Explore how the adults (duty bearers) in your setting help children access their rights. For example, is there a particular person/people who are responsible for keeping them safe? Make the link to Article 19.
 - Use the [ABCDE of Rights](#) guidance to explore the fact that rights are for all and there from birth.
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Rights in action (child or adult led activities)

Explicit links can be made to relevant articles in activities such as:

- Create a [Rights Respecting charter](#) using our guidance. You might want to personalise your charter display using images of your own children/mascot/toys experiencing their rights.
 - Exploring images taken of children in your setting. Ask children to describe what is happening. Make links to their rights.
 - You can purchase a Find the Rights poster pack and A2 poster set on our [website](#) or use images of your own children or from books.
 - Exploring rights in different contexts. For example, exploring the right to play (Article 31) using pictures or stories of play in a range of countries across the world.
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Outcome 3: Relationships are positive and founded on dignity and a mutual respect for rights.

Consider the role of children as rights holders and adults as duty bearers. Reflect on dignity and mutual respect in your setting, how are they lived and breathed through relationships, actions and words.

Making rights explicit through discussion

- Explore children’s understanding of ‘family’ and ‘friend.’ Discuss them in relation to what children need and in turn to relevant articles.
 - Discuss how adults and families (as ‘duty bearers’) help children (‘rights holders’) enjoy the rights in the CRC.
 - Discuss what makes a good friend? Link to Articles 2, 8 and 31.
 - Explore respect and how children can help each other access their rights. For example, by being kind to each other and asking others to play.
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Rights in action (child or adult led activities)

Explicit links can be made to relevant articles in activities such as:

- Matching characters to their families, e.g. The Three Bears, Gruffalo’s Child and the Gruffalo. Try to provide a range of representations of diverse families.
 - Exploring the questions: Do all families look the same? Who lives in your house? Is it the same for everybody? Every child has the right to live in a safe home and be cared for. You could discuss the children in the class, if appropriate, or well-known characters e.g. The Gruffalo’s Child who lives with her dad. Cinderella lives with her dad and step-mum. Create images of different family representations.
 - Using images of children in the class and their families. Compare with the school/nursery ‘family’ and friendship groups. How are those relationships the same/different?
 - Using some of the [CRC icons](#) with children Asking them to spot the adults on the images. Explore together what the adults doing. For example, the Article 5 image suggests the adults are giving love and care.
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Outcome 4: Children and young people are safe and protected and know what to do if they need support.

Rights Respecting Schools underpin and strengthen their good practice through linking it to the CRC. Consider safeguarding in your setting and reflect on the practice that helps ensure children’s safety. By being explicit with the whole school community about children’s rights to be protected from harm, everyone, including children, will understand reporting procedures and gain confidence in speaking up.

Making rights explicit through discussion

- Share the Article 19 icon from the [CRC](#). Ask children what they think it means.
 - Explore ‘what makes you feel safe?’
 - Discuss who keeps us safe? In school? At home? In the community? Make the link to duty bearers.
 - Explore what children can do if they don’t feel safe.
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Rights in action (child or adult led activities)

Explicit links can be made to relevant articles in activities such as:

- Exploring photos of different scenarios and support children identify hazards/dangers. For example, crossing the road or playing by the river.
 - Gather ideas from children on what they can do when they feel scared, cross, or sad etc. Practise examples and discuss who ‘trusted adults/duty bearers’ are and who children can go to if they have a concern.
 - Exploring different aspects of safety from how the children move around the classroom, to having locked doors and fire alarms. The following questions might be helpful: Can anyone play on our playground/in our garden? Why/why not? Do children play in the school kitchen? Why/why not? Who can you talk to if you don’t feel safe?
 - Children developing a check list or undertaking regular pupil-led risk assessments for your nursery environment.
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Outcome 5: Children’s social and emotional wellbeing is a priority. They learn to develop healthy lifestyles.

In Rights Respecting Schools, the good practice to support wellbeing explicitly links to children’s rights and is underpinned by the CRC. Rights Respecting Schools look at wellbeing through the lens of children’s rights in terms of equality, equity, fairness, dignity, and participation.

Making rights explicit through discussion

- Introduce and discuss the terms HEALTH, WATER, FOOD and ENVIRONMENT link back to Article 24. Explore how all children get these things in your setting.
 - Support children identify how you/parents/carers/family help them to stay healthy.
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Rights in action (child or adult led activities)

Explicit links can be made to relevant articles in activities such as:

- Working in pairs (or using a mirror) ask children to express a range of emotions. Children could guess the emotion, or you could share different scenarios and children use their face to express how they would feel. Discuss how we all experience a range of emotions.
 - If you have a daily check in on feelings link this to the relevant articles.
 - Making reference to relevant articles when discussing your healthy snack table, mindfulness activities, physical activity etc.
 - Exploring the importance of developing healthy lifestyles and how your setting supports children with this. Do you have PE/sport/gym/yoga/Forest School sessions?
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Outcome 6: Children and young people are included and are valued as individuals.

Diversity, equality, and discrimination are part of our everyday life. Children have a keen sense of justice and equality and with support and encouragement learn to extend this to others. By talking about the CRC, rights being for all and respect for everyone's rights a strong sense of inclusion can be fostered.

Making rights explicit through discussion

- Choose: two children or two characters from books. Ask children to consider how they are similar and different.
- Discuss: how we are all different, have different thoughts and beliefs and opinions. Highlight the importance of respecting everyone. We may have different ideas or beliefs, but we must be respectful to how others live and the choices they make.

Rights in action (child or adult led activities)

Explicit links can be made to relevant articles in activities such as:

- Providing positive visual images of the different ways people look and try to avoid inadvertently reinforcing stereotypes.
 - Exploring job roles, consider starting with people who help us. Discuss with children who they see/have seen undertake these roles. Challenge any stereotypical views with stories and images making the link to Article 2.
 - Talking with the children about their families – ask them to bring in photographs and then discuss the make-up of each family.
 - Play the mirror game and let the children compare their faces with their friends. Consider a range of questions such as: What makes us the same and what makes us different? Do some children wear glasses? Is it fair that only some children wear glasses? Why do we not all have the same hair colour? Why does the colour of our skin differ?
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Outcome 7: Children and young people value education and are involved in making decisions about their learning.

In Early Years, children are provided with a range of opportunities to make choices about their learning. Reflect on these in your setting and consider every child's engagement. A Rights Respecting setting will place the best interests of the child at the centre of their practice and link good practice to Article 12 and 29.

Making rights explicit through discussion

- Explore Article 28 & 29 and children's experiences, aspirations. Can be linked to
 - Allow children to share something they have learnt recently. Why was it important? How did they learn?
 - Discuss with children their favourite games and explore the following questions: Where do we play them? Why do you enjoy them? Who can you play them with? Discuss with children the importance of making choices when we play. Link to inclusion and respecting everyone right to join in. Discuss the learning opportunities that come from playing with new children? Identify if there are any games children would like to try? Can they teach each other?
 - Explore with children the choices they are given in your setting. For example, choosing which activity to engage in, voting for a storybook or choosing the next role play area theme. Make links to Article 12.
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Rights in action (child or adult led activities)

Explicit links can be made to relevant articles in activities such as:

- Supporting children to share their own knowledge, experiences and learning with peers. This could become a regular 'show and tell' type activity linked to Article 29.
 - Utilising parent and child discussion or surveys to develop learning opportunities and the environment.
 - Learning about fairness and turn taking linked to all children having the right to learn.
 - Exploring rights through P4C activities – big questions, would you rather?
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STRAND C: TEACHING AND LEARNING FOR RIGHTS – PARTICIPATION, EMPOWERMENT AND ACTION

Children are empowered to enjoy and exercise their rights and to promote the rights of others locally and globally. Duty bearers are accountable for ensuring that children experience their rights.

Outcome 8: Children and young people know that their views are taken seriously.

Consider the importance of children’s voices in your setting. Your mission statement or values may highlight children’s voices or you may have a voice policy. Article 12 states that children have the right to give their opinions freely on issues that affect them and adults should listen and take children seriously. Explore how you can ensure your school community is building awareness of Article 12 and the opportunities available to children.

Making rights explicit through discussion

- Remind children that rights are for all children all of the time. Explore what this means and how it impacts of children’s experiences.
- Share the [Article 12 icon](#) and discuss what is happening.
- Ask children to think about a time when they didn’t feel listened to. How did it make them feel? Explore how we show we are listening and what we can do if we don’t think adults are listening to us.
- Reflect on the things that have changed due to children’s ideas. Discuss and celebrate these – you might consider creating a display.

Rights in action (child or adult led activities)

Explicit links can be made to relevant articles in activities such as:

- Children taking on leadership roles such as Eco leaders, Librarians, Play leaders etc. Underpin groups with relevant articles. If these groups only include older pupils, consider how younger children can interact and share their views.
- Providing opportunities for decision making. For example, children may vote on menu choices, a charity to support or equipment for your outdoor space. Ensure they know this is because they have a right to a voice and to be listened to.
- Exploring the importance of everyone having a say. Set up a fair system of choosing that can be used at different times throughout the day.

Outcome 9: Children and young people have taken action to claim their rights and promote the rights of others, locally and globally.

In a Rights Respecting setting children will be supported to take action to promote rights locally and globally. Adults will model and encourage mutual respect, provide opportunities to support for charities, participate in fundraising and raising awareness of issues important to them and the community. Consider how you develop children's engagement with their community, the environment, and the wider world. How can you help them to recognise they can make a difference?

Making rights explicit through discussion

- Explore how children can help each other, you can use your charter if you have one. Pick out key articles and how children and adults act to ensure everyone can enjoy those rights?
 - Discuss ideas to make your setting a better place to play/learn?
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Rights in action (child or adult led activities)

Explicit links can be made to relevant articles in activities such as:

- Developing a campaign with children. This could start with a walk through the local community. Explore: What they like about it? What they enjoy doing in the local area? What they see when they are walking or traveling to the setting. Then also discuss: Anything they do not like? Any problems there may be?
 - This might lead to (or can be directed to) discussing global issues such as recycling, cars leaving their engines running, dog mess on the street or the quality of access to and inclusivity of play areas.
 - As a group children can choose one thing they would like to change.
 - Then consider who they could talk to about the change i.e., the Headteacher, the local council or local businesses.
 - Draw or create an image of the change they would like to see and how this will impact on rights.
 - Share children's views with duty bearers to influence change.
 - When growing plants, learning about the environment, recycling, saving energy etc make explicit reference to articles
 - When undertaking fundraising or taking actions for others make explicit links to the CRC.
 - Learning about a range of cultures, customs, countries, languages, religions. Show the children a globe or a map of the world and discuss. Have you ever been to a different country? Have you ever lived in a different country? Or know someone who has? Discuss how children's rights are for every child in the world, no matter what country they live in. Discuss how every country is different, but all children have rights.
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Useful resources

Resources for use with children:

Many of the resources that you already have in your setting will lend themselves to a natural exploration of children's rights and we hope that the guidance above will support you to see the links and develop this across your practice.

Here are some specific resources that might be useful:

- Take a look at our [Article of the Week](#) resources. These are intended to provide easy-to-use ideas to support children to learn about CRC articles. Despite the name, there is no expectation that you will do a pack each week in school. These flexible resources can be used in several different ways, and many contain activities, books and videos suitable for younger children or that can be adapted to your setting.
- [Find the Rights poster](#)
- [Want and Needs cards](#)
- Child friendly versions of the CRC
 - [CRC icons](#)
 - [UNCRC symbols cards](#)
 - [UNCRC symbols poster](#)
- What are Children's Rights – [YouTube](#)
- UNICEF video introducing rights and the CRC for 3–6-year-olds - [YouTube](#)
- I Am Me – A song about children's rights - [YouTube](#)
- Every Child A Song by Nicola Davies - [YouTube](#)
- Exploring children's rights through picture books – [Scottish Book Trust](#)
- World's Largest Lesson - [Early Years resources](#)

Staff CPD resources:

- Check out our [Spotlight packs](#). This resource is designed for use in staff meetings or training sessions and to support staff within settings to learn more about children's rights, the Strands and Outcomes of the RRSA and reflect on their own practice.
- [RRSA e-learning courses](#): available to RRSA member settings with access given to all staff.
- BBC: What are Child Rights? - [YouTube](#)
- NICCY: An Introduction to Children's Rights - [YouTube](#)
- World's Largest Lesson – [Just a Kid](#)
- Rights based practice in the Early Years - [Children's Parliament Scotland](#)
- Learning through rights in the Early Years: weaving the UNCRC through Policy, Provision and Everyday Practice - [City of Edinburgh Council](#)