Rights Matter - what the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child means to us

Children & Young People Engagement team
Written in 1989, the UNCRC is a set of rules, or ‘articles’, defining how each child and young person can be kept safe from harm, have chances to develop, become an individual and thrive. It helps us keep children and young people at the heart of all we do, through our RCPCH &Us network.

We explain more below, report on our vote on what makes the best health service, and link to resources - including our very own 'Recipes for Rights' games and UNCRC colouring sheet!
How many of you have heard of the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child (UNCRC)? How many of you can name at least five of the articles and why they are important for children and young people with health conditions?

RCPCH &Us member, Scott

RCPCH &Us is our network for children, young people, parents and carers. We actively seek and share their views to shape policy and practice.

We ask Scott's questions, above, of all doctors and nurses who take part in RCPCH &Us sessions. We want them to know about children and young people's rights, and explore how they can help protect these rights in health and all parts of life.

As RCPCH &Us we're always talking with children and young people about their rights, so that they know what they are and how to get help with them.

What's the UNCRC?

The UNCRC is a set of 45 rules, called articles, which helps countries, organisations and individuals know what needs to happen to give all children and young people the best start possible.

It was written in 1989, and the UK made it into law in 1992. All UN member states - except the United States - have signed it.

The articles help children and young people be safe from harm, have chances to learn and develop, become an individual and get the support needed to thrive. You can download Unicef's poster summary of the articles (PDF) or see them in pictures from the Children and Young People’s Commissioner for Scotland.
In each UK nation, a Children’s Commissioner makes sure that children and young people’s rights are being supported. You can find out more in our external links at the bottom of this page.

Rights &Us

The UNCRC helps us keep children and young people at the centre of everything we do through our RCPCH &Us network. We're proud to help protect and promote children's rights, and enable more than 2,000 children and young people each year to participate through our projects and events.

RCPCH &Us children and young people have looked at the UNCRC. They picked five articles that they think are the most important to remember and tell others about. (They also said that all the rights are important so they are not forgetting about the other ones!)

These are the articles they selected:

- **12** – The right to be involved in decisions that affect you, from individual care decisions through to shaping health services that you might use
- **23** – Infants, children and young people with disabilities have the right to be involved, which includes having appropriate communication support within health care appointments and engagement work
- **24** – The right to the best health care possible, thinking here about child and youth friendly health services
- **28** – The right to education, thinking about while they are an inpatient, or structuring services to avoid missing school due to medical appointments or supporting engagement sessions in evening and weekends/school holidays
- **31** – The right to rest, relax and play, which in a health context also needs to include support for parents of children with complex health needs to think about how to engage in social activities, and for health care services to acknowledge their role in providing services that do not prevent infants, children and young people from socialising with their peers (eg clinic times)
Why don’t you have a go at colouring in these five rights? Download our colouring-in poster and sheets below

In summer 2019, Raheema, age 17, did a five-week internship with the RCPCH &Us team. She saw that not everyone knew about UNCRC, so decided to do something about it. Raheema planned, directed and edited this video to raise awareness of rights and why they're important.

Why do rights matter?

The UNCRC was developed around the themes, provision, protection and participation.

These are important to us, too, as we want to ensure...

- **Provision**: children and young people have access to the best health services
- **Protection**: children and young people are protected from harm
- **Participation**: children and young people are actively involved in the work we do through RCPCH &Us

What do children and young people want (and what are we doing next)?

In September and October 2019, 1,791 children and young people across the UK shared their views. They participated by voting for ideas (article 12) on what makes the best health
provision/service (article 24).

Here’s how they voted:

- 28% - more help from adults on making positive life choices that keep them healthy, happy and well
- 26% - more help to understand health conditions like epilepsy, asthma, diabetes, sickle cell and others so that they are more aware and support their friends or be supported
- 23% - important to have access to youth friendly services who are aware of children and young people's needs and identities

Now that so many children have had their say on improving child health services, it’s time to make a difference!

In 2020 we'll start a new project informed by the vote results. Led by children and young people, the project will focus on helping children and young people to stay healthy, happy and well. We may create vlogs, develop resources on health topics or run sessions... but we'll find out more when the group starts planning! Want to get involved? Email us on and_us@rcpch.ac.uk.

How well is the UK doing on children’s rights?

The UNCRC’s 54 articles were written in 1989 and concern the survival and wellbeing of children, their development, protection, and participation in social life. The UK signed the Convention in 1990 and ratified it in 1991, and it came law in 1992.

The Children’s Rights Alliance for England regularly reviews how the UK is doing to deliver on children’s rights. In their 2018 briefing on health, they highlighted the need for improvements in mental health support, impact of inequalities on health, challenges around food poverty and insecurity, increasing levels of obesity, illegal levels of air pollution harming children’s health, increasing levels of tooth decay, low levels of breastfeeding and concerns about the impact of Brexit on child health.

According to the Kids Rights Index, the UK sits - as of November 2019 - at 170 out of 181 rated countries for upholding children’s rights. (Iceland is number 1.) This rating is based on the right to education, life, health, protection and enabling environment for child rights.

Get some resources

You can download below our colouring in poster and sheets, plus a taster of our forthcoming Recipes for Rights, games written by young people.

Our other resources:

- Facing the Future superhero – our video, online game and young people-led resources explore children's rights to care at the "right place, right time, right people"
- Recipes for Engagement - our easy-to-read guide gives tested ideas for health workers to practically and creatively engage children and young people. In particular, check out recipes 13, 17 and 21!
Need more resources or support? Just contact us on and_us@rcpch.ac.uk

External links
- Unicef UK: How we protect children’s rights
- Children Right’s Alliance for England: State of children's rights 2018
- Kides Right Index
- Children’s Commissioner for England
- Children’s Commissioner for Wales
- Children and Young People’s Commissioner for Scotland
- Northern Ireland Children and Young People’s Commissioner

Downloads
- Rights Matter and UNCRC - colouring poster 1.2 MB
- Rights Matter and UNCRC - colouring sheets 1.12 MB
- Rights Matter - a taster from our upcoming Recipes for Rights 456.42 KB