

# RIGHTS RESPECTING SCHOOLS

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UNITED KINGDOM

# CHARTERS OR AGREEMENTS IN RIGHTS RESPECTING SCHOOLS



## 1. What is the aim of the charter/agreement?

### **Establishing and building shared values and relationships for a rights-respecting classroom**

Creating a charter or agreement can be helpful in making the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child (CRC) a real and meaningful guide to action for adults and children on a day-to-day basis. It also helps everyone to learn more about particular articles of the Convention that impact most on their life at school. Please keep in mind during the process that even though you may 'choose' to highlight a certain number of articles (or rights) of the Convention in the charter(s), there is no right in the Convention that is more important than any another, and the CRC must be seen as a whole.

The initial process of creating the charter/agreement and its subsequent use should be inclusive and participatory. The process in itself is beneficial as it can help to unite pupils and adults in the class and strengthen relationships between them. The charter/agreement can help to develop a sense of shared ownership of the classroom and learning. Once developed, it becomes a point of reference for the class and once signed by the teacher, support staff and pupils, it can act as the 'social glue' which binds everyone together.

Children, young people and staff agree where and how the charters/agreements are displayed. These decisions will be influenced by the setting, area and age of those involved.

## 2. What is a charter/agreement?

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

- the rights (articles) selected from the CRC which children, young people and adult consider to be the most relevant in their class or school. The rights should be worded in language that is meaningful to the children but clearly based on particular articles from the Convention. The full text of the Convention or our child-friendly summaries of it are all available here: [www.unicef.org.uk/UNICEFs-Work/UN-Convention/](http://www.unicef.org.uk/UNICEFs-Work/UN-Convention/)
- the actions agreed between all children and adults to ensure that rights can be realised and enjoyed by everyone
- who has agreed to the charter. This is often done by everyone signing it.

What is agreed is then set out in a way that is easily visible.

In Rights Respecting Schools, charters/agreements are developed with the active participation of children and young people of all ages, including children from nursery settings. They reflect the shared values and principles of the CRC and are applicable to all.

### 3. How do we create a charter/agreement?

**Here are some tips for how to develop a charter/agreement – this advice has been adapted from guidance developed by Portway Junior School and Gwyrasydd Primary School**

- Start with a recap with pupils and staff on the United Nations Convention in the Rights of the Child. This can be done by a teacher or a pupil.
- Reinforce why the Convention exists, where the articles have come from, who agreed it, and the importance of all children under 18 having human rights. Extend to include the Universal Declaration of Human Rights (UDHR) and the similarities and differences. The UDHR applies to all human beings everywhere, whatever their age, gender, ethnicity, religion, language or any other status. It applies equally to all children and adults.
- With the pupils, choose the articles from the CRC that together you feel relate the most to children's lives in their school (for example, Articles 3, 12, 13, 15, 16, 17, 19, 23, 24, 27, 28, 29, 30, 31, 37, 39) and then get the children to discuss how and why these relate to life in school. Don't forget that there is no right in the Convention that is more important than another!
- Diamond a number of the children's choices (eg nine) and discuss the reasons why these particular rights were chosen (these will differ in each class or school).
- Use a number of the most popular and reasoned articles (eg six out of the nine) to create the class charter/agreement; the children need to identify the actions to be considered by EVERYONE in the class (including all adults) to ensure ALL children can enjoy the rights identified.
- Agree wording and ownership by the class/tutor group or school. Allow time for discussion around any issues that the children have – for example not signing, wording, if new people arrive.

- Clearly link the wording on the charter/agreement to articles from the CRC. Make sure the wording accurately reflects the content of the Convention (find a summary or the full text here: [www.unicef.org.uk/UNICEFs-Work/UN-Convention/](http://www.unicef.org.uk/UNICEFs-Work/UN-Convention/))
- Remember the following are not rights (and this list is not exhaustive): to be happy, to a clean classroom, to books and pens, to be loved, to have fun, to make mistakes, to have friends. The UN Convention on the Rights of the Child is a legal document so just keep in mind that you cannot legislate on emotions (such as love) or statuses that are difficult to define and put into law (eg to be happy or have friends). Ensure this is made clear to the pupils.
- Decide together how to display your charter.
- Regularly revisit and tweak the charter as a class. This is a good exercise if new people join the class, good for circle time and Philosophy for Children activities.

## **4. 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 most relevant to them at that time.

It is crucial during all the work on charters/agreements that staff and children fully understand that rights are inherent and do not come with conditions attached; children are rights holders and adults are duty bearers, so they have the main responsibility for making sure that children's rights are realised. The charter can help children appreciate the impact different actions can have on either providing or denying themselves or another child of their rights.

## Examples of charters

### 1. Three columns showing the actions to be considered by EVERYONE in the class to ensure ALL children can enjoy the rights identified

The majority of schools set out their selected rights in one column, and then add two more columns to allow children and adults to set down the actions that they will take to ensure these rights are realised and enjoyed by all:

<b>What children agree to do</b>	<b>UN Convention on the Rights of the Child</b>	<b>What adults will do to realise this right</b>
Ask other children to join in our games	<b>Article 31</b> (leisure, play and culture). Every child has the right to relax, play and take part in a wide range of cultural and artistic activities.	Ensure provision for range of play opportunities



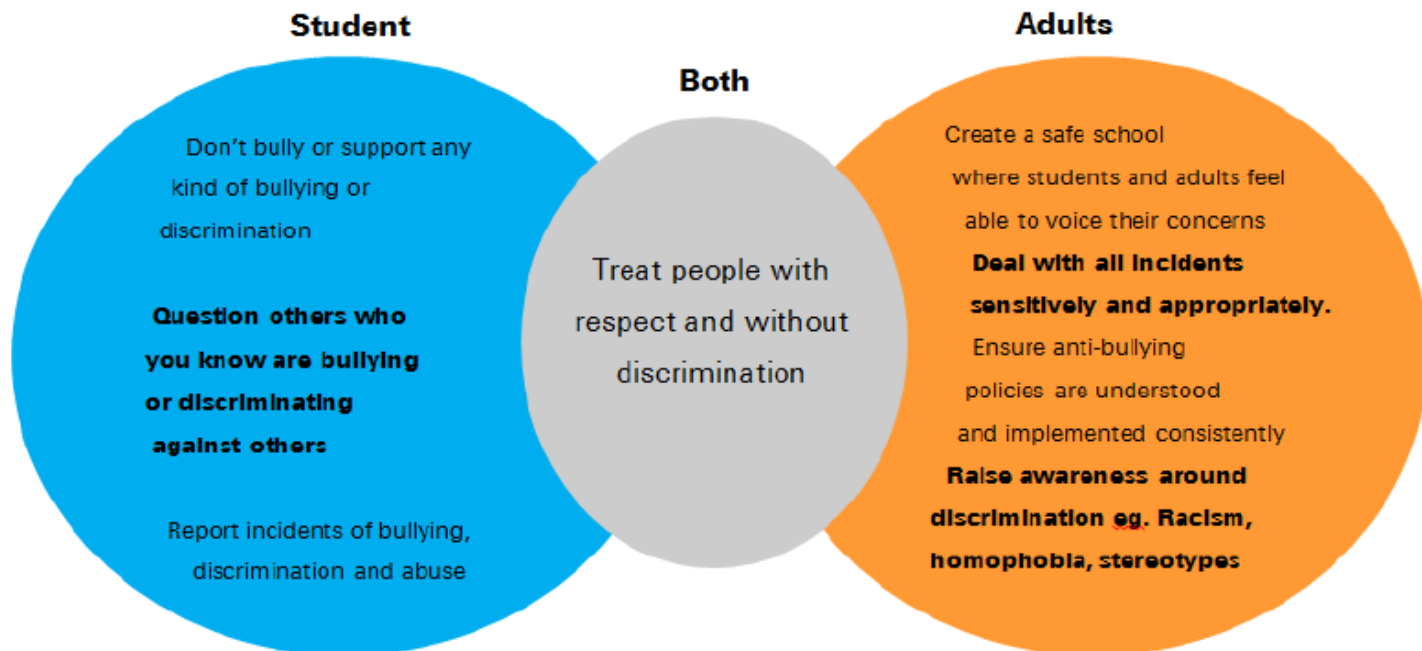
## 2. Venn diagram showing the actions to be considered by EVERYONE in the class to ensure ALL children can enjoy the rights identified

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 so that children's rights are realised and enjoyed by all. In the middle is a circle showing the actions to realise the right that **both** parties need to take.

The example below is from a secondary school:

### **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 and social and emotional learning.



## 5. Using charters

### Main points to remember when using charters

- Rights are inherent; they are something everyone has as a result of being born. No one has the power to give them to you or take them away from you. There are no conditions attached to them. Rights are indivisible and people should enjoy all their rights because they often impact on each other. People should know what their rights are and should be empowered and have the opportunity to claim their rights.
- When we learn about rights, we learn that not only do we have them ourselves, but everyone else has them too, in the UK and everywhere around the globe. Everyone should be enjoying their own rights as long as this does not stop other people from enjoying their rights.
- Adults working with children should 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 that all children are rights holders and that adults are duty bearers and so bear the responsibility for ensuring these rights are known about, understood and realised. A crucial aspect of the charter is that it reinforces that it is adults who are responsible for ensuring children's rights are respected and realised.

## 8. When should we do a whole school charter/agreement?

In **secondary schools** tutor groups or year groups/subject areas can generate charters from the outset. However, due to the way most secondary schools are structured a whole school charter may be more appropriate than class charters and can be a point of reference for the whole school.

When establishing a whole school charter, you should plan for this to take several weeks – possibly months. In order for the widest engagement and ‘ownership’ by young people and adults, proper consultation is needed for each stage which includes: feedback, time to discuss and reflect, responding and narrowing down options. At each stage time is required to seek consensus and present progress to date. Schools have told us that using a mixture of assembly time, registration/ form time, PSHE lessons can all contribute to this process. Delegating the entire process to a team, without ongoing consultation, is not likely to work.

We strongly advise that **most primary schools** do not consider developing whole school and lunchtime charters until children and adults have lived with and used class charters for at least a year. Wider charters could be a development included in your progress to Level 2. However, in **secondary schools** (plus early years, some additional needs settings or very large or very small primary schools) a whole school charter may be best way to establish rights respecting practice across the school.