



Saskatchewan's Children and Youth First Principles

All children and youth in Saskatchewan are entitled to:

- Those rights defined by the *United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child*.
- Participate and be heard before any decision affecting them is made.
- Have their 'best interests' given paramount consideration in any action or decision involving them.
- An equal standard of care, protection and services.
- The highest standard of health and education possible in order to reach their fullest potential.
- Safety and protection from all forms of physical, emotional and sexual harm, while in the care of parents, governments, legal guardians or any person.
- Be treated as the primary client, and at the centre, of all child-serving systems.
- Have consideration given to the importance of their unique life history and spiritual traditions and practices, in accordance with their stated views and preferences.



Human rights are basic standards to which every person is entitled, to survive and develop in dignity.

The United Nations set the minimum entitlements and freedoms that should be respected by governments with the adoption of the **Universal Declaration of Human Rights** in 1948. A number of subsequent treaties have been developed through negotiation among United Nations' member countries to recognize the basic human rights of all persons or particular groups of persons.

Children and youth (under 18 years of age) have had their rights defined in the **Convention on the Rights on the Child**. A special treaty for young people was necessary given their vulnerability and dependence. The *Convention* sets out these rights in 54 articles and in a set of Optional Protocols. The basic principles of these rights are:

- **Non-discrimination:** The rights of each child are to be respected without discrimination of any kind. It does not matter if children are boys or girls, if they are rich or poor, what their religion, ethnicity, or language is, or whether they have special needs. All children have rights.
- **The best interests of the child:** When decisions are made that affect the lives of children, the *Convention* says that it is very important to think about what is best for the child.
- **The right to survival, life and development:** The *Convention* says that governments should do their best to protect children from harm, and to help children live and grow to be the best they can be.
- **Participation:** Children have the right to give their opinions in all matters that affect them and to have their voices heard. Children's views should always be taken seriously.

The proper exercise of children's rights fosters respectful relationships between children and their peers and between children and adults. Human rights are interdependent and indivisible—one person's rights cannot be at the expense of another's rights.

The provision and protection of the *Convention's* rights is the primary responsibility of governments at all levels, and realizing the promise of the *Convention* is an ongoing, progressive commitment.

Practically every area of government public policy affects children and youth to some degree; and, because all human rights are interconnected and of equal importance, government decisions with regard to any one right must be made in the light of all the other rights in the *Convention*.

As a respected leader in the world, Canada played an active role in the *Convention's* development and ratified it on December 13, 1991. Since then, a number of federal and provincial laws, policies and practices affecting children have recognized these human rights and resulted in significant social change.

While the **Canadian Charter of Rights and Freedoms** applies to all of us including children and youth, the rights and potential of the *Convention* are yet to be fully realized in domestic law in our country.

To assist communities and the Government of Saskatchewan to better understand and implement the *United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child*, we have simplified the 54 articles into the eight **Saskatchewan Children and Youth First Principles**. These Principles serve as the foundation of our office's rights-based advocacy on behalf of the province's young people.

Sources and Resources:

- <http://www.voicesofyouth.org>
- <http://www.ohchr.org>
- <http://www.unicef.ca/en/policy-advocacy-for-children/about-the-convention-on-the-rights-of-the-child>
- <http://www.unicef.org/crc/>
- <http://www.un.org/Pubs/CyberSchoolBus/crc/about.html>
- <http://www.canadianheritage.gc.ca>