

# Human Rights Topics for Preschool and Lower Primary School



## Confidence and social respect

In preschool and lower primary education, teaching for human rights is aimed at fostering feelings of confidence and respect for self and others. These are the basis for the whole culture of human rights. This makes the teacher's "teaching personality" highly important. A supportive approach at all times will make every activity meaningful, even those not specific to human rights teaching.

Stories are invaluable. Young children can learn lessons and morals and remember them vividly if they are associated with a much-loved character in a well-told tale. Such stories can be obtained from published literature on children's tales, from parents and grandparents or even by using one's imagination.

A classroom library where resources are available may be useful. In selecting books, it is important to obtain attractive volumes that feature both females and males as multicultural, active and non-stereotyped characters. When reading to the class or showing picture books, point out the good things they show or tell.

Where the resources exist, students can participate in cooking, a wood-work bench or potting plants. These can be done as imagination games also. All activities should involve both boys and girls. If disagreement arises concerning activities, the class may need to make rules to equalize the situation and break down discriminatory behaviour. Such rules become unnecessary with regular use. Equality can also be improved by changing the way the classroom is arranged or how students line up. It is important to avoid grouping children in ways that reinforce obvious differences. Try to facilitate friendships between students as well as awareness that differences are acceptable and natural.

## Resolving conflicts

Conflicts often arise, and teachers need to develop a consistent strategy to address them. It is imperative that a teacher remain open to discussion of conflict at all times. Emphasize that a solution can be found to any problem. However, children need to think about a problem in order to find a solu-

tion. The following shows a more systematic approach to problem-solving:

1. Identify a problem and acknowledge it. Stop any physical or verbal activity and ask the children involved to discuss their behaviour together.
2. Get a description of what happened. Ask the children involved and any bystanders about the events that took place. Give everyone a turn to speak without interruption. Positive encouragement, such as a touch or a hug where appropriate, can also ease feelings of anger or guilt. However, it is essential to remain neutral at all times.
3. Explore a range of solutions. Ask those directly involved how this problem can be solved. If the children cannot suggest solutions, the teacher can offer some ideas.
4. Reason out the solutions. Point out how more than one fair solution may often exist. Encourage the children to think of the physical and emotional consequences of these solutions and recall past experiences of a similar nature.
5. Choose a course of action. Seek a mutual agreement on one of the solutions presented.
6. Carry out that action.

## Confronting discrimination



In cases of discriminatory behaviour, solutions are not so easy to find. Usually neither the insulted child nor the offending child has a clear understanding of discrimination. The teacher's actions are especially important in this situation. The teacher should first strongly criticize the discriminatory behaviour and make clear that it is definitely unacceptable. The teacher may offer clear support to the child who was the object of the offence without criticism of his or her anger, fear

or confusion, and be firm yet supportive with the child who engaged in the discriminatory behaviour. Teachers should help victimized children realize that negative responses to their gender, appearance, disability, language, race or other aspects are due to unacceptable prejudices; they should also examine with children who were involved and who wit-

nessed the situation the issues at stake. Discuss such incidents also with parents, staff and members of the local community.

This method can be used at all school levels as well as in critical situations outside the school environment. It can be applied to all discriminatory behaviour. Where possible, ethnic diversity in the classroom should be acknowledged, understood and even celebrated at every opportunity. It should be remembered that racism and sexism are usually present in children at a very young age, so this method may be remedial. Teachers should also be aware that they too may harbour discriminatory attitudes and strive diligently to recognize and overcome them.

Care should also be taken to make the classroom and school accessible and welcoming to children with disabilities.

The following strategies and activities offer ways to introduce human rights concepts into early childhood education.

## Appreciating similarities and differences

### Attributes

Children are seated in a circle. One child stands in the middle of the circle and makes a statement that describes himself or herself. For example: “Is wearing a belt” or “Has a sister”. Everyone who shares that attribute must change places, including the child in the middle. Whoever is left without a seat becomes the person in the middle and names the next attribute. Children will quickly see that they can be similar and different in many ways. An interesting ending would be to choose a more intangible attribute, such as: “People who are kind”. The game usually breaks down at this point because it becomes more difficult to identify such attributes at a glance. Teachers may wish to discuss how people usually recognize such behavioral attributes.

**(UDHR articles 1, 2; CRC article 2)**

### In the same boat

The teacher explains that people sometimes don't recognize ways in which they are alike. Then the teacher names a category (e.g. month of birth, number of siblings, kind of pet, favourite toy or game) and asks children to form a group with others who share that category with them. Older children can respond to more complex categories (e.g. number of languages spoken, career aspiration, hobby, favourite school subject). The game concludes with the question “What did you learn from this activity?” and a discussion of people's unrecognized similarities and differences.

**(UDHR article 2; CRC article 2)**

## Fostering confidence and self-esteem

### 1. Who am I and what am I like?

### A “Who Am I?” book

Children begin a book about themselves, with a self-portrait on the cover. Personal pictures, prose and poems can be collected in this book. As children learn to write, they can put personal details, questions about themselves and answers to questions in it too. If resources are limited, a book can be made for the whole class with a page or two for each child.

**(UDHR articles 3, 19; CRC articles 6, 7, 8, 12, 13, 30)**

### A circle for talking

Children sit in a circle that includes the teacher and any visitors. The teacher makes an open-ended statement and each student answers in turn. Questions might be one or more of the following:

- What I like best about myself is ...
- I'd like to be ...
- My favourite game is ...
- I think my name means ...
- I would like to learn about ...
- I feel happy when ...
- I feel sad when ...
- I want to become more ...
- Some day I hope ...

Listening without interrupting and sharing time equally are very important. Children can “pass” if they do not wish to speak. Each person remains seated until the activity is over. Answers can be included in the “Who Am I?” book(s).

**(UDHR articles 18, 19; CRC articles 8, 12, 13, 14, 17, 31)**

## The lifeline

Each child stretches out a piece of yarn that represents his or her own life. Children then hang on their yarn drawings, stories and objects that convey the important things that have happened to them. This can be done in chronological sequence, or in any order that the child may want. It can also be extended into the future.

**(UDHR articles 1, 3, 19; CRC articles 6, 8, 12, 13, 14, 27, 30, 31)**

## Me on the wall/ground

Trace the outline of each child on a large piece of paper (best done lying down) or on the ground. Have the student draw/paint in physical details, and then write around personal and physical qualities (e.g. name, height, weight, what the child would most like to learn or do at school or in adulthood). If you have used papers, pin them up around the wall. Allow all students to learn about each other as well as themselves.

**(UDHR articles 3, 19, 24; CRC articles 6, 7, 8, 12, 13, 28, 29, 31)**

## Me and my senses

Have children discuss in the circle, or use a role-play to explore the following statements:

- Hearing helps me to ...
- Seeing helps me to ...
- Smelling helps me to ...
- Touching helps me to ...
- Tasting helps me to ...

Rephrase the questions, where appropriate, to suit the needs of children with disabilities (e.g. “Not being able to see (very well? at all?) I’m still me, and I can . . .”). Get each child to invent an instrument to help them hear, smell or touch better. Have them describe, draw or dramatize it.

**(UDHR articles 22, 25, 26; CRC articles 23, 26, 28, 29)**

## Wishing-circle

Arrange the students in a circle. Propose that each child in turn makes the following wishes (this can also be done in small groups or pairs):

- If I could be any animal, I'd be \_\_\_\_\_ because ...
- If I could be a bird, I'd be \_\_\_\_\_ because ...
- If I could be an insect, I'd be \_\_\_\_\_ because ...
- If I could be a flower, I'd be \_\_\_\_\_ because ...
- If I could be a tree, I'd be \_\_\_\_\_ because ...
- If I could be a piece of furniture, I'd be \_\_\_\_\_ because ...
- If I could be a musical instrument, I'd be \_\_\_\_\_ because ...
- If I could be a building, I'd be \_\_\_\_\_ because ...
- If I could be a car, I'd be \_\_\_\_\_ because ...
- If I could be a street, I'd be \_\_\_\_\_ because ...
- If I could be a town/province/region, I'd be \_\_\_\_\_ because ...
- If I could be a foreign country, I'd be \_\_\_\_\_ because ...
- If I could be a game, I'd be \_\_\_\_\_ because ...
- If I could be a record, I'd be \_\_\_\_\_ because ...
- If I could be a TV show, I'd be \_\_\_\_\_ because ...
- If I could be a movie, I'd be \_\_\_\_\_ because ...
- If I could be a food, I'd be \_\_\_\_\_ because ...
- If I could be any colour, I'd be \_\_\_\_\_ because ...

**(UDHR article 19; CRC articles 13, 14)**

## 2. How do I live with others?

### A My puppet family

Each child makes a family of puppets that includes one of him or herself. These can be very simple, like cardboard cut-outs coloured and fixed to sticks or clay or mud figures. The figures are named and their relationships described and explained. Each child then devises a ceremony (a wedding, for example) or a festival, which is shown to the others in the class. The puppet family can be extended to include other people who live nearby. Children can dramatize something they do regularly with those people in order to bring them together. Extend the activity to include individuals from anywhere in the world.

(UDHR articles 16, 20, 27;  
CRC articles 9, 10, 15, 31)

### B Imaginary friend

The children sit or lie down quietly with their eyes closed. Tell them to breathe in deeply and then breathe out slowly. Repeat two more times. Now tell them to imagine a special place, a favourite place, anywhere in the world (or even in outer space). Say that they are walking in that place – in their imagination – feeling and hearing and seeing what is going on there. Lead them to a house or building they can visualize, where they go in to find a special room. The room has a door in one wall that opens by sliding up. The door slides up slowly, and as it does so, it reveals a special friend they have never met before – first feet, and finally the face. This friend can be old or young – anything. This friend is always there, and whenever they need someone to talk to, to turn to, they can visit him or her again if they wish. Close the door, leave the house and come home to the class. Let the children share what they have imagined in a speaking circle or in pairs or groups.

(UDHR article 20;  
CRC article 15)

### C Letters and friends

Set up a letter or electronic mail exchange with another class in another school or even another country. Initiate this exchange by sending poems or gifts from the class. This may lead to a visit later if the distance allows, and a chance to meet the children of the other community. Investigate the twin school:

- How big is it?
- What games are played there?
- What do the parents do?
- What are the differences and similarities?

(UDHR articles 19, 20, 26; CRC articles 13, 17, 29)

### D Buddy

Teachers should arrange for their students to have an older buddy from an upper class. An activity should be arranged to encourage children to seek out the help of their buddy if they have a problem. Ways should be devised to encourage the senior buddy to take an interest in his or her small colleague by showing games and helping with activities.

(UDHR article 20; CRC article 15)

### E People around me

Ask children in a talking circle to think of a good quality in themselves or ask "What are some qualities we admire in people?". Then lead a discussion on these topics:



- Do you respect in others the quality you like about yourself?
- Do you respect good qualities in others that you do not have?
- Do all human beings deserve respect? Why?
- How do you show respect for others?

Next ask children to think of a time when they felt hurt because someone did not respect them.

- How did disrespect feel?
- Why do people sometimes act disrespectfully to others?
- What is dignity? Is your dignity hurt when others do not respect you?
- What can you do when others do not respect you?

Finally,

- Ask “What does it mean if we say that all human beings deserve respect?”
- Ask for examples of how life in their community could be more peaceful if people showed greater respect for each other.
- Ask children to think of one way they could show respect for someone.

**(UDHR articles 1, 2, 12; CRC articles 2, 12, 13, 14, 16, 29)**



## The washing machine

Have the children form two parallel lines close together, and facing each other. Send a child from one end between the lines (“through the wash”). Everyone (where this is culturally appropriate) pats him or her on the back or shakes his or her hand while offering words of praise, affection and encouragement. The result is a sparkling, shining, happy individual at the end of the “wash”. He or she joins a line, and the process is then repeated for another child. (Running one or two people through daily is more fun than washing everybody in one big clean-up.)

**(UDHR articles 1, 2; CRC article 2)**

## Building trust

Trust begins with teacher/student relationships. Putting students at ease involves:

- Letting the students know that the teacher is just as human as they are;
- Explaining each and every activity thoroughly;
- Explaining unfamiliar words and ideas (concepts);

- Providing information (not just about specific activities but also about relevant issues touching students’ lives).

Where appropriate, the teacher should spend a few minutes of the day discussing local events and news items from the media. This will provide many opportunities to look at human rights issues in a less formal way. It can be an education in itself.

## Blind trust

Divide the class into pairs. Have one child blindfold the other and have the sighted member of the pair lead the “blind” one about for a few minutes. Make sure the leading child is not abusing the power to lead, since the idea is to nurture trust, not to destroy it. The “leader” of the pair should try to provide as wide a variety of experiences as possible, such as having the “blind” partner feel things with his or her feet or fingers, leading with vocal directions or even playing a game.

After a few minutes have the children reverse the roles and repeat the process so that the “leader” is now the led, and the “blind” partner is now the sighted one.

Once the activity is over, allow the children to talk about what happened. Discuss how they felt – not just as “blind” partners but their feelings of responsibility as “leaders” too.

This can lead not only to a greater awareness of what life is like for people with sight (or hearing) disabilities, but to a discussion of the importance of trust in the whole community. This can lead in turn to a discussion of world society, how it works and how it can fail to work too.

**(UDHR article 28; CRC articles 3, 23)**

## Creating classroom rules

The importance of classroom climate and the need for participation and cooperation cannot be emphasized enough. The children’s suggestions and opinions are also very helpful in creating the best classroom atmosphere. Be open to their help and provide necessary changes.

The next activity is very significant because it has a direct effect on classroom climate. It clearly demonstrates a teacher’s willingness to involve the class in how the classroom is run and her or his own trust in its members. It also makes

children think about what rules are desirable and possible in class, how they might be observed and the teacher's own role in maintaining the classroom environment.

## **A Classroom needs**

Classroom rules can be created in a number of ways: as a brainstorm (paring down the results in subsequent discussion); in small groups that then present their findings to a plenary session of the whole class; or as individual assignments that the teacher collates for class consideration later.

A good way to begin is by asking children what they "want" (the list may become quite long). Then ask them to choose from this list the items they think are really needed. They should end up with something shorter and much more essential. List these on a chart labelled "Our Classroom Needs". Finally, ask them to choose from their "needs" what they think they have a "right" to expect as members of society. List these on a chart labelled "Our Classroom Rights". Ask why they have chosen as they have.

**(UDHR articles 7, 21; CRC articles 12, 13, 28, 29)**

## **B Classroom responsibilities**

Emphasize the essential connection between rights and responsibilities. After students have created the list of classroom rights, ask them to rephrase each right in terms of responsibilities and list these in a separate chart labelled "Our Classroom Responsibilities" (e.g. "Everyone should feel safe in this room" might be revised as "Everyone has the responsibility not to insult anybody or hurt anyone's feelings").

**(UDHR article 29; CRC article 29)**

## **C Living with rights and responsibilities**

Once the class has agreed on its lists of basic rights and responsibilities, display them so that they can be referred to or amended as necessary. Sometimes children or the teacher may break the rules or situations may arise that the rules do not address. Sometimes conflicts may arise when classroom

rules are not compatible with the rules of other teachers or the school administration. These situations call for discussion and careful consideration of why things are going wrong. Order achieved by general consensus rather than simple control is always harder to get, and the process of reaching this consensus calls for compromise and careful negotiation. Such a process is itself a valuable learning experience.

**(UDHR articles 7, 11, 21; CRC articles 12, 13, 28, 29)**

## **Understanding human rights**

Having arrived at some classroom rules, it is a natural next step to consider the same sort of thing on a universal scale.

## **A Planning for a new country**

Explain that a new land has been discovered that has everything needed to sustain human life. No one has ever lived there before. There are no laws and no history. The whole class will be settling there. A small group has been appointed to draw up a list of rights for this all-new country. You do not know what position you will have in the new country.



Working in small groups, students in each group give this country a name and list ten rights the whole group can agree upon. Each group presents its list and the whole class makes a "class list" that includes all the rights mentioned. Discuss the class list (e.g. what would happen if some rights were excluded? Have any important rights been left out? How is this list different from your classroom rules?)

**(UDHR articles 13, 21, 26; CRC articles 12, 13)**

## **B Introducing the Universal Declaration of Human Rights**

Introduce the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, explaining that it is a list of rights for all people in the world. Then read the simplified version aloud (see annex 1). If stu-



dents hear an article that matches one of the rights on the class list, write the number of that article next to the right.

After completing the reading, discuss the results:

- Were any rights in the Universal Declaration left off the class list? Do students now want to add any new rights to the list?
- Were any rights on the class list left out of the Universal Declaration?
- Does the Universal Declaration include responsibilities as well as rights?

Students might try similar exercises using a simplified version of the Convention on the Rights of the Child.

**(UDHR articles 21, 26; CRC article 29)**

## Introducing children's rights



### What are children's rights?

Ask students whether there are rights and responsibilities that apply more specifically to them, not just as people but as young people – as children. What might it be wrong to do (or not to do) to someone just because he or she happens, at that point in time, to be “a child”?



Introduce the Convention on the Rights of the Child, explaining that it guarantees to children the things they need to grow up healthy, safe and happy and to become good citizens in their community. Help children understand the relationship between needs and rights.

Discuss:

- Why do you think the United Nations has adopted a document just for children's human rights? How are children's needs different from those of adults?
- Why do children need special protection? Give some examples?
- Why do children need special provisions for their welfare. What do children need for their survival, happiness and development?

- Why do children need to participate in their communities? Give some examples.
- Who is responsible for seeing that children's rights are respected? (e.g. parents? teachers? other adults? other children? the Government?)



### Wants and needs

Ask children working in small groups to create ten cards that illustrate things that children need to be happy. They can cut pictures from old magazines or draw these things. Help them label the cards. Each group explains and posts its cards under the heading “Needs”.

Next announce that the new Government has found that it can only provide some of the items on the list, so the group must eliminate ten items from the list of needs. Remove the cards selected and post them under the heading “Wants”.

Then announce that still further cuts are required and the group must eliminate another ten items and follow the same procedure.

Finally discuss this activity:

- What items were eliminated first? Why?
- What is the difference between wants and needs?
- Do wants and needs differ for different people?
- What would happen if the class had to go on eliminating needs?

Conclude by explaining that children's rights are based on what all children need to live a healthy, happy life and grow up to be responsible citizens. Introduce the Convention on the Rights of the Child as an effort to make sure that all children have these rights (see activity “What are children's rights?” above). Older children might read aloud the summarized version of the Convention (see annex 2) and compare it to their list of wants and needs.<sup>8</sup>

<sup>8</sup> Adapted from *It's Only Right! A Practical Guide to Learning about the Convention on the Rights of the Child* by Susan Fountain (UNICEF, 1993).



## **C** What does a child need?

Working in small groups, students draw a large outline of a child (or outline one of them) and give the child a name.



They then decide on the mental, physical, spiritual and character qualities they want this ideal child to have as an adult (e.g. good health, sense of humour, kindness) and write these qualities inside the outline. They might also make symbols on or around the child to represent these ideal qualities (e.g. books to represent education). Outside the child, the group lists the human and material resources the child will need to achieve these qualities (e.g. if the child is to be healthy,

it will need food and health care). Each group then “introduces” its new member of the community and explains its choices for the child.

Introduce the Convention on the Rights of the Child (see activity “What are children’s rights?” above). Then read aloud the summarized version of the Convention (see annex 2). When children hear an article that guarantees a child each of the needs they have listed, they write the number of the article(s) next to that item. Circle any needs identified by the class but not covered by the Convention.

## **D** Promoting children’s rights

In some countries children’s rights are advertised by newspapers, radio and television. Ask students working in small groups to make up some advertisements for particular articles of the Convention on the Rights of the Child (e.g. posters, skits, songs or other forms). Ask each group to perform or exhibit their ideas for the class as a whole.