

Putting the Rights of Child Human Rights Defenders Into Practice



Child-friendly Implementation Guide

Children are
Human Rights
Defenders!

THE IMPACT MAY
BE BIG OR SMALL
BUT WE ALL FIGHT
FOR WHAT WE
BELIEVE IN!



About

What? In this Guide you can learn all about the rights of child human rights defenders (CHRDs). These are children standing up for theirs and others human rights. The Guide will answer questions like: what are human rights? What are some of the challenges facing CHRDs? What and the gaps and what can be done to improve the situation?

This document is a child-friendly and everyone-friendly version of the original and more detailed version which you can read [here](#).

Why? This Guide can be used by children to teach others about their rights and their actions as defenders and as a tool to help adults and decision-makers (such as teachers, parents and carers, governments) better understand the rights of CHRDs and put them into practice.

How? There have been different ways that children and adults at the country, regional or global level have been supported to express their views and experiences on the protection and empowerment of CHRDs. All of this work has been collected and fed into the development of this Guide, which is the result of joint work by Child Rights Connect and its global [Children's Advisory Team](#) and Queens University Belfast.



Thank you

A big thank you to the Child Rights Connect Children's Advisory Team, a group of child advisors across all regions with boundless energy and motivation to promote and protect the rights of CHRDs. From 2018 until 2021, Child Rights Connect has supported 39 child advisors ranging from ages 10 to 18, all of whom have played a vital role in developing this Guide!

Here is a note from the 2021 Team:

*Learn to defend your and other rights
by reading and sharing this Guide!*

*And remember that today's human
rights violations are the cause of
tomorrow's conflicts.*

*Let's work together to reach more
parts of the world and make sure every
child human rights defender enjoys
their rights.*

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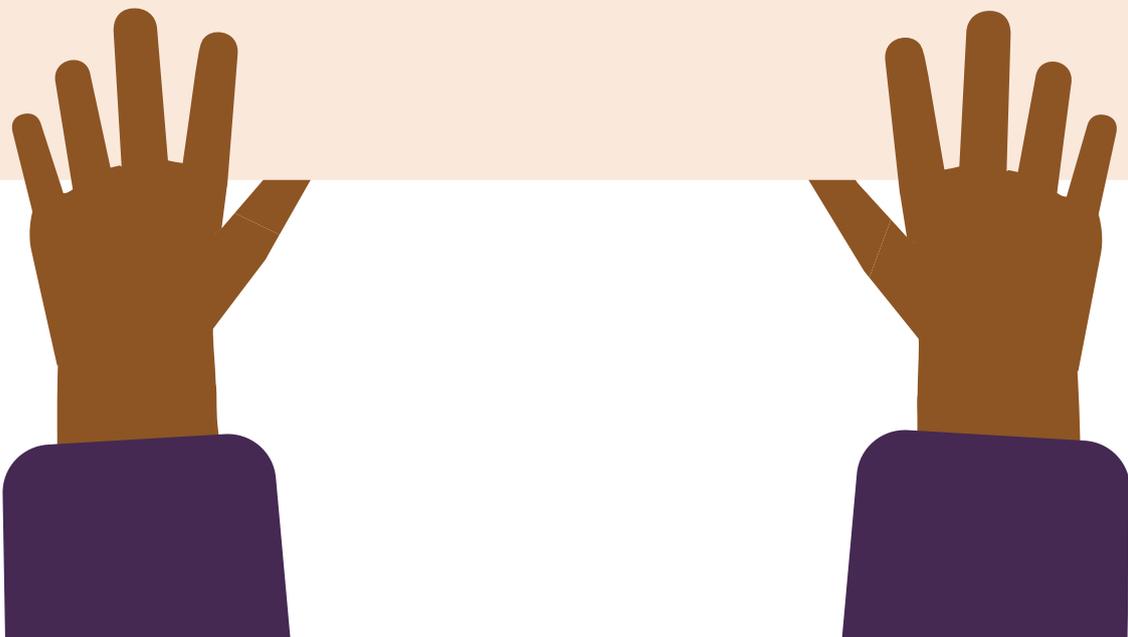
Putting the Rights of Child Human Rights Defenders into Practice

Who are CHRDs and what do they do?

Child human rights defenders (CHRDs) are children who stand up for their own rights or the rights of others.

Examples of CHRDs' actions:

- teaching others about children's rights
- being a member of a children's group to help make sure that the government respects its human rights promises
- running a campaign about a human rights issue
- taking part in a peaceful protest
- sending a report to the [UN Committee on the Rights of the Child](#)



What challenges do CHRDs face?

Children who act as Human Rights Defenders (HRDs) face many of the same challenges as adults who act as HRDs. But they can also meet extra problems because they are children. Here are some examples:

- They do not know or learn enough about their rights
- They are not able to get information without adult support
- They are not taken seriously because they are children
- They are not allowed by adults to get involved in activities
- They are bullied and abused because they are children speaking out

All of these problems can be more difficult when the child is a girl or has a disability or is from a local or native community or a minority.

What rights do CHRDs have?

Human rights are the strong promises that governments have made to people who live in their countries. These include special rights for children and parents/guardians and people who act as HRDs. These are set out in these documents:



- **The United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child (CRC)**
- **The Declaration of Human Rights Defenders (DHRD)**

This Guide explains how the promises that governments have made to all children and to all HRDs can be put into practice to support children who act as human rights defenders (CHRDs) in their actions.

The next sections set out what these rights are and what governments and others need to do so that children are able to act as CHRDs in ways that allow them to carry out their activities well and stay safe.

The Four General Principles

There are **4 rights** in the **CRC** that apply across all other rights.

CHILDREN ARE
HUMAN RIGHTS
DEFENDERS!

1. The right not to be treated unfairly
2. The right to have decisions taken in children's best interests
3. The right to life and development
4. The right to be heard in decision-making.



What is happening

- Some CHRDs (girls, minorities, children with disabilities, indigenous children) do not enjoy their rights equally to other children
- Decisions are made about CHRDs without proper understanding about what is in their best interests. Sometimes best interests are understood to be the same as being safe
- CHRDs' views are not found or taken seriously on the issues that matter to them, including how they can be supported as defenders
- CHRDs can experience violence for their activity

What is needed

- Governments should have laws and policies that make sure CHRDs enjoy their rights equally
- Governments must make sure that CHRDs can act without risking their lives or harming their development
- Adults (such as the police, teachers, parents) who make decisions about what is in CHRDs' best interest should receive training so that they understand that, when doing this, they must seek CHRDs' views and take into account all of their rights, including the right to act as a CHRD
- Governments should create ways to seek the views of CHRDs and take them seriously on issues of public interest



Rights of Parents/Guardians

Parents/guardians have a right and a duty to advise and guide CHRDs. **Governments should support them to do this.**

What is stopping that

Example

A CHRD is stopped by their parent/guardian from taking part in a Friday's for Future strike because they are worried that their child will miss out on school.

- Parents/guardians often do not know what children's rights are and how to support CHRDs to act safely
- Parents/guardians will sometimes stop children acting because they are worried about safety or education, or have concerns about what people would think

What is needed

- Governments should make sure that CHRDs can act safely and in ways that are not harmful to their education
- Governments should promote a positive attitude towards children who act as HRDs and support and inform parents/guardians so that they can support CHRDs

Example

A government sets up local community meetings across their country to teach parents/guardians about the rights of CHRDs and how to support them in their actions.

Education Rights

Children have a right to learn about human rights and have their rights respected when they are at school. Governments should make sure that everyone, including children and their teachers, learn about human rights, including the rights of HRDs.

What is happening

- Schools do not teach children about their rights and how to act on them
- Many teachers do not know that children have the right to act as CHRDs
- Some children get punished by teachers or bullied by other children in school for acting as HRDs
- Some children are not in school

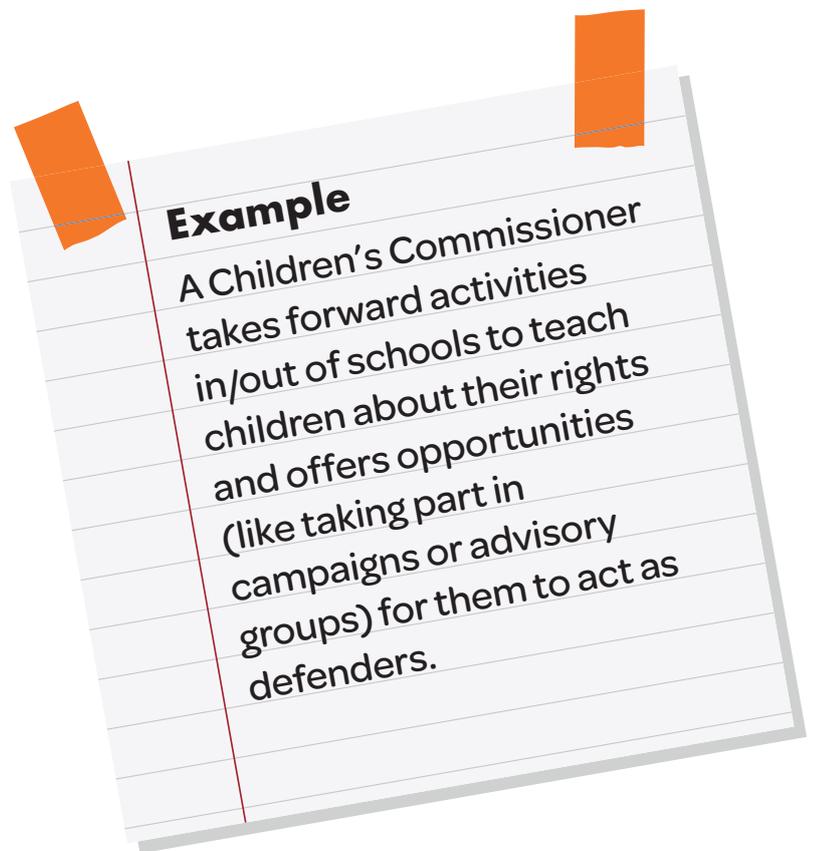


Example

Teachers in school treat children unfairly based on gender, disability or other backgrounds, which spreads an environment of fear or unfairness among children as they grow up.

What is needed

- Schools should teach children about human rights and ways that children can defend their own rights and the rights of others
- Children should learn about human rights by seeing them respected at school
- Staff in schools should learn about children's rights and how they can support children to act as CHRDs
- Children's champions (sometimes called Commissioners or Ombudspersons) and non-governmental organisations (NGOs) can help children to learn about human rights, including children who are not in school



SCHOOLS SHOULD TALK ABOUT HUMAN RIGHTS, TEACH STUDENTS HOW TO ACT OR WHAT TO DO TO PROTECT THEM!



Civil & Political Rights

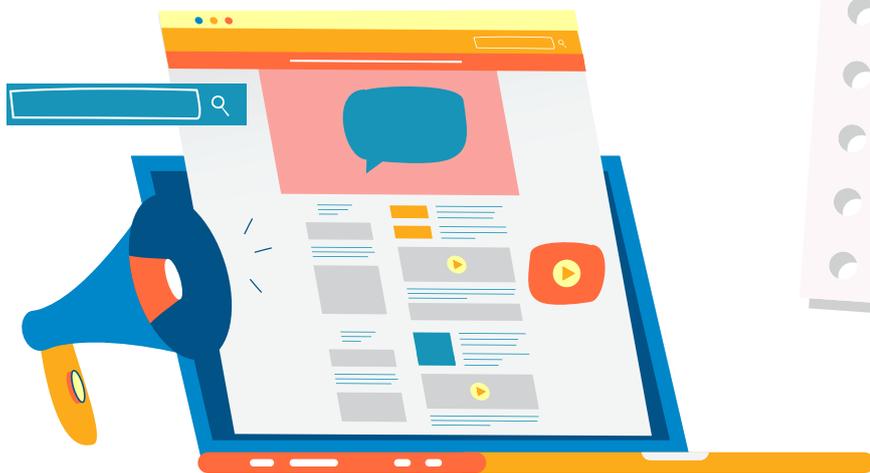
Civil and political rights include the right to seek, get and share information; to have ideas and opinions and say what children think about human rights issues; to have information about them kept private; to join or set up groups to work on human rights issues; and to take part in a peaceful protest. CHRDs also have these rights when they are online, too.

What is happening

- Children face more barriers to their civil and political rights because of their age, and often without good or clear reasons
- Sometimes children are stopped from seeking information, saying what they think, joining a group or taking part in a protest because adults think they will not be safe, or it will be bad for their education
- Sometimes laws say that children have to be a certain age before they can join a group or go online

Example

A law in a certain country says that associations cannot be set up by anyone under the age of 18 which means that CHRDs are not able to exercise their rights as defenders.



What is needed

- Adults should learn about the rights of children who act as HRDs and how to support them to act as CHRDs
- If adults are worried about children's safety, they should first try to do everything they can to make sure that children are safe rather than stop them acting
- Children should only be stopped if it is necessary and, even then, any restriction should be balanced and fair

Example

Child-friendly information is made available by UN experts so that children know how they can act as CHRDs at the international level, and where to get more information and support.



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Protection from Harm

Children have the right to be protected from harm and violence including being hurt, bullied or treated badly. The government should make sure that HRDs are not put at risk and do not face any violence, threats, punishment or unfair treatment because of their activities. If a CHRD has been harmed, they have a right to seek justice and get help to recover. Complaints should be taken seriously and dealt with quickly.

What is happening

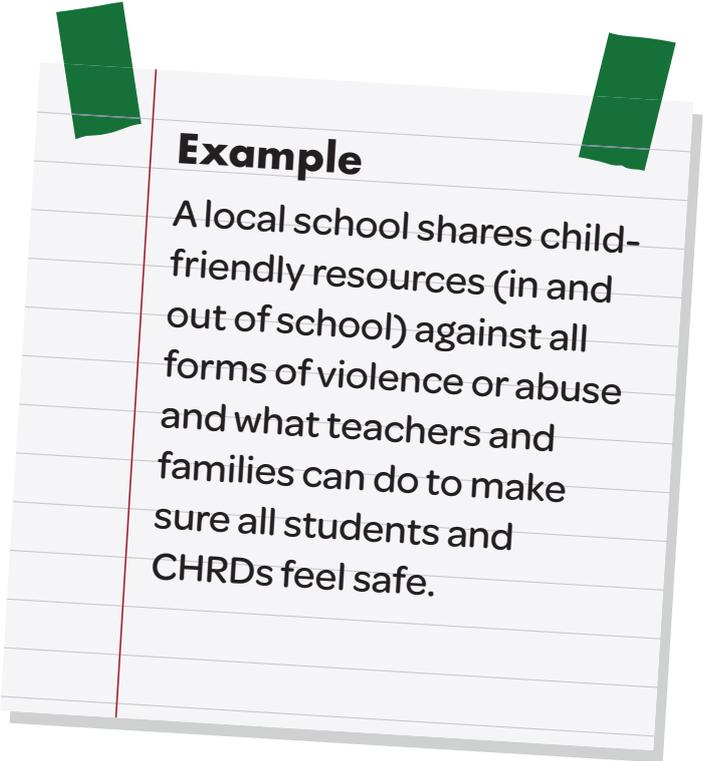
- Many CHRDs experience abuse in person and online for their activity
- CHRDs are likely to attract abuse just because they are a child, and the abuse is likely to be more harmful because they are a child
- The ways of complaining and getting protection that are offered to adult HRDs are not always accessible to children

Example

A CHRD is sent abusive messages after they help to set up an online climate change petition, but they do not know where to get help and adults around them do not take it seriously.

What is needed

- Governments should do all that they can to keep CHRDs safe (e.g. police can block off streets or change the direction of traffic during protests)
- Parents, teachers, police, lawyers need to be trained on children's rights and how to support CHRDs to carry out their activity and stay safe
- CHRDs and parents/guardians should be informed about the risks and how to manage them so that they can make informed choices and keep themselves safe
- Governments must offer age-appropriate ways for CHRDs to make complaints when their rights are not met or taken away, or get protection if they are at risk of harm
- Governments should fund services (help lines, child protection and health care) that will help CHRDs recover if they experience harm
- The media (offline and online) should do all they can to protect CHRDs from abuse, and make sure that their privacy is protected



Example

A local school shares child-friendly resources (in and out of school) against all forms of violence or abuse and what teachers and families can do to make sure all students and CHRDs feel safe.

Creating CHR D-Friendly Justice

Governments should make sure that CHR Ds have ways of complaining if their rights are denied. CHR Ds should have ways of getting support if they are at risk of or have experienced harm. Governments should collect good information about what is happening to CHR Ds.

What is happening

- Supports for HRDs who are at risk of harm are often not available to or suitable for children
- CHR Ds may not know about organisations that can support and help them
- CHR Ds cannot get child-friendly ways of complaining or seeking remedies
- There is very little information collected about CHR Ds

Example

A local government takes steps which means that CHR Ds cannot access basic legal protection (like a lawyer who can stand up for them and their rights) and special support and treatment as children.

What is needed

- CHRDs and their families should be able to get support if they are at risk of harm for their activity
- There should be child-friendly ways of complaining and seeking to set things right if their rights are denied
- CHRDs' views should be sought and taken seriously when provision is made as to how to support HRDs or provide ways of complaining and setting things right
- Governments should collect good information about CHRDs



Example

A government helps to fund a complaints service for children, including CHRDs, to report when their rights have been taken away and seek protection. Child-friendly and accessible information is shared so that children know about the service and how to use it.

Putting it All Into Practice

The CRC requires governments to do everything they can to make sure that children enjoy their rights including when they act as CHRDs.

What is needed

Governments should:

- Make laws and policies that protect the rights of CHRDs
- Have information and campaigns to make sure everyone values children's involvement in public life
- Make sure that all children learn about their rights and how to use them
- Train professionals who work with CHRDs about how to protect their rights
- Provide funding and support to NGOs who work with CHRDs

Human Rights bodies (such as the United Nations) should:

- Publish child-friendly information that can support CHRDs
- Have ways that CHRDs can contact them and report on their experiences
- Check whether governments are meeting their promises to CHRDs and give advice about how they can do better



Visit our website: <https://childrightsconnect.org>