

How can you use rights?

Student Handout

- With respect for the rights of other people

Everyone has rights. All rights are equal. However, the specific rights we have may depend on our situation, for example, whether you are a child or an adult. Sometimes rights conflict with each other. One person's right could conflict with another person's right or two rights could conflict within one person.

Rights can conflict between two people: I have the right to express myself, but if I were to threaten to kill you that would conflict with your right to feel safe

Rights can conflict within one person: A child has the right to privacy but if they are hiding drugs in their room adults in their life also have to consider the child's right to be safe and healthy. The child's right to privacy is conflicting with the child's right to be safe and healthy.

- To get what's best for you

If people are making decisions that are not the best thing for you then you, or someone who cares about you, needs to speak up for your rights. When two rights conflict (for example a child's right and their parent's right) the decision that is made by adults must be one that is best for that child. For that to happen, adults should listen to what the child has to say about the decision.

- To get help if you need it

If your rights are being violated then there is someone out there whose job it is to help. You can call on the United Nations, the government, the legal system, various rules, codes, charters of different organizations, police, teachers, the media, caregivers (i.e. parents) or other young people to help fight for rights or to help balance rights that are conflicting.

Rights are not privileges. Your rights can't be taken away because you are irresponsible. For example, it would be wrong to be kicked out of school because you didn't do your homework. The only time a right can be fairly violated is when it conflicts with another right, but then it has to be given back when the conflict is over.

All rights are equal and work best when they are used together. All the rights work together – like players on a team – to make sure people are respected as human beings. You need all your rights! They are a package deal and work badly when some rights are respected and others are disrespected. For example, having a house to live in isn't more important than having food to eat; you need both to survive and be healthy. Although one right may seem more important in one situation, you can't rank one right as being more important than another in all cases.