

NICCY

PROMOTING THE RIGHTS OF
CHILDREN & YOUNG PEOPLE

42 RIGHTS

for children





Your guide to your rights!

Let's learn about
our rights!





WHO IS NICCY?

The Northern Ireland Commissioner for Children and Young People is **Koulla Yiasouma**.

Your Commissioner's job is to protect and promote your rights and best interests. NICCY is independent of the Government. The Commissioner works to make sure that you and other people know about your rights and that people making decisions – for example, Government or councils – have your best interests in mind. The Commissioner will also speak out if she believes children or young people aren't getting a fair deal. NICCY works with all children and young people up to the age of 18, or 21 for those who have a disability or experience of being in care.

If you would like to find out more about your rights, how to get help and what the Commissioner does, please visit **www.niccy.org**

To get in touch with the Commissioner and team;
phone **028 9031 1616**, or email **info@niccy.org**



WHAT ARE RIGHTS?

Rights are promises made to you by Government. Rights are about making sure you are treated well and get a fair deal. They set out the sorts of things that must be put in place for this to happen. Everybody has rights, and everybody should respect the rights of other people. Some people find the idea of "children's rights" quite difficult – they may think it is about children and young people getting everything they want and not having to listen to adults. This is not the case, children's rights are human rights and are as important. Even the right to play is a serious right because you need to play to grow up happy and healthy.



WHAT IS THE UNCRC?

The UNCRC or UN Convention on the Rights of the Child is an agreement signed by many countries, including the UK Government, which lists promises made to all children and young people. If you are under 18, the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child is about you. It describes the commitment that your Government has made to recognise your rights. The Convention is an international law that recognises that children and young people in Northern Ireland have rights. The UNCRC has 54 articles in it, **42 rights** are for children and young people up to 18 years of age. The others are all about how governments and adults should work together to make sure children and young people can access their rights.

WHAT IS THE UN?

The United Nations (UN) is an international organisation that helps countries live together peacefully and makes sure the rights of all people are respected. They have a Committee on the Rights of the Child who are experts on Children's Rights.

WHY 42?

These 'articles' are the 42 promises made by Government to children and young people – your rights. Most of them are about **WHAT** Government should do for your health, your education and your family. However four are particularly important because they are about **HOW** Government should deliver on your rights:

- Your best interests come first;
- Your views and opinions must be taken into account in decisions taken about your life;
- You have a right to life, survival and development must be protected and be safe; and
- You need to be protected from discrimination (treated equally and the same as everyone else).



Read this leaflet and you will be able to spread the word about children and young people's rights, to help make sure they are respected.

1

All children and young people have rights.

If you are under 18, the Convention applies to you.

2

The rights in the Convention apply to everyone under the age of 18, no matter who you are, whether you are a boy or a girl, what your religion is, whether you have a disability, or what type of family you come from.

You shouldn't be treated badly or discriminated against because you are – or seem – different.

*NICCY can help you out if you feel you are being discriminated against. Contact our office on **028 9031 1616**.*

*In an emergency you can contact Childline on **0800 1111** (free of charge – even from a mobile. The call won't show on your bill) open 24 hours a day.*

Discrimination can be against the law, so get some help.

- 3 If a decision is being made by any person about you, then your **best interests** must be considered when making the final decision. What is best for YOU is what matters.

For example, if a council is planning a new road, they have to think about how their plans affect your safety.

- 4 The Government has a responsibility **to make sure these rights are a reality** for all children and young people, and make sure people know about your rights.

- 5 **Parents and guardians have a responsibility to guide you** through your childhood and help you learn how to use your rights. The kind of support and guidance parents give will change as you get older and more independent. The Government must respect this important role that parents have.

- 6 You have the right to be **alive, survive and to develop** through life. The Government must keep you safe from harm.





- 7** You have the **right to a name at birth and the right to be a citizen of your country.** You also have the right to be cared for by your parents, as far as possible. Every child in Northern Ireland has to be registered when they are born. Your name, the date you were born and your parents' names will normally be recorded together in one place. In Northern Ireland, the law recognises that your parents should normally be the people who care for you, if this is the best thing for you.

- 8** You have a **right to an identity** and to know who you are – official records should be kept. If you are over 18 years old and adopted, you can try to find out who your birth parents are. If you decide to do this, it is really important that you think things through and talk about it with someone.
- 9** You **should not be separated from your parents unless it is for your own good;** for example, if a parent is mistreating you or neglecting you. If your parents have separated, you have the right to stay in contact with both parents unless this is not in your best interests.
- 10** If you and your parents live in different countries, you have the right to **stay in touch** or get back together as a family.
- 11** The **Government must make sure you are protected** from being kidnapped or taken out of the country when you shouldn't be. In the UK, babies must have their own passports with pictures.

- 12 You have the right to **speak up** and have your **opinions listened to** and taken seriously by adults, on things that affect you. This means you having a say at home, in your school, in your community, when getting services, and even being listened to by politicians when making new laws.
- 13 You have **freedom of expression**, or the right to say whatever you believe as long as it does not harm other people. You also have the responsibility to respect the rights and freedom of others.
- 14 You have the **freedom to have your own thoughts and beliefs** and to choose your own religion. Government should recognise the role of your parents in providing you with guidance.
- 15 You have a right to **freedom of association** (to join and form groups and make friends) and to **freedom of assembly** (to meet together with others) as long as this does not harm other people. In exercising your right, you should respect the rights of others.





16

You have the right to your own space and **privacy**. For example, Government shouldn't interfere with your family or home life, unless there is a legal reason for this.

In Northern Ireland, the law will allow an exception to this right when you or someone else is in some kind of danger. The law should also stop people saying things that damage your reputation if they aren't true.

17

You have the right to **access information** which is important to your wellbeing, for example from newspapers, websites, TV, social media and radio. Adults should help you find the information you are looking for and make sure it's not harmful.

18

Government should make it clear that both parents share responsibility to raise you, and should always consider what is best for you. The Government should **help your parents care for you properly**, including helping them find childcare when they are working.

19

You must be kept safe from harm and **protected against violence and abuse**. You must be given proper care by those looking after you. If you think you or anyone else is in real danger, then you should speak to an adult you trust – maybe a teacher, a social worker or Childline.

*In an emergency you can contact Childline on **0800 1111** (free of charge – even from a mobile. The call won't show on your bill) open 24 hours a day.*

20

If you can't live with your parents, then you have the right to **special care**. For example, you may be looked after by other members of your family or by a different family. Your religion, beliefs and language must all be considered when a new home is being chosen. This might mean finding people from the same or similar background as you.

21

If you're being adopted, this must only happen under very strict rules which make sure that what is happening is **best for you**. In Northern Ireland, there are strict laws which cover adoption. If you have any questions about adoption, your social worker can help.

22

Refugees are people who have been forced to leave their country because it is not safe. If you are a refugee, you have a right to special help and to be allowed to live somewhere that is safe, particularly if you have been separated from your parents.





- 23** If you have any kind of **disability**, you have a right to special help to make sure you can live a full life and join in with things in your community. Money should not be a barrier to this.
- 24** You have a right to be as healthy as possible, and if you are ill, you must be given **good healthcare services**. You have the right to live in a safe, healthy environment with good food and clean drinking water.
- The Government must make sure that anyone having a baby is given good healthcare, and parents are supported to keep their children healthy. In Northern Ireland, the Government has a responsibility to make sure everyone gets healthcare, including children and young people.
- 25** If you are **looked after** in a care home or somewhere else away from home for health treatment, you have the right to have your living arrangements checked regularly, to make sure they are still what's best for you.

- 26** You have the **right to social security benefits** from the Government if you need them. This could mean money for housing or living costs.
- 27** You have the **right to an adequate standard of living** for your physical, mental and social development. Your parents have the main responsibility to make sure you are provided for but, when necessary, Government should also help, particularly in relation to meeting your basic needs including a place to live, food and clothing.
- 28** You have the right to primary and secondary **education**, and Government should make sure all young people have an equal opportunity to get to college or university.
- In Northern Ireland, primary and secondary education is free and children from three years old are entitled to a free nursery place. Schools should respect your rights and treat you with dignity when it comes to discipline in the school.





29

Your education should help you **develop your skills and personality** fully, teach you about your own and other people's rights and prepare you for adult life. Your education should help you to develop respect for your parents, for your own cultural background and national values. Education should promote equality and help you to develop an understanding and tolerance of others, and respect for the natural environment.

30

You have a right to **enjoy your own culture**, use your own language and practise your own religion. In Northern Ireland, there are many different communities and cultures with different languages, religions and ethnic identities.

31

You have the **right to rest and leisure, as well as to play** and to have the chance to participate in a wide range of activities, including in cultural life and the arts. It is very important that you have time to rest and relax, as well as to play, meet with friends and take part in activities.



- 32** The Government must protect you from doing **dangerous work**, or work that could harm your health or interfere with your education.
- 33** You have the right to be **protected from using dangerous drugs**.

- 34** You should be **protected from sexual exploitation**, which is when children or young people are pressurised, forced or tricked into sexual activities in return for something else like money, drugs, alcohol, attention, debt repayment or protection. This is a form of sexual abuse and you have the right to be protected from it.

*If you are affected by this please phone Childline on
0800 1111 to speak to someone who can help,
or talk to an adult you can trust.*

***Please remember, what is happening
to you is not your fault!***

- 35** You have a right to be protected **from being abducted, trafficked or sold**.
- 36** You have a right to be **protected from all other sorts of exploitation** which can damage your welfare or development. Exploitation can include things like being forced to work in factories, farms or someone's home, or being made to work or beg for criminals. The Government must protect you from this.

37

If you break the law you should **not be punished in the same way as adults**. You will be able to get legal help and should not be locked up unless it is absolutely necessary. You should not be tortured or treated in a cruel way.

In Northern Ireland, if you are aged 10 or over, you are responsible for crimes you commit. You cannot be prosecuted if you are under the age of 10. In Northern Ireland, children do not always go to court but are dealt with through a diversionary scheme, youth conference or youth engagement clinic. You should be connected with your community and helped not to commit the crime again. The PSNI and the Youth Justice Agency in Northern Ireland must make decisions which are in the best interests of the child.

38

If you are under 15, **you cannot be recruited into the army** or take part in fighting in armed conflicts. During fighting, governments are required to protect civilian populations, particularly children who are affected. In Northern Ireland, you have to be 16 to join any of the armed forces, but you should not normally be allowed to fight until you are 18.



39

If you have been a victim of abuse, neglect or exploitation, or of an armed conflict, you have **the right to special support** to help you recover.

40

If you have been accused of committing a crime you have the right to be considered **innocent until proven guilty**, through proper legal procedures. These procedures should take into account international standards and should be properly adapted to reflect your individual needs as a child or young person.



41

If your **country's own laws, or international laws** give children more than the Convention requires, then your country should meet the higher standards in those laws.

42

You have the right to **know your rights**. The Government must publicise the Convention to children, young people and adults throughout their country.

Contact Us:

Tel: 028 9031 1616

Web: www.niccy.org

Email: info@niccy.org

Facebook: [www.facebook.com/
nichildrenscommissioner](https://www.facebook.com/nichildrenscommissioner)

Twitter: @NICChildCom

Instagram: NICCY_YP



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