

2. A Constitution for Our Group

Who has responsibility for my rights?



Themes	Citizenship, Democracy, Participation
Level of complexity	Level 3
Age	10-13 years
Duration	Phase 1: 60–90 minutes; Phase 2: 30-45 minutes
Group size	10–30 children
Type of activity	Discussion, consensus building, rule making
Overview	Children develop a group ‘constitution’ stating their rights and responsibilities
Objectives	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • To understand the relationship of rights to responsibilities • To connect rights and responsibilities in daily life • To emphasize participation in the creation and protection of rights • To create an agreed set of rules and responsibilities for the group
Preparation	None
Materials	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Pencil and paper for each participant • Flip chart and markers • Optional: Copies of the simplified CRC

Instructions

Phase One

- Explore children’s experience and understanding of rules and responsibilities, starting with some restrictions that they already understand. Ask them to complete sentence such as this: “I don’t have the right to ___ because ...” (e.g. I don’t have the right to hit people when I am angry because ... / I don’t have the right to treat people unfairly.). List these and then ask the children to turn the statements from positive to negative (e.g. I have the right not to be hit / I have the right to be treated fairly.).
- When children understand the process of creating positive rights statements such as these, divide them into small groups of four or five. Give each group paper and markers. Explain that:
 - Each small group should make three or four basic rules for the whole group.
 - They should use the phrase “Everyone has the right to...” (e.g. Everyone has the right to participate.).
 - They can only write this down as a right if everyone in the group agrees.
 - The goal is not to have many rules but rules that everyone accepts.
- Bring the whole group back together and ask each group to present their rules. Record them on a chart such as the one below.
 - First ask for specific rights that groups have identified. Combine similar rights, asking for group approval of any revised language. List these on the flipchart under the ‘Rights’ column.
 - After listing a right, ask what specific responsibility every individual has to see that everyone enjoys this right. Write this in the ‘Responsibilities’ column next to the right, using language such as, “I have the responsibility to...”, or “I should...”
- Then ask what responsibility each right involves. Write this as a statement next to the right statement, using the first person (e.g. I have the responsibility not to exclude someone from participating).



CONSTITUTION	
<i>RIGHTS</i>	<i>RESPONSIBILITIES</i>
Everyone has the right to be treated fairly. Everyone has the right to express an opinion.	I have the responsibility to treat everyone fairly. I should give everyone the right to express an opinion.

- After including all the rights and responsibilities listed by the small groups, ask the children to review their draft constitution.
 - Point out that it is better to have a few good rules than too many not-so-good rules. Can any of these rights and responsibilities be combined? Can any be eliminated?
 - Are there other rights and responsibilities that need to be added?
- When the lists of rights and responsibilities are complete, ask the children whether they could use these statements as a kind of ‘constitution’ for their group.
 - Are they willing to observe these rules that they made themselves?
 - Who is responsible for making sure that everyone follows this ‘constitution’?
 - What happens when someone violates one of the rights?
 - Is it necessary to have consequences for not following rules? Why?
- When you have arrived at a final version of the ‘constitution’, make a clean copy and hang it in a prominent place. Explain that these will be our rules for working and playing together, for both children and adults.
- Conclude the discussion by emphasizing that rules and responsibilities help us to live together in a way that everyone’s rights are respected. Rules protect our rights (e.g. to participate, to have an opinion, to learn, to play, etc.), keep us safe and healthy, and also give us responsibilities to respect the rights of others.

Debriefing and Evaluation

1. Ask the children to discuss their experience of this activity.
 - a. Was it easy for your small group to develop a list of rights? Was it easy to draw up the list of responsibilities?
 - b. Was it easy to work together in a group? What are some of the advantages and disadvantages of working together in a group?
 - c. Were some ideas for rights not agreed on by the whole group? Why?
 - d. What did you do with the ideas that were not agreed on? Did anybody try to convince the rest of the group in order to get agreement? Were any ideas reconsidered?
 - e. What did you learn about yourself in this activity? What did you learn about rules and responsibilities?
 - f. Did you learn anything about democracy?
2. Discuss the purpose of rules and responsibilities by asking questions such as the ones below, and recording their responses.
 - a. What rules do you have in your life (e.g. at home, at school, in other settings)? Who made these rules?
 - b. What responsibilities do you have? Who gave you these responsibilities?
 - c. Do adults have rules and responsibilities too? Where did these come from?
 - d. Why do we all have rules and responsibilities? Do we need them?
 - e. What happens when somebody doesn’t follow the rules? Is it necessary to have consequences for not following rules? Why?



3. Discuss enforcement of rights and responsibilities, asking questions such as these:
 - a. Now that you have agreed on rights and responsibilities, how will you make sure that everyone observes them?
 - b. Who has the responsibility to see that these rights are respected?
 - c. Should there be some consequence for a person who does not observe the rules? Who should decide on the consequences?

Phase Two

1. A few days or weeks after making the Constitution, ask the children to reconsider it. Point out that laws often have to be improved, eliminated or added.
 - a. Do they still agree on the rights and responsibilities they developed earlier?
 - b. Are some responsibilities harder to observe than others? Why
 - c. Does anything in their Constitution need to be changed? Eliminated? Added?
2. Discuss enforcement of rules and responsibilities, asking questions such as these:
 - a. Are some rights violated more often than others? Why?
 - b. Who is taking the responsibility to see that these rights are respected?
 - c. Who decides what happens when someone violates one of the group's rules?
 - d. Does the group need to work together to establish some consequences for breaking the rules?

Debriefing and Evaluation

- Discuss what it means to have rules for the group that were made by the group itself. Relate this process to the way laws are made in a democracy.
 - Does it help to have a Constitution for our group?
 - What difference does it make that the group made its own rules?

Suggestions for follow-up

- You may wish that every child has and keeps a copy of the group's 'constitution'.
- When conflicts or problems arise in the group, try to use the group's constitution to resolve them. Real-life problems often help to bring out needs to revise the 'constitution'.
- You may want to take Phase 2, Step 2 further to enable the children to develop cooperatively some established consequences for breaking the rules.
- Give the children copies of the simplified CRC, p. 296. Ask them to compare their constitution with this document of rights for all the children of the world. Are there rights and corresponding responsibilities in the CRC that they would want to add to their Constitution?
- With older children, discuss why children need a special convention that defines their rights. Do children have different human rights from those of adults? Different responsibilities? Help the children understand the relationship between responsibilities and the CRC principle of evolving capacities.
- 'EVERY VOTE COUNTS', P. 103, which engages children in the process of democratic decision making, makes a good preliminary or follow-up activity.

Ideas for action

- Ask the children to find out if their school, team, or club has a set of rules or policies and procedures that guard and protect the rights of the children, and if those rules also state their responsibilities. If so, ask them to evaluate these rules:



- Who made them?
- Do you agree with these rules?
- Can they be changed? If so, how?
- What happens when people don't follow these rules?

Tips for the facilitator

- Some children may not be familiar with the word or concept of 'constitution'. You may decide not to introduce the word (Phase 1, Step 4) and simply call the document 'the rules and responsibilities for our group'. On the other hand, you may want to introduce the concept of a constitution prior to this activity, asking children to find out the answers to the following:
 - Does our country have a constitution?
 - What is in our constitution?
 - Who wrote it? When was it written?
 - Who pays attention to whether it is respected or not?
 - What happens when someone does not follow our constitution?
- Many children have a negative attitude towards rules, seeing them only as restriction on their freedom. You may need to spend some time discussing and giving examples of how we need rules to live together.
- Young children may need help differentiating between responsibilities in terms of personal obligations towards others (e.g. taking turns, respecting differences, refraining from violence) from limitations or tasks placed on them by adults (e.g. brushing teeth, making the bed, raising hands in school, doing homework).
- Stress the connection between the rights and roles/responsibilities of every person, both adults and children. Include the responsibility to enforce rules as well as that of respecting them.

Adaptations

1. To make this activity less complex for younger children, keep the experience concrete:
 - a. Keep the discussion focused on rights and responsibilities.
 - b. Don't go into the complications of rules, enforcement, and responsibility for enforcement.
2. For older children you can go further into the abstract relationship between rights, rules, and responsibilities with debriefing questions such as these:
 - a. What is the relationship between rights and rules?
 - b. What is the difference between rules and responsibilities?

