



Children's Rights Centre

May 2011

Local Government Elections & Children's Rights

NewsBrief on Children's Rights

CHILDREN AND THE ELECTIONS

In the Bill of Responsibilities launched by the Minister of the Department of Basic Education in March, one of the rights 'correlated' to the responsibilities of learners, educators, parents and caregivers is this:

The right to citizenship requires active participation in community life.

We entirely agree and, in honour of the International Day of the Child, we here include a 'toolkit' from *Proud2b.org Community Development*

Contents

Children and the Elections

June 1st – Child Rights Day – celebrate!
Child Protection Week 2011 - Focus on adolescents

TALKING ABOUT POLITICS WITH CHILDREN

If you do talk politics with your kids, make sure to keep it fun. One of my favorite memories with my first born Luca is taking him with me into the voting booth with the previous election to watch me check off my ballots. He was so excited and told me that he couldn't wait for his chance to vote one day. I know that the experience that day helped instill a level of excitement, which I would like him to carry with him in the future. We need to start building that foundation early with our own kids. Honestly, I think one of the most important points is that your conversations and explanations are age appropriate. Here are 5 tips to help you:

1. Keep it simple

In keeping with the age-appropriateness theme, don't get too technical unless your kids are ready for it. Just like discussions about babies and sex, only answer the questions they are asking. Stay simple. If you are trying to explain the voting process to young children, illustrate voting at home: Have your kids vote on what you will watch during family movie night, or what they want for dessert. When we explain the role of the President to our seven-year-old son, we use terms he'll understand: "He's the boss of South Africa but he has a big team of people that help make important decisions. And there are some big decisions that all of us get to help make by voting. It's *our job* to vote."

2. Relate discussions to their everyday life

Is your city voting on any measure that could impact the parks that your kids play at or the schools they attend? This is a simple way to explain to your kids how everyone in your city who votes plays an important role in making decisions about things that are important to your child. With older kids, you can broaden this to a national level. Is there legislation that can impact the requirements for teens to obtain a driver's license? Talking to them about issues that are important and relevant to their lives helps them understand why everyone needs to use their voice in politics.

3. Bring your kids to your polling place on Election Day

Let them share in the excitement. Little kids can wear your "I Voted" sticker with pride. If they feel left out of the voting process, create a kid-polling place at home, make ballots and let them decide who they think should be president.

We gratefully acknowledge the support of the Bernard van Leer Foundation in the production and distribution of this newsletter.

Children's Rights Centre

Postal address:
P.O. Box 3630
Durban 4000, South Africa

Physical address
22nd floor S.A. Eagle Building
353 Dr Pixley KaSeme Street
(formerly West Street),
Durban, South Africa
Tel: 031 307 6075
Fax: 031 307 6074

E-mail: info@crc-sa.co.za
www.crc-sa.co.za

You could add some fun things to the ballot and let them vote for their favourite movies, books, singers, foods and desserts.

4. Share your views but don't be upset if they disagree

If you're voting for a certain party, tell your kid. But explain why this vote is important to you. Your job here isn't to convince your kid to share your views. It's to show your kid why you have a certain stance. And if little Luca disagrees with you, so be it. Everyone is entitled to his or her opinion. If anything, keep an open mind. You might learn a thing or two about your first grader's uncomplicated and unclouded thought process. And you should also mention to your kid that they shouldn't get angry with others for not sharing their opinions, too.

5. Get historical

Provide context to political events. Whatever your political views, you can certainly explain to your kid that this particular election might make history. Make sure your kids know they will be a part of this important milestone.

2. JUNE 1st – CHILD RIGHTS DAY – CELEBRATE!

International Day of the Child is on June 1st and celebrates the child as a person that holds RIGHTS. This is an affirmative view of children – not looking at the stereotypes that so often depict children as little angels (who are so often victims of abuse) – or little devils (who so often perpetrate violence). These stereotypes do not advance children's rights. Children are human beings and from birth are entitled to all human rights – to survival and protection – yes – but also to education and development to become the best they can be. And we must not forget the very important RIGHT TO BELONG! From this right to be included and to participate in all groups to which they belong- family, friends, school, community and nation - they experience and learn responsibility.

What are the legal foundations for children's rights in South Africa?

There are four very useful documents about children's rights, all ratified by our South African Parliament:

- Constitution of South Africa – Bill of Rights – Section 28
- The African Charter of the Rights and Welfare of the Child
- The United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child
- The Children's Act No. 38 of 2005 (Consolidated)

These can all be found on our website www.crc-sa.co.za

DISCUSSION & ACTIVITIES WITH CHILDREN

Ask the children:

Why do we celebrate June 1st as the Day of the Child? When did it start?

Do you have a grandparent who is nearly 100 years old? It was nearly 100 years ago, in 1925, that a meeting was held for all the countries in the world to look at the well-being of children. People were worried that not enough was being done to help children suffering poverty, violence, hunger and lack of care.

World leaders were asked to choose a day to be **Children's Day** to draw attention to children's rights. Most countries chose June 1, which has become known as International Day of the Child. Some countries also have a NATIONAL Children's Day, or 'Child Welfare Day' to look at children in difficult circumstances. In South Africa it is the first Saturday in November.

Many people round the world use this day to look into the rights of children – not just the problems some children might have, but the real needs of ALL children.

What do you think these real needs are? Food, shelter, clothes, loving care and ...?

Activities for young people and children:

List and/or draw what you think are the 10 most important rights for children. You could make a poster to go in your school library. You could choose other activities such as:

Making cards for Children's Day for your family, friends or whoever you wish.

You may like to look through newspapers for news items that concern young people, and write your opinions in a letter to the editor.

You might look through newspapers and magazines for articles on children both affirming their rights and reporting violations, and make a poster, using them as a collage.

Does your school have an anti-bullying policy? Would you like to draw one up, or add to an existing one?

The slogan "It's not cool to be cruel!" could be used to point out that much bullying is not physical – it is hurting children's feelings especially by shutting them out and saying 'You can't play!'

GOOD RESOLUTIONS FOR CHILDREN'S DAY, FOR ADULTS CARING FOR CHILDREN!

Parents, caregivers and teachers can help children to be strong and resilient.

Take time to build **a loving relationship with children so that they are sure they are lovable**

Offer information and provide opportunities to help them achieve **so that they have a belief in their effectiveness and ability to improve whatever situation they find themselves.**

Give them tasks and make sure their help is appreciated and praised **so that they believe in their ability to assist the family or group/class**

Help build links in your community for children **so that they are connected to adults outside the immediate family**

Discuss real-life problems with children and take their suggestions seriously to help them develop **effective problem solving**

Share your deepest values and hopes with children **so that they have the strength of having spiritual resources or a vision of some a greater good** beyond the individual or family

3. CHILD PROTECTION WEEK 2011

Protecting children – including ADOLESCENTS - is everybody's business

It is everyone's responsibility to make their community child friendly. But Local Government has a particular role by Statute, and we hope that the new councillors elected this week will put children's needs first, as our Constitution demands. Keep an eye on them!

The international focus this year is on children living and working on the street, but we would like to put a word in for a group that is generally overlooked, worldwide, and that is the adolescents. Worldwide - and in our country too - the special needs and rights of the 12-18 year olds are just not being met, in spite of the fact that they are still children and should have priority!

Teenagers at a 'camp' in November 2010, set out some of the gaps in realising their rights:

Information on their rights like ages of consent to testing and treatment

Clinics where the staff were NOT hostile but friendly

Access to sexual and reproductive health information

Support from understanding adults when things go wrong

Opportunities for leisure activities with their peers

We consider the following key areas are also necessary to improve the situation of adolescents:

- ✦ Improving data collection to increase our understanding of adolescents' situation – at present all data relating to adolescents' health in S Africa is confusing as children over 14 are classed as adults;
- ✦ Investing in education and training so that adolescents have the means to lift themselves out of poverty and contribute to their national economies;
- ✦ Expanding opportunities for youth to participate and voice their opinion, for example in national youth councils, youth forums, community service initiatives, online activism and other avenues which enable adolescents to make their voices heard.

“Adolescence is a pivotal point – an opportunity to consolidate the gains we have made in early childhood or risk seeing those gains wiped out,” said Anthony Lake, UNICEF Executive Director. “We need to focus more attention now on reaching adolescents - especially adolescent girls - investing in education, health and other measures to engage them in the process of improving their own lives.”

Adolescence is a critically important age. It is during this second decade of life that inequities and poverty manifest starkly. Young people who are poor or marginalized are less likely to make the transition to secondary education during adolescence, and they are more likely to experience exploitation, abuse and violence such as domestic labour and child marriage – especially if they are girls. ... Girls also experience higher rates of domestic and/or sexual violence than boys, and are more susceptible to the risk of HIV infections. (UNICEF: 2011 State of the World's Children report, entitled 'Adolescence: An Age of Opportunity'.)

**INVITATION TO HELP WITH THE OPTIONAL PROTOCOL
on a complaints procedure for the UN Committee on Children's Rights**

*Many greetings from Duisburg!
Barbarar Dünneweller, our colleague from the Lobby and Advocacy Department has just asked me, if there is any partner in South Africa who is involved / wants to be involved in the process around the optional protocol on the CRC with regard to the complaints procedure. If so, please let me know for networking reasons as we will then forward your contact details to others who are lobbying on it. If you need further information just have a look at www.crin.org. - please check with other partners/NGOs as well? Thanks a lot.*

*Lots of greetings,
Gudrun Steiner (Kinder Nod Hilfe)*