

Podcast 3 - **How to be a Rights Champion**

[Young Person 4 – Pippa]

Hi there, and welcome to the last of the three podcasts all about children's rights and the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child. I am Pippa and I'm here to tell you about raising awareness of United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child and how you can champion children's rights. We will also be hearing from some guests along the way, and there will be some discussion questions at the end that you can talk about with your group or class.

This podcast series is part of an Activate Your Rights project. A project run by Young Scot and Children in Scotland and funded by Scottish Government. The idea for this podcast came from children and young people themselves who worked with Young Scot and Children in Scotland to create resources and activities to promote the awareness of the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child and children's rights to people in Scotland.

Our rights as children and young people are set out in the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child, or the UNCRC. There are 42 rights in this document which cover everything from the right to safety and healthcare, to play, relaxation and meeting up with friends. In Scotland, a lot of these rights are guaranteed by law, which means that it is illegal for someone to not respect your rights. You can probably think of some examples of this, but the first one that I thought of was Article 35 of the UNCRC which protects you from being abducted and sold. It's not just our right, but anyone who does abduct you or sell children can be prosecuted by law.

Other rights are less straightforward to uphold as they can be interpreted in different ways. Article 31 says that we have the right to relax and play, but it doesn't say how often or how much play we should be allowed, so it is a lot harder to stand up for this right. The best way to ensure rights like Article 31 is met, is to tell people about them and make sure everyone in the society is informed about what children's rights are. How did you find out about children's rights? Can you think of ways to tell other people in your community about rights? This could be telling other children and young people about rights at your school or a youth club, or it could be telling adults about rights, like teachers, parents and others who care for you.

You can read the full list of rights in the UNCRC at the Children and Young People's Commissioner Scotland website, and there are some more in-depth articles on your rights on the Activate Your Rights page on the Young Scot website at young.scot. Some ideas, like putting up posters about the UNCRC can be simple to do, because organisations like UNICEF, Save the Children, and the Children and Young People's Commissioner Scotland all have free posters to print out online. Maybe you could see which posters you like best and print out a few.

Being aware of the UNCRC and your rights is one thing, but it can be more difficult to know what to do if you see rights not being respected. Everyone in society has a responsibility to stand up for children's rights. But what is the best way to take action?

We asked Maree Todd, the Minister for Children and Young People how Scottish Government helps to make sure children's rights are being met.

[Maree Todd]

Protecting and promoting the rights and wellbeing of our children and young people is absolutely key to the work that the government does so it's very key to achieving our national outcome. We grow up loved, safe and respected, so that we realise our full potential. And in the last year we've progressed a whole lot of really important measures which seek to take forward children's rights for example, we supported a law which will change the law in relation to physical punishment in Scotland from the 7th November this year so from within a month or two. From that date all physical punishment will be against the law here and one of the first things I did as minister, so one of the first pieces of legislation that I steered through parliament was raising the age of criminal responsibility in Scotland from woeful eight to slightly better age of twelve. And

we recently passed through parliament the children in Scotland bill, which will ensure that children's voices are heard and taken into account in family law cases, so cases where there may be conflict within the family and children often get lost in those so there's just, you know in the last couple of years really tangible examples of legislation that we're taking forward that respects children's rights. Over the last few months of course, and I can't speak about children's rights without thinking about the situation that we're currently in, so COVID-19. That pandemic has highlighted the essential role of human rights in ensuring the highest standards of health and wellbeing of everyone, and the Scottish government is absolutely committed to doing everything it can to support children and young people who are suffering from the effects of the pandemic.

[Young Person 4 – Pippa]

Children and young people can stand up for rights too. The way this can happen really depends on the right that is not being respected. If someone is in danger, then call the police or speak to an adult immediately and ask for them to call the police. You might be worried about a friend's safety too, even if you haven't seen anything happen to them. For example, you might have noticed that they have a lot of bruises and worry about someone is hitting them, or you might have heard that your friend is having a sexual relationship with someone much older than them.

In these cases, you can talk to your friend and say you are worried about them. It might be that they needed someone to talk to about it, and together you can find a trusted adult to talk to like a guidance teacher, parent or youth worker. If you're not sure which adults to turn to, you could get in touch with Childline for advice. There's information on the Childline and NSPCC websites about safe relationships, abuse, bullying, and families, so take a look and help your friend get some support.

Educating yourself like this is a great way to be a rights champion, and there are different ways to stand up for different rights. It would take too long to list all the ways to stand up for these rights here but head on to the Activate Your Rights page on young.scot to find out more about your rights and standing up for them. The Children and Young People's Commissioner Scotland has a Rights FAQ page which answers a lot of the common questions about upholding rights too.

To take this to the next level, you could think about how to educate others about standing up for rights. You might want to talk about ways you could tell your whole school or community about rights and how to stand up for them, like putting together a rights week across your school, holding assemblies about different rights, or creating a peer education programme. There are lots more ways to get rights out there and encourage people to talk about them.

It might be that there is a particular right or issue that affects your community or group that you would like to focus on too, like local play facilities, discrimination, or healthy eating. You could spend some time finding out about how the issues and how your rights are not being upheld, then work together to think of some ideas to challenge this, like creating a campaign, writing to people with the power to change things, or sharing information that will help people.

Bruce Adamson, the Children and Young People's Commissioner Scotland has some thoughts too.

[Bruce Adamson]

Children and young people play an amazing role as human rights defenders and it's something that we've probably not been very good at recognising for a long time. That children have always been part of positive change in society, children have always been really good at campaigning and challenging and making the world a better place, but we haven't really recognised that until recently, particularly the term human rights defenders is something that we often think of as adults. We think of amnesty international; we think of journalists or protesters but the work that children and young people across Scotland, across the world are doing, coming together to form groups, campaigning at a local school level or in the community, those are really

important human rights defender actions. And what's really important about that is that being a human rights defender means that you get extra protection. Because there's an international agreement about human rights defenders, there's a declaration on human rights defenders which says that all governments all around the world need to make sure that human rights defenders are protected. When you stand up to protect your rights and the rights of others you get special protection. And so, we've been doing a lot of work over the last few years with the United Nations committee on the rights of the child and others about what being a human rights defender means for children and young people in Scotland. And so, we're very clear that what's really important is that there's proper education about human rights and being a human rights defender, and there's also support to learning the skills that you need to be a human rights defender, how to go about campaigning safely and legally, how to change power and challenge people but also really importantly to be protected. Now human rights defenders, and particularly children and young people as human rights defenders, have the right to be protected. And so, when you're standing up for your rights and the rights of others, you shouldn't face any punishment for that, whether that's in the school, or community and we need to put in place proper protections around that and also things like online on social media. Social media can be an amazing place to connect to others and to really achieve something positive, but it can also be a place where there's bullying or attacks, a lot of negative things. And so, we need to make sure that when children are acting as human rights defenders that they've got the skills that they need, they've got the education they need, but also the protection that they need. So, it's a hugely exciting thing to be a human rights defender and we see this every day with children and young people who are really passionate about things like climate justice and the environment, things like ensuring an education that works for everyone, campaigning on things like food and security, poverty or better health treatment. These are all human rights actions and actions of human rights defenders and what we as adults need to do better is to support you as children and young people by making sure you've got the educations and skills but also that you're protected. And so, for children and young people who want to be human rights defenders again there's lots of information on our website, again Young Scot and many others provide lots of kind of information and skills. There are opportunities to join other groups of young people, a lot of organisations have young people's groups that can help you build some of those skills on things that you're passionate about. So, look to join up with others, speak to organisations that are campaigning on things that you're interested in, and also come and speak to me and my team and we'll provide as much support as we can so that you know your rights and that you can use them to make the world a better place for everybody.

[Young Person 4 – Pippa]

We spoke to some children and young people about how they have been promoting rights at their school.

[Young Person 1 – Shayne]

In my school I am the rights respecting school chairperson and every year we deliver lessons to S1s and S2s talking about rights and responsibilities and how key a role they play in our society.

[Young Person 4 – Pippa]

I'm sure you can think of some ways to promote rights in your community or school too, and together we can create a Scotland that is aware of children's rights, where everyone takes on their responsibility to stand up for children's rights. Sounds pretty good doesn't it!

We'll finish up with a word from Maree Todd, laying out her vision for a Scotland where children's rights are respected.

[Maree Todd]

We have a vision of a Scotland where all children and young people, and all families, because children live in families, are treated with dignity and with respect wherever they are and whatever their background is. And absolutely fundamental to that is the need for duty bearers, government, public services, parents, carers to be aware of children's rights.

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If you want to discuss children's rights in a group, think about the following questions:

- Take a look at the articles of the UNCRC – which rights are easiest and hardest to uphold and stand up for?
- How could you raise awareness of children's rights in your school or community?
- Think about an issue in society or your community that relates to one of the rights in the UNCRC. How could you stand up for this right and make sure it is being respected?