

CHILDREN'S RIGHT TO BASIC EDUCATION

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The Convention on the Rights of the Child (1989) acknowledges education as a *right* of every child. The World Declaration on Education for All (1990) and the World Summit for Children (1990) adopted an expanded vision of *basic education* as the foundation of learning for every individual. If we assume **basic education** as a fundamental right of children, what would it imply?

1. The right to be children, to play and enjoy playing, to be protected from the abuses of child labour, to have enough time to attend and stay in school, do schoolwork, and learn. The right to a home and a family; to the nearby school, to the teacher who enjoys teaching and likes children, to an education that prepares not only for adulthood but, most importantly, for a happy childhood.

2. The right to learn in and out of the school. The right to be curious, to ask and to be answered, to doubt, to think and argue, to err, to be consulted and to participate, to express themselves spontaneously and with liberty, to be listened and respected in their opinions, to disagree, to imagine and to create, to learn to learn. The right to self-esteem, to parents' and teachers' high expectations, to feel both confident and challenged in their capacities and rewarded for every small gain.

3. The right to continuous learning, starting at birth, in a continuum that does not recognize other limits than the child's own interest and capacity to learn. Since the foundations of personality and knowledge are built in the first years of life, and since it is in this period that the most important and spectacular cognitive development takes place, the most basic right to basic education children have is the right to a good start in life. The right to an early childhood that plants good seeds for their future growth and development.

4. The right to open learning, at home, in school, in daily life, through play, in their interaction with friends, through mass media, in their own exploration of the world. The right to enjoy libraries, the sports yard, the museum, the park, the zoo, the circus; to access to books, newspapers, comics, fairy tales, encyclopedias, dictionaries, videos, movies, works of art; to learn not only from books but from the contact with reality, with people and with nature. The right to learn not only from adults but from other children. The right to learn from others but also from personal experience and error, from reflection and discussion.

5. The right to go to school and remain there the time required to develop the knowledge, skills and attitudes that are essential to survive, to get

to know their own bodies and protect their health, to learn about their culture and roots; to express themselves orally and in writing; to calculate and solve the basic problems of daily life; to better understand themselves and the world around them; to protect the environment; to internalize the values of justice and solidarity; to be aware of their rights and duties; to build the foundations of their self-esteem and self-confidence, and continue learning.

6. The right to an education tailor-made for children in which everything -- relationships, contents and methods, buildings and spaces, calendars and schedules, regulations and norms -- is designed to meet the needs of children, not adults. An education that respects the knowledge, points of view and dreams of children. An education based on joy, play and music, surprise and adventure, movement and laughter, not as complements but as the raw material for teaching and learning.

7. The right to quality and relevant education, oriented to learning, aware of the importance not only of *how much* but also of *what* is learned and *how*. The right to an education free from prejudice and stereotypes, that fights racism and sexism, respects differences and acknowledges the value of the child's own language and culture; an education that highlights what children know and are able to do, rather than what they don't know and are unable to do; an education that privileges cooperation over competence, dialogue over monologue, doing over saying; an education that aims at achieving what constitutes the dream of any good parent and teacher: children and students who are better than themselves.

8. The right to basic learning conditions essential to take advantage of school and other educational opportunities, and to fully develop the child's capacities. The right to basic education assists each boy and girl to demand from their communities and societies not only free schools, trained teachers, relevant curricula and necessary materials, but also the indispensable economic, social and affective conditions: nutrition, health care, proper housing, and, above all, love, emotional support, respect, and a general environment of stability, security and peace.

9. The right to parents with basic education, because it is crucial for children's survival, well-being, education and future perspectives. The right to informed parents, aware of the importance of educating both girls and boys, respectful of child play, open to dialogue and persuasion rather than to punishment. The right to literate parents, who appreciate the effort involved in learning, distinguish bad from good teaching, take part in school matters, and are willing to demand quality education. The right to parents who are knowledgeable of their rights and obligations, and possess the self-confidence and the fundamental knowledge to help their children grow, learn and develop.

10. The right to responsible communication media, sensitive to children's needs, capable of complementing and enriching their education: of putting the urban child in contact with the field and the rural child in contact with the city; of widening their vision of the world and transporting them to other realities, countries and times; of introducing them to the possibilities and limits of modern science and technology; of showing them the greatness and also the smallness of mankind; of developing their appreciation for universal art, science and culture; and of developing their vocation for peace, non-violence, tolerance, solidarity and justice.

Basic education is a universal right. It assists all children: boys and girls, rich and poor, those living in the city, in rural and remote areas, the disabled, working children, indigenous children and those coming from ethnic minorities, those who have a family and those who live in the streets, children who are refugees and displaced by war.

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