



All children have rights

THE United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child (CRC) was created in 1989, effectively establishing that all children everywhere are entitled to basic human rights: the right to survival; to develop to the fullest; to protection from harmful influences, abuse and exploitation; and to participate fully in family, cultural and social life. The United Nations Children's Fund, UNICEF, is the world's leading advocate for children, working to build a world where the rights of every child are recognised, so that children can develop to their full potential, free from hunger and want, neglect and abuse.

UNICEF and My Child Malaysia have come together to bring you the Children's Rights series, which features activities that teachers and parents can use to demonstrate at least one of the articles of the CRC to children, and help explain why children's rights are so important.

The following activity is based on Article 23 of the CRC:

"Children who have any kind of disability have the right to special care and support so they can develop to the best of their potential and lead full lives.

According to Youssouf Oomar, UNICEF Representative to Malaysia and Special Representative to Brunei, children with disabilities have the right to be protected from discrimination. "They deserve to live with dignity, develop self-reliance and be empowered to become an active member of the community," he says.

Activities – All children are able

Purpose:

These activities help children reflect on what it might be like to have a disability and think about the special consideration that those with disabilities might need from others in society.

Reminder to parents and teachers: To ensure the safety of children, these activities should only be carried out under full adult supervision and within a safe space.

Materials:

Blindfolds, earplugs, lollipops, cards, socks, potato chip, Monopoly/toy money.

Time: 60 minutes

Procedure:

Set up four workstation areas with an adult supervisor in each area.

- Split children into groups of four or five and give each group 10 minutes at each workstation
- *Activity 1 – Physical impairment* – have children play a round of cards while wearing socks in their hands. Leave a bowl of potato chips for them to try to eat while they play. Ask them to consider the consequences of not being able to touch things or use their hands easily.



- *Activity 2 – Hearing impairment* – Muffle the hearing of the children by having them wear earplugs. Tell them they must write down three sentences spoken by their teacher. The teacher then delivers the three sentences in a regular voice, then in a whisper and then with his or her back turned. Ask the children how well did they complete the activity? Was it hard to do?
- *Activity 3 - Speech impairment* – Have children discuss their favourite TV show while they have a lollipop in their mouth. Ask them to consider the challenges of not being able to talk clearly.
- *Activity 4 – Vision impairment* – Blindfold children. Hand them a mix of coins and notes and see if they can work out how much money they have been given. Ask them to consider the challenges people face if they can't tell the value of the money they hold.
- Bring all the children together to discuss the difficulties they faced when trying to complete each tasks. Point out that the challenges faced over 40 minutes are what some people face on a daily basis. Ask the children what they think people should do to ensure that those with a disability are disadvantaged in society.

Background

While there is no reliable data on the number of children with disabilities globally, some estimates put their number at 150 million, which is likely to be underestimated due to the widespread under-reporting of disabilities. Most children living with disabilities in developing countries have no access to rehabilitative health care or education. They are often separated from their families and communities and placed in institutions.

Wherever they live, children with disabilities often face discrimination and marginalisation that affects their self-esteem, limits their chances to interact with others, and interferes with their educational opportunities. Negative attitudes towards children with disabilities increase their risk of abuse and exploitation.

UNICEF works to meet the basic needs of children with all kinds of disabilities, and promote their rights. It encourages countries to adopt policies that keep children with disabilities in their families whenever possible, and seeks to support parents in meeting the needs of their children in the home. UNICEF promotes inclusive education that allows children with

disabilities to attend school with non-disabled children, which creates greater opportunities for them to learn and fulfil their intellectual and social potential.

Children with disabilities enjoy the same human rights and freedom as other children. They have the right to live independently and participate in their communities. They have the right to use telephones, computers and other technology. They have the right to privacy, and to express their opinions. Children with disabilities have the right to be respected by others just as they are!

What you can do

List down several action ideas that children and their teachers/parents can do at home or in kindergarten.

Examples

- organise a club and make regular visits to shelter homes or centres for children with disabilities;
- draw posters and paintings to reflect the rights of children with disabilities, and organise art exhibition;
- find pen pals in other countries who have disabilities and write to them;
- organise Music/Sports Day to bring together your friends and other children with disabilities, etc.

ABOUT UNICEF AND CRC@20

Close to 20 years ago, the world came together to say YES to children; that children, defined as people 18 years and below, have the same general human rights as adults. It was in this year, 1989, that the Convention on the Rights of the Child (CRC) was adopted by the world and held up as the key document that will make the world a better place for children. UNICEF works all around the world to uphold the Convention and promote the rights of children everywhere.

CRC@20 marks the 20th Anniversary of the CRC, to be observed officially on 20 November 2009, on a day known as Universal Children's Day. Use this anniversary to think about what you can do to protect the rights of children and young people in your home, school and community. ■

For further information about the Convention on the Rights of the Child, visit unicef.org/malaysia



Save our children

For SHAFINAZ SUHAIMI, one case of sexual abuse in one too many

IN Johor Bharu, a 15-year-old girl is now seven months pregnant (The Star, April 27, 2009). She claimed she has been raped by her father and a friend of his since she was 12 years old, at their own home and other locations.

In another recent case, a young girl was paid a pathetic sum every time her father and his friends had sex with her. The girl had tolerated it for many years until she finally disclosed it out of fear that her younger siblings would go through the same abuse.

There have already been a significant number of cases like those above and probably many more not reported. Disclosure of such cases by the child survivors is not a straight forward matter. The abuser is often someone familiar to the child whom the child trusts. More often than not, we find that we are dealing with a child who has been well-groomed by his/her abuser to consent to the sexual acts and may end up actually protecting the latter from the law by keeping silent.

When the abuser manages to gain the trust of the child and is well-liked, personal boundaries became vague and the child is introduced to physical and sexual touches which they learn to accept as expressions of love and care.

This concept of 'grooming' to make a child accustomed to sexual advances by an adult is not as far-fetched. In most parts of this country, young children grow up in a culture or society where they are taught not to question or talk back to adults. There is already a form of fear instilled in the child at a very young age

where being assertive, or to be able to say 'no' to something, or to even grumble about anything, are all associated with punishment. It has to be said at this point that there is a fine line between discipline and punishment.

So, as children become accustomed to remain voiceless or irrelevant in the eyes of the adults, a suitable environment is created for child abusers, who are in a position of power to groom the children to be loved and then to be taken advantage of. This 'grooming' process can take up to a year and blurs the child's mind as to what is good and what is bad, what is right and what is wrong.

When rape or other forms of child sexual abuse eventually happen, the abuser is protected by the child either through emotional blackmail (i.e. losing the 'love' and 'comfort' provided by the abuser), or even physical blackmail (i.e. through fear of being harmed).

Often feeling alone, neglected, and under a lot of shame and guilt, children who are sexually abused suffer in silence as they deal with the quandary of being ill-treated by the very people they love and trust. This then allows sexual abuse to spread rampantly.

Therefore, when a child does disclose a case to an adult, it should NOT be ignored as the child may withdraw and choose not to report again.

What is child sexual abuse

The Child Act (2001) defines a child as a person under the age of 18 years. Under that same Act, a child is sexually abused if she/he has taken part, whether as participant or observer in any activity which is sexual in nature for the purpose of:-

- Any pornographic, obscene/indecent material, photograph, recording, film, videotape or performance.
- Sexual exploitation by any person for that person's or another person's sexual gratification.

Any act of sexual contact between a child and an adult constitutes child sexual abuse, and sex with a girl below the age of 16 is classified as statutory rape under the Penal Code. Child sexual abuse does not have to be restricted to physical and sexual – it can be verbal and visual too, such as sexual stimulation through obscene phone calls, obscene MMS/SMS, exhibitionism, voyeurism, showing pornography to a child, photographing a child in sexual poses, and/or making a child watch/hear sexual acts.

A child's right to a safe environment

The Convention on the Rights of the Child incorporates the full range of human rights – from civil, cultural, economic, political and social rights. In 1989, the world recognized that children have human rights too and that people under 18 years old need special care and protection that adults do not.

Malaysia ratified the Convention on the Rights of the Child (CRC) on 17 February 1995. By agreeing to undertake the obligations of the Convention, Malaysia has committed itself to protecting and ensuring children's rights and that they have agreed to be held accountable before the international community. State parties to the Convention are obliged to develop and undertake all actions and policies in the light of the best interests of the child.

The Convention sets out these rights in 54 articles and two Optional Protocols, which spells out the basic rights that children everywhere have:-

- the right to survival;
- to develop to the fullest;
- to protection from harmful influences, abuse and exploitation; and
- to participate fully in family, cultural and social life.

The four core principles of the Convention are non-discrimination; devotion to the best interests of the child; the right to life, survival and development; and respect for the views of the child. The Convention protects children's rights by setting standards in health care; education; and legal, civil and social services.

Are we doing enough?

The Ministry of Women, Family and Community Development currently handles and administers all matters pertaining to children through the Child Division under the Department of Social Welfare and of the National Advisory and Consultative Council. A second National Plan of Action and a National Child Policy are being drafted to more effectively deal with children's issues.

The Department of Social Welfare Officers have specific training modules on the CRC and through the Social Institute of Malaysia, children have been trained as facilitators and educators on the principles of the CRC. In addition, public awareness was raised through specific campaigns, Child Protection Teams and community training on the CRC.

There is yet to be a comprehensive database or statistics on children, however efforts are currently being made to have these done.

There is also a need for a more child-sensitive investigation procedure for child sexual abuse cases. The Sexual Abuse and Children's Division at the Federal Police Headquarters in Bukit Aman, Kuala Lumpur, is urging the community, and particularly parents, to understand the law better. In recognising the sensitive nature of such cases, there is a need for more child-friendly investigation procedures.

Protect & save the children

Protect & Save The Children (P.S. The Children), a registered non-profit organization since January 2002 is currently the only social organisation in Malaysia that focuses primarily on the prevention, intervention and treatment of Child Sexual Abuse. P.S. The Children's main objectives of their Child Sexual Abuse Prevention Training sessions are to help people understand the dynamics of child sexual abuse, understand the sex offender, identify the signs, carry out appropriate response as well as learn ways of prevention.

The organisation believes that creating awareness of child sexual abuse amongst adults is the first vital step towards a community free of sexual violence. It is the responsibility of the adults to ensure that the rights of the child is protected - one case of child sexual abuse in the community is one case too many. ■

For a safer world for our children, find out more how you can be involved by visiting P.S. The Children's website at <http://www.psthechildren.org.my>.

References:-

Convention on the Rights of the Child.

- <http://www.unicef.org/crc/>
- Protect & Save The Children.
- <http://www.psthechildren.org.my>

State Party Examination of Malaysia's First Periodic Report. Session 44 of the Committee on the Rights of the Child.

- <http://www.crin.org/docs/Malaysia%20Session%20Report.doc>