

# Child rights

## *Preparation:*

- *In this factsheet, the members will learn about the rights and needs of children. After this meeting, they should understand what they can do to meet the special needs and rights of children.*
- *The VAG leader should know what according to the law in your country defines childhood. In most countries, a child is any person under the age of 18. Check to make sure.*
- *The VAG leader should read through the factsheet and make sure that he/ she understands the content.*

## **In our tradition, how do we distinguish a child from an adult?**

*Let the members discuss for a short while. Local customs in reaching adulthood will be discussed later.*

## **According to the law in our country, who is a child?**

A child is any human being below the age of 18 years.

## **Why is there this law?**

All peoples and countries in the world have agreed to it. It is there because it is agreed that until the age of 18, children need special care and attention.

## **What needs do children have?**

*Children's needs can be divided into the 4 categories below. Make sure that all 4 categories come up in the discussion.*

- Physical: shelter, clothing, food, healthcare, exercise, etc.
- Emotional: love, attention, praise, encouragement, hope, respect, trust, understanding, etc.
- Social: conversations, friendship, education, free time, play, etc.
- Spiritual: guidance, faith, knowing one's religion.

## **We know about the importance of basic human rights. Why is it important to know about the human rights of children?**

Respect for human rights begins with the way society treats its children. Children are vulnerable, they can't fully take care of themselves (yet). A society that cares about its children will respect their rights, so they can develop their full potential and become adults who can live a good and dignified life.

*Show the drawing depicting several children's rights.*

*Explain the rights by going through them one by one (you may ask the members each time which right they think is depicted), using the information below. Some of the information is followed by a discussion and action planning.*

## **The most important rights for children are:**

The right to live and survive *(This one isn't depicted in the drawing.)*

Like every adult, every child has the right to life, whether it is healthy or sick or handicapped, or a boy or a girl. No one can take away the life of a child, not even the parents.

The right to parental care and protection from neglect

Every child has the right to be cared for and brought up by parents, or if this isn't possible, by guardians. Every child with a mental or physical disability has the right to any special measures of protection it needs. The care and the protection should ensure the child's dignity, its self-reliance and its active participation in the community.

The right to an adequate standard of living  
*(This one is depicted as the provision of food, and clothing.)*

Adequate standard means that it prevents infant and child mortality and allows children to grow healthily. It includes the provision of nutritious food, safe drinking water, clothing, housing and health care. Children have the right to receive help from the government if they are poor or in need.

The right to education

Through education, children can fully develop their personality, talents and abilities to the benefit of society. All children should have equal access to education, including girls and handicapped or chronically ill children.

**Discussion.**

*Discuss the following questions with the members. Let the members discuss freely about any actions they want to take. Write the actions down in the action list in the VAG meeting report.*

- **Do all children in school age (6 to 14 years of age) in our community go to school?**
- **If not, what are the reasons and what can be done about it?**
- **Do boys and girls have the same opportunity to go to school in our community? And do they both stay in school? If not, what are the reasons and what can be done to change the situation?**



The right to play and to a reasonable workload  
Children should be protected from work that is dangerous or might harm their physical, mental and emotional health. Children can help out their family at home, in the farm or the business, in ways that are safe and suited to their level of development. Children's work should not jeopardize any of their rights, including the right to education, or the right to relaxation and play.

### Discussion.

*Discuss the following questions with the members:*

- **What kind of tasks do you give your own children?**
- **What types of work are not good for children of any age? Why?**

### The right to be protected from any form of harmful treatment

Children should be protected from all forms of harmful treatment, for example: inhuman or degrading treatment, injury, torture, sexual abuse and/or injury to the sex organs.

- o Operating on a child's body should always and only be done by trained health professionals and for medical reasons.
- o Child marriage and the mutual promise to marry of girls and boys should be prohibited as children are not mature enough to bear the responsibilities of raising a family and children.
- o Child marriage interferes with other human rights, like the right to education, parental care and the right to play.
- o Parents have the right to protect their children from harmful treatment by authority figures (e.g. teachers, village leaders).



### Discussion.

*Discuss the following questions with the members. Let the members discuss freely about any actions they want to take. Write the actions down in the action list in the VAG meeting report.*

- **Are there any traditions/ customs in our community that involve children? What happens in these customs that can be harmful to children? (Let them discuss as freely as possible.)**
- **What are our marriage customs, regarding young people? Do children under the age of 18 marry?**
- **Should we take any action to change these customs for our children?**
- **Do we have vulnerable children in our community whose rights are violated? If so, what can be done?**
- **Where can children go for help or advice if there are problems which cannot be solved at home?**

## Considering the human rights of children, should some children be treated differently from others?

*Members may mention the difference between boys and girls, or children who are handicapped, chronically ill, or slower than others, or whose parents/ family are different from others.*

The answer is no. All children are equal human beings, they all have the same rights and should be treated accordingly.

### What to do

- *Make sure the members have understood the rights of children.*
- *Plan actions on how to help children in the community that suffer from violation of their rights. Let the members discuss freely about any actions they want to take. Write the actions down in the action list in the VAG meeting report.*

Possible actions:

- We can encourage people's knowledge of the rights of children (including children themselves).
- We can set the example by treating our own children in accordance with their rights.
- We can help parents who find it difficult to meet their children's needs, for example by sharing food and clothing, taking a sick child along to the health center, etc.
- We can start a schoolclub for vulnerable children where they can receive psycho-social support, get advice, learn life skills from a trained OVC volunteer and engage in sports with other children.

### **Key information.**

- A child is any human being below the age of 18 years.
- Children have their own rights, because they need special care and attention.
- We need to respect their rights, so they can develop their full potential and become adults who can live a good and dignified life for the benefit of society.
- All children are equal human beings, they all have the same rights and should be treated accordingly.

### **Concluding notes.**

- *Remind the members about the action points they have decided on.*
- *Ask if there are any further questions.*
- *Agree on the date, time, place and topic of the next meeting.*
- *Close the meeting.*