

Child Rights

The United Nations (U.N.) Convention on the Rights of the Child (CRC), adopted by the U.N. General Assembly on November 20, 1989, is widely recognized as the model framework for codifying children’s rights worldwide, with “children” defined as ages birth to 18 years. NASP reaffirms its commitment to the CRC and reiterates the responsibility of school psychologists, collectively and individually, for advancing child rights. NASP’s 2010 standards for ethics, practice, training, and credentialing (National Association of School Psychologists, 2010a, 2010b, 2010c, 2010d) are philosophically consistent with the CRC and collectively provide opportunities for translating child rights principles into policies and actions that affect children in the context of families, schools, and communities. As of 2019, the United States is the only country to not yet have ratified (committed to officially implementing) the U.N. CRC, though they have signed it indicating support. NASP, by virtue of its pledge to promote and protect the human rights of children, with particular emphasis on their learning, education, social–emotional and behavioral development, and safety, fully supports the CRC and U.S. ratification. As the CRC is in line with NASP’s goals and standards for ethics, practice, training, and credentialing (Nastasi & Naser, 2014), promoting and protecting child rights is central to school psychology practice at the individual and system levels.

RATIONALE

The CRC’s core purpose is to secure and advance the health, well-being, education, and safety of children. This purpose is consistent with the guiding principles of NASP to deliver a comprehensive continuum of services that promote the well-being of children and youth by ensuring opportunities to attain optimal learning and mental health. The CRC asserts the role of governments, communities, organizations, and individuals to collaborate in implementing policies and practices to ensure the health and well-being of all children.

As mediators between policy and practice in the promotion and protection of child rights, school psychologists have the professional expertise and ethical responsibility to apply the relevant components of the CRC to inform policy and action at local, national, and international levels (Mcloughlin & Hart, 2014; Nastasi & Naser, 2020)¹.

¹ Mcloughlin and Hart (2014) provide an introduction to a series on child rights and school psychology published across several journals through a collaboration of editors of the following school psychology journals: *Journal of Educational and Psychological Consultation*, *Journal of School Psychology*, *Psychology in the Schools*, *School Psychology International*, *School Psychology Quarterly*, *School Psychology Review*. Nastasi, Hart, and Naser (2020) provide a full articulation of the role of school psychologists in advocating for child rights and chapters that review current research, practice, and policy related to child well-being and development in the context of the U.N. (1989) Convention on the Rights of the Child.

Human rights of children, as embodied in the CRC, provide the foundation for international, national, and local policies and practices related to child rights. The following themes, articulated in the CRC, are relevant to school psychology (pertinent articles in parentheses; United Nations, 1989; UNICEF, n. d.):

- ***The best interests of the child.*** In all actions pertaining to children, the primary concern should be the best interests of the child (CRC art. 3).
- ***Education.*** The role of education is to foster full development of human potential, respect for human rights and diverse cultural backgrounds, and individual responsibility within a free society (CRC arts. 28 & 29).
- ***Child care and protection.*** All children are to be cared for and protected from all forms of violence and exploitation in all settings and sectors of their lives (CRC arts. 19, 20, 32, 34, 35, 36).
- ***Respect for the views of the child.*** In accordance with the child's evolving capacities, children have the right to share their views, be listened to, and have their views taken seriously (CRC arts. 12, 13, & 14).
- ***Respect for rights and responsibilities of parents or guardians.*** Because of their role in ensuring healthy child development, parents or guardians should be afforded the rights, duties, and responsibilities to guide children in exercising the rights guaranteed to them by the CRC. The CRC emphasizes the rights of families and children to live together, to remain together regardless of national borders or politics, to remain in contact if separated, and to be reunified as a family, unless it is harmful to the child (CRC art. 5, 9, 10, 18, & 20).
- ***Life, survival, and development.*** All children have the right to survive and develop in a healthy manner (CRC art. 6).
- ***Health and health services.*** All children have the right to the best healthcare possible to ensure the highest attainable standard of physical and mental health (CRC art. 24).
- ***Recovery, rehabilitation, and reintegration of child victims.*** Children who have been neglected, abused, or exploited should receive special help to physically and psychologically recover and reintegrate into society. Particular attention should be paid to restoring the child's health, dignity, and self-worth (CRC art. 39).
- ***Culture, leisure, and play.*** All children are entitled to opportunities for rest and recreation, and for artistic and cultural experiences (CRC arts. 30 & 31).
- ***Freedom from discrimination and respect for diversity.*** The rights of all children are to be equally respected regardless of their background, origins, beliefs, or personal characteristics or identities. The CRC highlights the right of marginalized and indigenous children to learn about and practice their own culture, language, and religion (CRC arts. 2 & 30).
- ***Special attention to rights of children with disabilities.*** Every child should enjoy a full life in contexts that guarantee dignity, self-reliance, and active participation (CRC art. 23).

These themes and the larger body of the child rights principles strengthen the profession of school psychology's base of values, intentions, guidance, and accountability, and thereby, its integrity.

ROLE OF THE SCHOOL PSYCHOLOGIST

The CRC and its ratification by the United States are fully supported by NASP. NASP is committed to helping school psychologists understand, appreciate, and advocate for child rights in their daily practice. Moreover, NASP acknowledges the importance of preparing school psychologists to understand child rights and promote child participation and protection in the school setting. In addition, NASP

recognizes that school psychologists are well positioned to incorporate child rights into individual practice as well as system-level and public policy advocacy. Specifically:

- NASP is committed to promoting opportunities for school psychologists to understand the CRC and appreciate its relevance to their practice. This includes training for current graduate students, and for early career and advanced professionals that focuses on the connection between child rights and the professional ethics, responsibilities, and opportunities for school psychologists to incorporate child rights into practice.²
- NASP acknowledges that children at-risk for violence exposure, exploitation, and abuse are particularly vulnerable and face academic and emotional problems at rates much higher than their peers; therefore, the CRC (especially sections addressing safety and well-being) has particular relevance for school psychologists and their charge to promote learning and well-being for all children.
- NASP appreciates the evolving capacities of children throughout development and promotes the participation of children in decisions affecting their learning, safety, education, and well-being; as such, school psychologists should understand and be able to promote a child rights approach in their own practices and practice settings.
- NASP respects the growing diversity of children in schools, and the importance of education that allows children to learn about and develop their own individual identities in a way that honors their unique cultures, languages, and religions, and that protects all children from discrimination (CRC arts. 2, 29, 30).
- NASP recognizes that school psychologists play a pivotal role in promoting respect for and realization of child rights and that their contributions are best made in partnership with families, educators, schools, and their communities. Because of school psychologists' expertise and experience, they are well positioned to operationalize the CRC in their professional practice and to serve as advocates who promote child rights at systemic and policy levels in the following ways (as articulated in ISPA & CRED-PRO, 2010).
 - **Professional practice.** School psychologists provide a range of services (e.g., consultation, prevention, intervention, assessment) in multiple settings, with services directed at individuals (e.g., students, families, educators) and systems (e.g., families, classrooms, schools, community organizations). Child rights should be central to the work in each of these contexts, and school psychologists should continue to evaluate their own services and the incorporation of child rights into individual practices.
 - **System-level advocacy.** School psychologists can identify and understand how the rights established by the CRC can be used to positively influence mental health (and psychological) services and policies within classrooms and other school venues, schools, school systems, and other child-serving agencies. They have the responsibility to examine services in these settings and facilitate changes to policies and procedures that ensure the protection and promotion of child rights.
 - **Public policy.** School psychologists are an important link in translating research into policy and practice at local, national, and international levels. Governments, through both action and inaction, contribute to the protection or disregard for child rights. Instead of focusing only on

² A training curriculum and self-study modules have been developed through a partnership of the International School Psychology Association (ISPA), Child Rights Education for Professionals (CRED-PRO) of the International Institute for Child Rights and Development (IICRD), Division 16 (School Psychology) of the American Psychological Association, Tulane University School Psychology Program, and Cleveland State University School Psychology Program. For information contact Bonnie Nastasi, bnastasi@tulane.edu. The training module is available as an online resource for the book Nastasi, Hart, and Naser (2020).

ameliorating violations of child rights, school psychologists, through individual and collective advocacy, can help to promote and protect child rights, and thereby help to ensure optimal development, well-being, learning, and safety of all children.

NASP is committed to helping school psychologists understand, appreciate, and advocate for child rights in their daily practice. NASP acknowledges the importance of training school psychologists to understand child rights, to promote child participation and protection in the school setting and incorporate child rights into individual practice and system-level and public policy advocacy.

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RESOURCES

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- The Campaign for U.S. Ratification on the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child (CRC). (2009). Child Advocacy Toolkit. Available: <http://childrightscampaign.org>

WEBSITES

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http://www.iicrd.org/work/projects/communityof_practice/CREDPRO
- International School Psychology Association (ISPA), <http://www.ispaweb.org/>
- Oxfam educational resources on child rights: www.oxfam.org.uk/education
- Save the Children Federation, US. [national and global resources and research reports on Education, Health, Policy, Emergency Response] <https://www.savethechildren.org/>
- UNICEF, Convention on the Rights of the Child (CRC): <http://www.unicef.org/crc/>
- United Nations Office of the High Commission for Human Rights (OHCHR), Committee on the Rights of the Child (CRC): <https://www.ohchr.org/EN/HRBodies/CRC/Pages/CRCIndex.aspx>

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