



Believe it or not, if you're under 18 you're a child. Now you may not feel like one and you probably don't look like one, but in terms of your rights – you are one! This is a good thing because it means that you have special rights, guaranteed by the Constitution, that can't be taken away from you.

If you're over 18, this is still a crucial section for you. Because as an adult, you should look out for the children around you to ensure that they (and their rights) are respected and protected.

Let's look at children's rights and responsibilities!

Children have the right to be cared for by their parents or guardians ...and the responsibility to respect and appreciate their parents or guardians.

Children have the right to be taken seriously ...and the responsibility to listen to others.

Children have the right to privacy ...and the responsibility to respect others' privacy.

Children have the right to good health care ...and the responsibility to take good care of themselves.

Children have the right to a good education ...and the responsibility to study and to respect their teachers.

Children have the right to be loved and protected from harm ...and the responsibility to show others love and care.

Children have the right to own their own belongings ...and the responsibility to respect others' belongings.

Children have the right to get special care for special needs ...and the responsibility to be the best people they can be.

Children have the right to be proud of their heritage and beliefs ...and the responsibility to respect the cultures and beliefs of others.

Children have the right to a safe and comfortable home ...and the responsibility to keep it clean and tidy.

Children have the right to make mistakes ...and the responsibility to learn from their mistakes.

Children have the right to be well fed ...and the responsibility not to waste food.

Children have the right to a clean environment ...and the responsibility not to pollute it.

Children have the right to be protected from sexual abuse ...and the responsibility not to sexually abuse others.

What Is Child Abuse?

Child abuse takes many forms - sexual, physical, emotional and economic.

Sexual abuse is when an adult shows a child his or her private parts or wants to see the child's private parts. Sexual abuse is also if an adult touches a child's private parts, with hands, mouth or the adult's private parts - or if the adult has sexual intercourse with the child, masturbates in front of the child or forces the child to masturbate. Sexual abuse is if an adult shows a child pornographic videos or pictures, takes photographs or videos of the child's private parts, or offers a child something (like better results at school) in return for sexual acts.

NOTE

It's important to emphasise that there is absolutely no truth in the belief that sex with a virgin, infant or child can prevent or cure HIV/AIDS! The 'virgin cure' is a myth – a horrifyingly dangerous one!

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Physical abuse is when a child is beaten or hit with anything (like a stick, belt, sjambok or fist); burned with anything (like a cigarette or hot iron); kicked or bitten; shaken hard; stuck with pins (or anything sharp); strangled; suffocated; tied up; locked into a small space; or murdered.

Emotional abuse is when parents or care-givers consistently withhold warmth and affection. It's verbal abuse, threatening, swearing, shouting or parental indifference (an uncaring attitude). Emotional abuse is also when parents or caregivers consistently humiliate (make feel unworthy), threaten or manipulate a child.

Economic abuse or neglect takes place when there's not enough food for the child to eat; there's a lack of proper supervision; there's a lack of protection; the child isn't provided with enough clothing; there's a lack of medical or dental care; there's a lack of educational opportunity; there's a lack of proper hygiene; the child doesn't get enough sleep; children are driven in a car by someone under the influence of alcohol or drugs; or there's inadequate nurturing, affirmation and emotional support given to the child.

Some people think that children are only abused by strangers, but sometimes the abuser is a friend or a family member. Abusers are often known to the child. So child protection must start at home. Children are vulnerable, especially when they are alone at home over weekends or during holidays. Parents and care-givers must always know where their children are and who's looking after them!

What Can I Do?

- Child abuse has terrible long-term consequences, including physical injury and serious psychological and emotional problems. Children can build up a lot of hurt and anger inside, so they must be helped if they've been abused.
- Sometimes 'the abused becomes the abuser' - child abuse is a cycle that begins with a child being abused and can continue until the child is an adult, often abusing his or her own children.
- Not only victims of violence and abuse need to report cases of abuse! So help to stop the cycle of abuse and report any incidents of child abuse in your family or community.

As a responsible adult:

Phone Childline on 0800 055 555, SAPS Crime Stop on 0860 010 111 or the SAPS emergency number: 10 111
Information courtesy of Childline South Africa Web: <http://www.childline.org.za>

If you're the victim of abuse:

- Never allow abuse to become a secret between you and the abuser.
- Tell a trustworthy adult (and keep telling him or her until someone takes action to protect you!)
- Phone Childline on 0800 055 555. It's a free call and you can call any time from any phone. Your call will be answered by someone who knows a lot about child abuse and you don't even have to give your name if you don't want to.
- Remember: child abuse is never the child's fault!

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