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Children's Rights are Human Rights- An Introductory Handbook for Students and Professionals

Claire Bedard

Loyola University Chicago, cbedard1@luc.edu

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AN INTRODUCTION TO HUMAN RIGHTS FOR STUDENTS AND FUTURE LEADERS



CHILDREN'S RIGHTS ARE HUMAN RIGHTS

THE CENTER FOR THE HUMAN RIGHTS OF CHILDREN

BY CLAIRE BEDARD



Preparing people to lead extraordinary lives

CHILDREN'S RIGHTS ARE HUMAN RIGHTS

**AN INTRODUCTORY HANDBOOK FOR
STUDENTS AND PROFESSIONALS**

WRITTEN BY: CLAIRE BEDARD

**CENTER FOR THE HUMAN RIGHTS OF CHILDREN
LOYOLA UNIVERSITY CHICAGO
(2007)**

The first version of this handbook was published in 1996, under the title, *CHILDREN'S RIGHTS HANDBOOK: An Introductory Guide for Child Protection Professionals and Agencies*, as a joint collaboration between Cornell University and Childhope Foundation (USA).

This updated version (2007) is intended more broadly for all students and professionals interested in becoming better educated about children's human rights.

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amy@amyfromm.com

Copies of this publication can be ordered by e-mail request

CONTACT THE AUTHOR

cbedard1@luc.edu

OR WRITE TO:

The Center for the Human Rights of Children
Loyola University Chicago
6525 N. Sheridan Rd, Damen Hall #628
Chicago, IL 60626

CHILDREN'S RIGHTS ARE HUMAN RIGHTS

The *Children's Rights are Human Rights* handbook is intended for students and professionals of all disciplines—either closely or remotely connected to serving the needs of children. The ultimate goal of this handbook is to advance the cause of children everywhere.

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**OUR COMMITMENT IS TO ADDRESS THE CHALLENGES OF SOCIAL
INEQUALITY AND SOCIAL INJUSTICE AROUND THE BELIEF THAT FAITH
AND THE DESIRE FOR HUMAN PROGRESS COME FROM THE SAME ROOT
WITHIN OUR HUMAN NATURE.**

**IT DEMANDS THAT WE ENGAGE AND CHALLENGE ONE ANOTHER TO
EXAMINE AND CHANGE THE CONDITIONS THAT PROMOTE INJUSTICE
AND VICTIMIZE OURSELVES AND OTHERS.**

Michael Garanzini, S.J., PhD
President,
Loyola University Chicago

Introduction

"All are equal before the law and are entitled without any discrimination to equal protection of the law. All are entitled to equal protection against any discrimination in violation of this Declaration..."

- Universal Declaration of Human Rights

When we think about our childhood days, some of us smile as we remember the idyllic happiness and unspoiled innocence that filled our early years. Others among us will barely wish to revisit it for fear of reigniting the pain of what we recall as an era filled with unkind treatment on the part of those who were supposed to nurture us. The majority of us may remember childhood as something of a mixed bag—both happy and confusing or painful at times.

**IN CHILDHOOD, THE ANSWERS TO
LIFE'S IMMEDIATE QUESTIONS ARE
PROVIDED MOSTLY BY ADULTS.**

Whatever may be the variation of our memories of childhood, what we have in common is that as children, we were all dependent on adults for our well-being and happiness.

This dependence on adults—especially for our physical and psychological needs—emerges as the central theme of our lives for all of childhood.

**CHILDREN ARE BORN
INTO A WORLD CREATED
AND RUN BY ADULTS.**

Childhood, like adulthood, is a journey. What was our journey like? Was the journey arduous? Was it perilous? Was it to be filled with possibility? Was it happy? What needs were met? Did we feel safe? Loved? Liked? What left us wanting?

Adults are the decision-makers in the child's social environment. The way a child experiences life during childhood is directly connected to the quality of the decisions adults make on their behalf. In the child's environment, life is experienced directly. Only the here and now exist: Who feeds me? Who takes care of me? Who makes me feel safe? Who teaches me? Who plays with me? Who hurts me? Who heals me? Those are the elements that make up a child's experience of childhood.

But as we grow into adulthood, we realize that there is a complex set of layers of power that influence the quality of our lives. These layers consist of ever-widening concentric circles of influence drawn around children's lives—from the smallest circle being one's immediate caretaker, to the largest circle representing political and legislative decision-makers at all levels, from local to international.

Each and everyone of us, therefore, experiences human life within a social, political, economic, and cultural context. It is just that as children, we are not at all aware of how far reaching the influence of adults actually is on our lives.

Far reaching it is: The social, political, economic, and cultural context is what determines whether a child survives beyond infancy, lives a life where childhood is actually possible, and whether he or she will have access to the bare minimum required for human life, or access to more than that.

**WE, AS ADULTS, CREATE
AND SHAPE THE CONTEXT
OF CHILDHOOD.**

Creating and shaping the conditions in which children grow is a big task. To accomplish it, we need guidelines, goal posts and instruments to help us navigate human challenges.

This is where human rights come into the picture: to give us guidelines and human goals to keep us focused on what human life is truly meant to be.

"Children are abused because adults don't think that kids have rights and that they are people, too."

- Michelle, 9 years old

"We did a project in school about children's rights and something called a Convention for children's rights. I learned that children have the right to live without being beaten, and that they have a right to food to grow healthy. But it doesn't make sense that a paper can make sure that this really happens. Grown-ups have to read the paper and then do something about it."

- Anton, 12 years old

Human Rights

WHAT ARE HUMAN RIGHTS AND WHY DO WE HAVE THEM?

"A right is something to which one has a just claim; something that one may properly claim as due"

- Webster's Dictionary

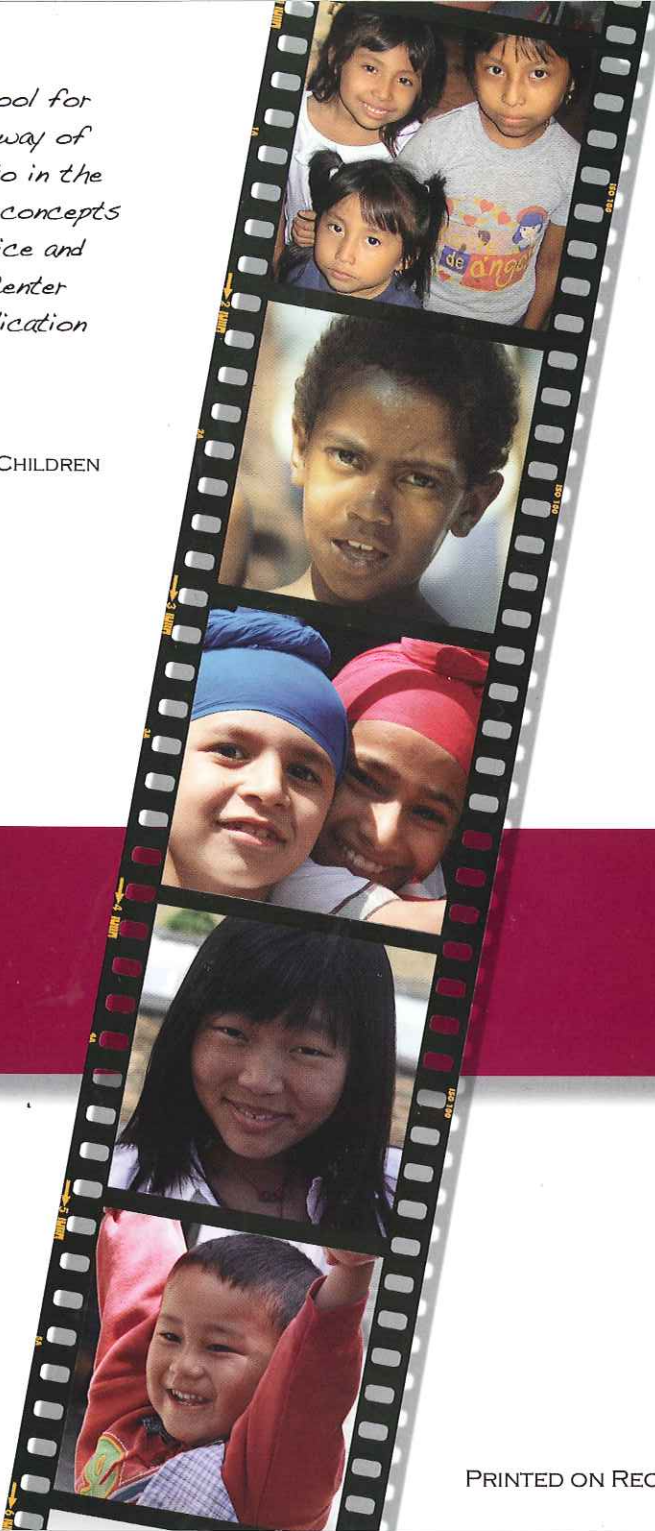
Human rights are those rights inherent to all humans. They are not earned, they are inherent to being human. Human rights give rise to standards created by the world community to ensure that human beings can live their lives with dignity and achieve their full human potential. Human rights instruments are the legal documents which lay out what the international community has agreed upon collectively to uphold and protect.

Human rights are said to be *universal* because they apply equally to ALL human beings, regardless of race, sex, religious affiliation, nationality or social status. Human rights are just that: RIGHTS. They are not to be confused with *privileges*. Although in a world where resources are not shared, it certainly can look as though human rights are the domain of only the privileged. But inequity is the opposite of the fundamental purpose of human rights. Human rights are also said to be *inalienable*, meaning that no one can be stripped of his or her human rights. (Certain rights can be limited in certain situations, such as the right to liberty when someone is convicted of a crime by a court of law).

The purpose of human rights is to promote the conditions that make it possible for people to access at least the minimum required to live a decent life. These conditions draw from many areas of society: political, social, and economic. Another purpose of human rights is to protect people against acts which may violate them as human beings entitled to at least a minimum of dignity.

"Children's Rights are Human Rights" is a much needed tool for child advocates. It offers professionals and students a way of thinking about children that few Americans are exposed to in the course of their education and training, namely that basic concepts of human rights can and should guide professional practice and public policy. I am delighted that the Loyola University Center for the Human Rights of Children can sponsor this publication and offer it to America."

JAMES GARBARINO, PHD
DIRECTOR, CENTER FOR THE HUMAN RIGHTS OF CHILDREN
LOYOLA UNIVERSITY CHICAGO



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