

How to protect your child's rights

Every child has the right to lead a good and secure life. Finland is committed to the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child, which aims to protect children so that they can grow up in peace and on an equal footing with other children. Adults are always responsible for ensuring that children's rights are respected. This guide explains briefly what the most important children's rights are, how you can ensure that children's rights are respected and where you can get parenting support for yourself.

Good parenting means active participation in your child's life, schooling and hobbies.

When adults make decisions on issues concerning a child, they must always establish what is best for the child

Sometimes we have family discussions on, say, how late I can stay out.

Boy 13

Parents have primary responsibility for their child's upbringing and development in accordance with the child's best interests. When you make decisions on issues concerning a child, think about what is best for the child and how your decision will affect the child. Listen to your child when you make decisions and take their opinions into account, keeping in mind their age and level of development. Tell children about decisions that concern them in such a way that they understand. The state must protect refugee children. In all matters concerning children, their best interest must be a primary consideration. When the authorities – for example, the employees of a reception centre, municipality, child health clinic, daycare centre, school or health service – make decisions about your child, ask them how the child's best interests have been assessed.

If you think that the best interests of your child are not being served in your residence permit

application process, ask for help from a legal adviser or an organisation working with refugees. Ask the authorities for reports that can help make the child's best interests known, for example, in an appeal. If your child is interviewed without parents, make sure that the child is feeling safe and that an assistant is present in the interview room.

If necessary, ask for an interpreter when you are talking to the authorities. According to the law, matters relating to children are always interpreted. Do not use your child as an interpreter. Decisions made by the authorities are often difficult to understand. Ask them to explain the decision in plain language.

Children make decisions on many issues, but we must be there to offer control.

Dad

DISCUSS WITH YOUR CHILD

- what kinds of things children can decide, what the parents decide and what the authorities decide
- what the best solution for the issue would be

Children have the right to be themselves and be treated equally

If your child is being bullied, you should contact us straight away, unless the teacher has dealt with the matter in a parent-teacher consultation.

Municipal social worker

Every child must be respected regardless of their gender, the language they speak, what they believe in or look like, their country of origin or whether they have arrived as a refugee or an asylum seeker. No one must be discriminated against, bullied or mistreated. If your child is being bullied in daycare, school, hobbies or online, talk to your child. Tell your child

If the teacher does not intervene, you have to intervene yourself.

Girl 16

that children must be able to rely on an adult for help in all situations. Support your child in dealing with these situations and help them resolve disputes without physical intervention. Children should learn that they have the right to live in safety and be well treated. Talk to

your child's teacher at school or daycare or you child's instructor at a hobby. If parents are not told about bullying and racism, they will not be able to discuss the issue with their child. A social worker can also contact the school.

Sometimes children may feel that boys are valued more than girls at home. Aim to treat your children equally and give them the same chores and freedoms regardless of their gender. If your child tells you about their sexual orientation or gender identity, support them.

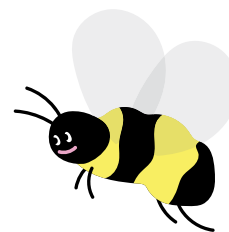
If I do outdoor chores, why shouldn't my little brother do indoor chores?

Girl 17

DISCUSS WITH YOUR CHILD

- what it means to be yourself
- what your child's strengths are
- what discrimination is
- whether your child has experienced discrimination or discriminated against others
- how to tackle discrimination in different situations

Children have the right to receive care and attention and feel safe



To live in safety means that you can walk outside and go to your activities without any worries.

Girl 16

The state has a duty to support parents in raising their children.

MATERNITY AND CHILD HEALTH CLINIC

All children and pregnant women have the right to maternity and child health clinic services, whether they have a residence permit or not. Family counselling clinics provide help with questions related to the development and upbringing of children or young people and assist in family crises. A family counselling clinic may offer a support person to a child.

HEALTH SERVICES

All children under the age of 18 have the right to feel healthy and receive care. Reception centres are responsible for organising health services for asylum seekers. Children with a residence permit receive healthcare as part of municipal services, as do children without a residence permit living outside the reception system.

EARLY CHILDHOOD EDUCATION AND CARE

Early childhood education and care refers to the education, teaching and care of children in a daycare centre or family daycare. Children who have a residence permit are entitled to early childhood education and care. Children under temporary protection and asylum seekers have the right to daycare if their parents are working or studying.

Asylum seeker children may feel vulnerable before they obtain a residence permit. Get your child used to a daily schedule, even at a reception centre or in home accommodation. Life which is as normal as possible under the circumstances offers the best support for children. If you are tired and feel that your child needs stimulation and the company of other children, ask the reception centre staff to find out whether your child could get a place in a daycare centre. In daycare, children are taught daily routines and are helped with their sleep pattern. If you are an undocumented migrant, ask child welfare or immigration services to find out if your child could have access to daycare.

Children have the right to receive care and attention and feel safe

FAMILY SOCIAL WORK AND CHILD WELFARE

Sometimes parents can get tired and lose control of the situation at home. Children may behave badly, spend too much time gaming or be self-destructive. It is worth tackling problems before they get too big. Ask for help from a social worker. Family social work aims to help families and prevent the need for child welfare services. If you live in a reception centre, ask a social worker or a family and crisis worker for help. Child welfare authorities safeguard the wellbeing of children and provide parenting support. A child is placed into care in acute and severe crisis situations. The continuation of the placement is reviewed regularly.

When a family with children is not granted a residence permit, and the family must leave the reception centre, the children are reported to child welfare services, and the process for the assessment of their need for services is started.

Child welfare services provide additional support for the everyday life of an undocumented family. Children have the right to bodily integrity in all situations. Do not use corporal punishment when you have to tell your children off.

You have no right for any reason – such as family honour, religion or some other beliefs – to physically punish a child. Problematic practices include the genital mutilation of girls.



DISCUSS WITH YOUR CHILD

- what makes your child feel safe and secure

Children have the right to learn and attend school

At home, we have been encouraged to attend school and told that it is important to study.

Girl 14



PRE-PRIMARY EDUCATION AND BASIC EDUCATION

Every child in Finland has the right to access pre-primary education and basic education and to receive support for learning. It is the responsibility of the parent to ensure that their child attends school and to explain the reason for any absences.

Sometimes children feel under pressure to achieve good grades at school to show at home. Give your children the right to develop at their own pace.

If you do not understand Wilma messages and feel excluded on parent evenings and from

your child's schooling, ask to receive help in your own language when you are dealing with your child's school. Find out if your school has a multicultural adviser. Ask to have an extra parent-teacher consultation in your own language. Suggest to the teacher that you could use the multilingual Wilho cards.

I always get top grades but if my grades went down, my parents would want to talk about it.

Boy 13

DISCUSS WITH YOUR CHILD

- how the child is doing at school, what kind of pressures they experience
- whether your child receives enough support for learning from you
- whether your child would benefit from learning support at school

Children have the right to rest and leisure

Children have the right to choose their friends, but I have the right to know who they are, whose children they are and where they go.

Mum

If I was a director of a reception centre, I would get toys for the centre.

Boy 6

Your child may have homework and chores to do, but make sure there is also time for playing, games, friends and rest.

The time waiting for a decision on a residence permit application can drag. Look for things to do; ask your children what kinds of activities they would enjoy. The reception system includes a budget to support each child to attend activities. Ask the reception centre for this allowance. Enquire about activities, free events or children's playgrounds available in the area. Find out whether there are organisations in the

I have been allowed to choose my own hobbies. Sometimes school trips are a bit difficult for my parents.

Girl 14

area that have social activities and events for refugees. Ask your municipality's immigration services what kinds of leisure activities are available for immigrant families.

DISCUSS WITH YOUR CHILD

- how your child wants to spend their leisure time
- the importance of friends for your child
- the importance of rest



Children have the right to express their opinions and participate. Children have the right to the freedom of thought, conscience and religion

If children are allowed to say their opinions, the world will become a better place.

Girl 17

According to the Finnish Constitution and the rights of the child, children always have the right to express their opinions. Even if you do not agree with your child's opinion, try to respect it. Your child has the right to think differently from you about everything, including religion, society or how to dress.

When adults make decisions about the family and their child, the child's opinion must be taken into account. It is the adult's duty to establish safe boundaries for children. If your child wants something that is against their best interests, explain to them why you will not go along with their wishes. As your children

grow, give them more space to make decisions so they learn life skills. Listen to your children and take their opinions into account.

Children also have the right to engage and participate in society. It is a sign that they take responsibility for themselves and their future.

When we said to our child that we don't do that in our culture, our child said: "but I am myself!"

Dad

DISCUSS WITH YOUR CHILD

- in what kind of situations your child thinks that they should be consulted – what do you think?
- which social media platforms your child can use, and whether their accounts can be public and what the consequences of that might be

Children have the right to know and receive information. Children have the right to privacy and the secrecy of correspondence

I follow the traces to find out what my children are watching. I chat to them and ask why they watch that channel.

Mum

The Internet, social media, messaging and gaming are an important part of children's lives. Talk to your child regularly about media use and agree on rules. Children have the right to seek and obtain information about things that interest them. However, it is the duty of adults to protect children from information that could be harmful to them. If necessary, you can restrict your child's Internet access and ban them from some sites.

Messages received by a child must not be read without the child's permission. If you think intervening is in the child's best interests, explain to your child why you feel you must

intervene. Base the child's right to privacy on the child's age. Trust your child and be worthy of your child's trust.

Your child may also communicate with strangers online. Talk to your children about the importance of telling you if they receive disturbing messages from strangers or people they barely know.

I allow my children to spend one hour per day on their phones. We spend a lot of time outdoors and doing things together.

Dad

DISCUSS WITH YOUR CHILD

- what your child's private matters are
- what your child thinks about you tracking them with an app
- which sites are OK to visit when they are learning to use the Internet
- restrictions on phone and computer use to allow time for homework, chores, exercise, family time and sleep.

Children have the right to a family

When you receive a residence permit or international protection, but your family is not in the country, you can apply for family reunification and have your family members join you in Finland. Ask a social worker to help you with your application forms. If you cannot get help, consult civic organisations or a lawyer.

If a child has entered Finland as an unaccompanied minor, a representative is appointed for the child. The representative and a social worker of the unit for unaccompanied minors look after the child's best interests. When a child is granted a residence permit or international protection, they have the right to bring their

Believe in your upbringing and trust in your child!

Girl 17

parents and siblings who are minors to Finland. The representative and the social worker help with the application process.

If one parent is denied stay in the country, ask a legal adviser who is familiar with the Aliens Act to make an appeal on the basis of the interests of the child. If necessary, ask your social worker, daycare, school or other authorities for reports.

Where to ask for and receive more support

Making sure your child's rights are respected and your child is doing well gives you pleasure as well. If you are struggling to cope, get help. Accept all the help that is offered to you and your child. The aim is for the whole family, parents and children alike, to thrive.

In Finland, the rights of children are supervised by the Parliamentary Ombudsman and the Ombudsman for Children. Many organisations also support refugee and immigrant families: Save the Children Finland, the Central Union for Child Welfare, the Mannerheim League for Child Welfare, MIELI Mental Health Finland, Support for Asylum Seekers, the Finnish Refugee Council, the Finnish Refugee Advice Centre, Global

We get strength and energy from seeing that our children are thriving. Mum and dad Parents, ask for help and accept all the help offered to you. The aim is for the whole family to thrive.

Social worker

Clinic, the Deaconess Foundation, Turun Valkonauhdistus ry, Monik, Kasvatus- ja perheneuvonta Kasper, Familia ry, Suomen Vanhempainliitto. You are sure to find support near you!



INTERVIEWS:

Child and parent workshops, reception centre social workers, family and crisis workers, municipal social workers, undocumented migrant services, migrant service advisers, researchers, representatives, teachers, interpreters, mothers of mentor families and experts from organisations: Save the Children Finland, the Central Union for Child Welfare, Support for Asylum Seekers, Turun Valkonauhayhdistys ry, Suomen Vanhempainliitto, the Deaconess Foundation's Mentor family activities, All Our Children