YOUR RIGHTS, YOUR LIFE
An Adolescent Guide to the Yogyakarta Principles
Understanding human rights, sexual orientation, gender identity, gender expression and sex characteristics

WHO IS THIS GUIDE FOR?

This Guide is for **adolescents who are children under the Convention on the Rights of the Child**.

The Yogyakarta Principles apply universal human rights standards in relation to sexual orientation, gender identity, gender expression and sex characteristics. They apply to everyone. This Guide looks at them through a particular lens: **the rights of the child**.

Under the Convention on the Rights of the Child, a child is every person under the age of 18, unless adulthood is reached earlier under the law that applies to them.

Adolescence is a period of childhood in which your relationships, identity, independence and understanding of the world continue to develop. As your capacities develop, you become increasingly able to make decisions and exercise your rights for yourself. This is why the Convention recognises both your right to protection and your growing autonomy.

The Guide focuses on adolescents because the questions addressed in the Yogyakarta Principles may become particularly important during this period of childhood — questions about identity, your body, family, school, health, privacy, relationships, safety, participation and having a voice in decisions that affect you.

This does **not** mean that younger children do not have these rights. They do. All rights in the Convention belong to all children. But younger children may need different information, different forms of communication and different kinds of support to understand and exercise them.

Nor does it mean that these rights end when you turn 18. Human rights belong to everyone throughout life.

This Guide simply has a particular purpose **to help adolescents understand how the Yogyakarta Principles and the Convention on the Rights of the Child work together in their lives.**

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1. WHO I AM

There are many things that make you who you are, but most importantly: your body; your thoughts and feelings; the people you love and care about; your family and friends; the languages you speak; the things you believe in; your school, community and culture; the things you enjoy and the things you dream about doing in the future.

Your sexual orientation, gender identity, gender expression and sex characteristics may also be part of who you are.

People are different from one another. Some of these differences are visible and others are not. Some things about yourself you may have known for a long time. Others you may still be discovering.

You do not need to have everything figured out.

SOME WORDS YOU MAY COME ACROSS

Sexual orientation is about who you may feel emotionally, romantically or sexually attracted to.

Gender identity is a person's deeply felt internal experience of gender. It may or may not correspond with the sex they were assigned at birth.

Gender expression is how a person expresses their gender, for example through appearance, clothing, behaviour, speech or other ways of presenting themselves.

Sex characteristics are physical features relating to sex, including chromosomes, hormones, reproductive organs and other bodily characteristics. Some people are born with sex characteristics that do not fit typical definitions of female or male bodies.

You may use some of these words to describe yourself. You may use different words. You may not want to use any label at all.

MY RIGHT

I have the right to be myself and to have my dignity, identity and rights respected.

Your human rights do not depend on who you are attracted to, how you understand your gender, how you express yourself or what sex characteristics you have. You have the same human rights as everyone else.

You also have the right to grow, learn about yourself and develop your own identity. As you grow and your abilities develop, you should have an increasing say in decisions about your own life.

WHAT DOES THIS MEAN FOR ME?

It means that you should not be treated unfairly because of who you are — or because of who other people think you are. You should not have to pretend to be someone else in order to be safe, accepted at school, receive health care or take part in your community. You should have space to explore and understand who you are without being forced into a particular identity or label.

Other people may have views about your life. Your family and other adults who care for you have an important role in supporting and guiding you as you grow. But **your own views matter too**, and they matter increasingly as your capacities develop.

WHAT DO THE YOGYAKARTA PRINCIPLES SAY?

The Yogyakarta Principles start from a simple idea: **Human rights belong to everyone.** Sexual orientation, gender identity, gender expression or sex characteristics can never be a reason to deny someone their human rights.

The Principles apply existing human rights to the real experiences of people with diverse sexual orientations, gender identities, gender expressions and sex characteristics. They do not create a separate set of rights for some people. They help make clear that **universal human rights really must be universal.**

AND THE CONVENTION ON THE RIGHTS OF THE CHILD?

The Convention on the Rights of the Child says that every person under 18 has rights.

All children have these rights without discrimination (Article 2).

Your **best interests must be a primary consideration** in decisions affecting you (Article 3).

The Convention recognises your **developing abilities and increasing autonomy as you grow** (Article 5).

You have the **right to express your views about matters affecting you and to have those views taken seriously** according to your age and maturity (Article 12).

You also have rights relating to your identity (Article 8), privacy (Article 16), health (Article 24), education (Articles 28 and 29), protection from violence (Article 19), and many other parts of your life.

The Convention looks at you as a whole person.

So does this Guide.

WHAT CAN I DO IF THIS RIGHT IS NOT RESPECTED?

The following chapters look at different parts of your life — your body, family, school, health, privacy, voice, friends and community — and explain what your rights can mean in each of them.

They also look at what you can do and where you can seek support when your rights are not respected.

For now, remember: **There is no single right way to be you. You have the right to grow, discover who you are and be treated with dignity along the way.**

2. MY BODY

MY RIGHT

My body belongs to me.

I have the right to feel safe in my body and to have my body respected. No one should hurt me, change my body or make decisions about my body just because of my sexual orientation, gender identity, gender expression or sex characteristics.

I have the right to be involved in decisions about my body and health. I have the right to information I can understand, to express my views and to have those views taken seriously. As I grow older and become more able to make decisions for myself, my choices should carry increasing weight.

WHAT DOES THIS MEAN FOR ME?

It means that other people should respect your body, whoever you are and however you identify or express yourself. You should not be forced into medical or psychological treatment to try to change or suppress your sexual orientation, gender identity or gender expression.

If you were born with sex characteristics that do not fit typical definitions of female or male bodies, you have the same right to bodily integrity as everyone else. Medical procedures should not be performed simply to make your body fit other people's ideas about how a girl's or boy's body should look.

If a medical decision needs to be made, you have the right to know what is being proposed, why, what the possible benefits and risks are, and whether there are other options. You have the right to ask questions and to express what you want and how you feel.

Your age does not mean that your views can simply be ignored.

WHAT DO THE YOGYAKARTA PRINCIPLES SAY?

The Yogyakarta Principles protect everyone from harmful or forced medical treatment based on sexual orientation or gender identity. They make clear that sexual orientation and gender identity are not medical conditions that need to be treated, cured or suppressed. YP+10 goes further by expressly recognising everyone's right to bodily and mental integrity, autonomy and self-determination, regardless of sexual orientation, gender identity, gender expression or sex characteristics.

When decisions are made about a child's body, the child must be properly informed and consulted. The child's views and developing ability to make their own decisions must be respected.

Yogyakarta Principles: especially Principles 17 and 18; YP+10: especially Principle 32.

AND THE CONVENTION ON THE RIGHTS OF THE CHILD?

The Convention says that **all children have the same rights without discrimination** (Article 2). Your **best interests must be a primary consideration** in decisions that affect you (Article 3). You have the **right to express your views about matters that affect you and to have those views given due weight according to your age and maturity** (Article 12). You have a **right to privacy** (Article 16), a **right to protection from violence and abuse** (Article 19), and a **right to the highest attainable standard of health** (Article 24).

These rights belong together. Your health matters. So do your dignity, your identity, your views and your right to have your body respected.

WHAT CAN I DO IF THIS RIGHT IS NOT RESPECTED?

You do not have to deal with a problem on your own.

You can talk to an adult you trust. This might be a family member, teacher, counsellor, health professional, social worker or another person who makes you feel safe.

You can ask:

What is happening? Why is this being proposed? What are my choices? What happens if I say no? Can I have more time? Can I speak to someone else?

If you feel that nobody is listening, you can ask for help from a child rights organisation, an LGBTQIA+ organisation, an independent children's rights institution or ombudsperson, or another service that supports adolescents where you live.

And remember: **Being an adolescent does not mean that your body belongs to someone else. Your body matters. Your views matter. You have rights.**

3. MY FAMILY

MY RIGHT

I have the right to care, support and respect in my family life.

Families are an important part of many adolescents' lives. They can be places where you feel loved, protected and supported as you grow and discover who you are.

Families are also different. You may live with one or both parents, grandparents, siblings, other relatives, foster carers, adoptive parents or other people who care for you. You may have one home or more than one. Whatever your family looks like, your sexual orientation, gender identity, gender expression or sex characteristics should never be a reason for you to receive less love, care, protection or respect.

WHAT DOES THIS MEAN FOR ME?

Growing up means gradually becoming more able to make decisions about your own life. Your parents, carers and other family members can play an important role in helping and guiding you. They may have questions or worries, and they may need time and information to understand what you are experiencing.

But guidance should help you grow. It should not be used to silence you or force you to become someone you are not. You have the right to express your views about decisions that affect you and to have those views taken increasingly seriously as you grow and develop.

You also have a right to privacy. You should be able to decide carefully when, how and with whom you share personal information about your sexual orientation, gender identity or sex characteristics.

No family belief, tradition or expectation can justify violence, humiliation, abuse or harmful treatment.

WHAT DO THE YOGYAKARTA PRINCIPLES SAY?

The Yogyakarta Principles recognise that **families exist in many different forms**.

They say that everyone has the right to establish a family, regardless of sexual orientation or gender identity, and that no family or family member should face discrimination on these grounds.

For children/adolescents, the Principles emphasise something particularly important: in all actions and decisions concerning them, **the best interests of the child must be a primary consideration**. They also recognise that children have their own views and that these views must be given appropriate weight as their capacities develop. The Principles make clear that

violence, discrimination or harmful treatment cannot be justified by family attitudes, culture, tradition or beliefs.

Yogyakarta Principles: especially Principles 5, 6, 10 and 24; YP+10: relevant additional obligations.

AND THE CONVENTION ON THE RIGHTS OF THE CHILD?

The Convention sees the family as an important environment for the growth and well-being of children. It also sees **you as a person with your own rights**.

Your parents or carers have the responsibility to provide appropriate direction and guidance, but they must do this in a way that respects your **evolving capacities** (Article 5).

You have the right to preserve your **identity** (Article 8).

You have the right to **express your views** in matters affecting you and to have them given due weight according to your age and maturity (Article 12).

You have the right to **privacy** (Article 16).

You have the right to be protected from **all forms of violence, abuse and neglect**, including when they happen within the family (Article 19).

And all these rights belong to you **without discrimination** (Article 2).

Family support and children's rights do not have to be opposites. A family can be one of the most important places where you learn that your rights — and the rights of other people — deserve respect.

WHAT CAN I DO IF THIS RIGHT IS NOT RESPECTED?

Sometimes families need time, support and reliable information. If you feel safe doing so, talking with a family member you trust may help.

You might also choose to talk with another trusted adult — a friend, relative, teacher, counsellor, health professional, social worker or someone from an organisation that supports children and adolescents.

But if someone in your family threatens you, hurts you, humiliates you, forces you into unwanted treatment, throws you out of your home or makes you afraid for your safety, **you have the right to seek help and protection**. You do not have to wait until a situation becomes unbearable before asking for help.

And remember: **Being part of a family does not mean giving up your rights. Your family can guide and support you as you grow — and your voice, dignity and developing autonomy must be respected too.**

4. MY SCHOOL

MY RIGHT

I have the right to learn, to belong and to be safe at school.

School is not only a place where you study. It is also a place where you spend a large part of your life, meet other people, make friends, discover new ideas and learn more about yourself and the world around you.

You have the right to education without discrimination because of your sexual orientation, gender identity, gender expression or sex characteristics. You also have the right to be treated with dignity and respect while you are at school.

WHAT DOES THIS MEAN FOR ME?

You should not be excluded from school, denied opportunities, punished or treated unfairly because of who you are — or because someone thinks they know who you are. You should be protected from bullying, harassment, threats and violence, including when these happen online or between students.

Teachers and other school staff should take such behaviour seriously. They should not ignore it, encourage it or blame you for it. School rules should respect your dignity and rights. Rules about clothing, appearance, behaviour, school activities or the use of school facilities should not be applied in ways that discriminate against you.

Your privacy matters at school too. Personal information about you should not be shared simply because other people are curious about your sexual orientation, gender identity or sex characteristics.

You also have a right to information and education that help you understand yourself, other people and the world around you. Information about bodies, relationships, health, gender and sexuality should be accurate, appropriate to your age and development, and respectful of human diversity. Education should help adolescents learn to live together with respect — not teach them that some people are worth less than others.

WHAT DO THE YOGYAKARTA PRINCIPLES SAY?

The Yogyakarta Principles say that **everyone has the right to education without discrimination** based on sexual orientation or gender identity.

Schools and other educational institutions should provide equal treatment to students, staff and teachers. Education should support the development of each student's personality, talents and abilities and promote understanding, tolerance and respect for human rights. Students should be protected from bullying, harassment and social exclusion.

The Principles also recognise the importance of ensuring that education responds to the needs of students of diverse sexual orientations, gender identities, gender expressions and sex characteristics.

Yogyakarta Principles: especially Principle 16; YP+10: relevant additional obligations.

AND THE CONVENTION ON THE RIGHTS OF THE CHILD?

The Convention says that **every child has the right to education** (Article 28).

But it also tells us what education is for. Education should develop your personality, talents and abilities to their fullest potential. It should help you develop respect for human rights, for your own identity and for other people, and prepare you for responsible life in a free society in a spirit of understanding, peace, tolerance and equality (Article 29).

This means that the right to education is not only a right to enter a school building. **It is also about what happens to you once you are inside.**

You have the right to be protected from violence (Article 19), to privacy (Article 16), to access appropriate information (Article 17), and to express your views about matters affecting you (Article 12). And you have all these rights **without discrimination** (Article 2).

A school that respects children's rights should therefore be a place where every student can learn, participate and develop in dignity and safety.

WHAT CAN I DO IF THIS RIGHT IS NOT RESPECTED?

If you are being bullied, harassed, excluded or treated unfairly at school, you can tell someone you trust.

This might be a teacher, school counsellor, principal, parent or carer, another trusted adult, or a student support service.

You can ask what rules your school has about discrimination, bullying, violence and privacy, and what procedures exist for reporting a problem.

If the school does not respond or if the problem involves the school itself, there may be other places you can turn to, such as an education authority, children's rights institution or ombudsperson, anti-discrimination body, or an organisation supporting children and LGBTQIA+ adolescents.

You can also raise concerns together with other students when it is safe to do so. Your right to participate does not disappear at the school gate. And remember: **You do not have to earn the right to belong at school by hiding who you are. Education is your right — and dignity, safety and respect are part of that right.**

5. MY HEALTH

MY RIGHT

I have the right to the best possible health and to health care that respects who I am. Health is about your body, but it is also about how you feel, think and cope with everyday life. Your physical, mental, emotional and sexual health are all part of your well-being. You have the right to health information and services without discrimination because of your sexual orientation, gender identity, gender expression or sex characteristics.

Health care should be a place where you can seek help, ask questions and receive accurate information without being shamed, judged or treated as if who you are is a problem.

WHAT DOES THIS MEAN FOR ME?

You should be able to receive health care when you need it and to be treated with dignity and respect. Health professionals should listen to you and explain things in a way you can understand. You should be able to ask questions about your body, feelings, relationships, sexual health or any other concern without fear of ridicule or discrimination.

Information about your health should be accurate and appropriate to your age and development. Your privacy and confidentiality should be respected. There may be situations in which health professionals have a legal duty to share information in order to protect you or someone else from serious harm, but the rules should be explained to you clearly.

You have the right to be involved in decisions about your health. As your capacities develop, your views and choices should carry increasing weight. Your sexual orientation or gender identity is not an illness. You should not be subjected to treatment intended to force you to change or suppress your sexual orientation, gender identity or gender expression.

If you have variations in sex characteristics, decisions about medical treatment must respect your health, dignity, bodily integrity and views. Treatment should not be carried out simply to make your body conform to other people's expectations of what a female or male body should look like. And if you are struggling emotionally or with your mental health, you deserve support — not judgment.

WHAT DO THE YOGYAKARTA PRINCIPLES SAY?

The Yogyakarta Principles say that everyone has the right to the **highest attainable standard of physical and mental health**, without discrimination based on sexual orientation or gender identity. Health services should respond to people's needs and respect their dignity, autonomy and privacy.

The Principles reject the idea that sexual orientation or gender identity should be treated as a medical condition that needs to be cured. Hence, they protect people from harmful, involuntary or coercive medical practices.

YP+10 strengthens these protections, including in relation to gender expression and sex characteristics, bodily and mental integrity, informed decision-making and unnecessary medical interventions. For children and adolescents, this means that health decisions cannot be separated from their right to information, their views, their developing capacities and their best interests.

Yogyakarta Principles: especially Principles 17 and 18; YP+10: especially Principle 32 and relevant additional obligations.

AND THE CONVENTION ON THE RIGHTS OF THE CHILD?

The Convention says that every child has the right to the **highest attainable standard of health** and to health care and services (Article 24). But your health rights are connected to many other rights.

You have the right to receive appropriate **information** (Article 17).

You have the right to **privacy** (Article 16).

You have the right to **express your views** about decisions affecting you and to have those views given due weight according to your age and maturity (Article 12).

Your parents or carers provide guidance in a way that must take account of your **evolving capacities** (Article 5).

You have the right to protection from **violence and harmful practices** (Articles 19 and 24).

And all these rights belong to you **without discrimination** (Article 2).

This is why good health care does more than treat an illness. **It respects you as a whole person and as a person with rights.**

WHAT CAN I DO IF THIS RIGHT IS NOT RESPECTED?

You can ask questions.

What are my options? Why are you recommending this? What are the benefits and risks? Is there another choice? Who will have access to this information? Will you tell anyone what I say?

You can ask a health professional to explain something again or in a different way if you do not understand.

You can also ask whether you can speak with a health professional privately, depending on the laws and rules where you live.

If you feel that a health professional has discriminated against you, ignored your views, disclosed private information improperly or pressured you into treatment you do not want, you can seek support from a trusted adult, patient or children's rights service, health authority, ombudsperson, or an organisation supporting adolescents.

If one person does not listen, that does not mean you should stop asking for help.

And remember: **Good health care should care for you — not try to change who you are. Your health, dignity, privacy, body and voice belong together.**

6. MY PRIVACY

MY RIGHT

I have the right to privacy and to have my personal information protected. Privacy is about having a personal space in your life that other people should respect. It includes your body, your home, your relationships, your communications and your personal information — including information about your sexual orientation, gender identity, gender expression, sex characteristics and health.

Having a right to privacy does not mean that there is something about you that should be hidden or that you should be ashamed of. **Privacy means having a say in what other people know about you and how personal information about you is used.**

WHAT DOES THIS MEAN FOR ME?

You may want to tell other people about your sexual orientation, gender identity or something else that is important to you.

You may not. You may tell one person but not another. You may be ready to talk about something today and not about something else until later. As far as possible, **you should have a say in these decisions**. Someone should not reveal personal information about you simply because they think other people have a right to know. This can matter in many places. At school, teachers and other staff should treat sensitive information about students carefully.

In health care, information you share with health professionals should be treated confidentially, within the rules that apply where you live. In your family, your need for privacy should be increasingly respected as you grow and develop.

And privacy matters online too. Messages, photographs, videos, health information and other personal information can travel quickly and may be difficult to remove once they have been shared. Someone should not post, forward or expose private information about you without your agreement.

Revealing someone's sexual orientation, gender identity or sex characteristics without their consent is sometimes called **"outing"**. Outing can cause embarrassment or distress and, in some situations, can put a child/adolescent at risk of discrimination, violence or rejection.

Your privacy deserves protection both online and offline.

WHAT DO THE YOGYAKARTA PRINCIPLES SAY?

The Yogyakarta Principles say that everyone has the right to privacy, regardless of sexual orientation or gender identity. This includes the right to decide whether to disclose information relating to your sexual orientation or gender identity. The Principles also protect

people against arbitrary or unlawful interference with their privacy, family, home or communications.

YP+10 extends and strengthens these protections in relation to gender expression and sex characteristics and addresses the collection, storage and use of personal information. Privacy is connected to dignity and autonomy: being respected as a person includes having appropriate control over information about yourself.

Yogyakarta Principles: especially Principle 6; YP+10: relevant additional obligations.

AND THE CONVENTION ON THE RIGHTS OF THE CHILD?

The Convention says that **no child should be subjected to arbitrary or unlawful interference with their privacy, family, home or correspondence**, or to unlawful attacks on their honour or reputation (Article 16). And children have the right to legal protection against such interference or attacks.

But privacy is connected to other rights too:

You have the right to preserve your **identity** (Article 8).

You have the right to seek, receive and share **information and ideas** (Article 13).

You have the right to access appropriate **information** (Article 17).

You have the right to **health**, including health information and services (Article 24).

Your views must be heard in matters affecting you (Article 12), and the guidance you receive from parents or carers should take account of your **evolving capacities** (Article 5).

And all these rights belong to you **without discrimination** (Article 2).

As you grow, your need and capacity for personal privacy also develop. Respecting your privacy is part of respecting you as a person with rights.

WHAT CAN I DO IF THIS RIGHT IS NOT RESPECTED?

Think carefully about whom you trust with personal information, especially online. But remember: **protecting your privacy is not only your responsibility**. Other people, schools, health services, public authorities and online services also have responsibilities to protect personal information.

You can ask: **Who will see this information? Why do you need it? What will you do with it? Will you share it with anyone else? Can I ask you not to share it?** Before sharing information, photographs or messages online, you can also think about who may be able to see, copy or forward them. If someone shares private information about you without your

agreement, you can ask them to remove it or stop sharing it. If this happens online, you may also be able to report the content or account to the platform. If the situation makes you feel unsafe, or if private information is being used to threaten, blackmail, humiliate or harm you, seek help from a trusted adult or an organisation or service that supports adolescents.

And remember: **Privacy is not about hiding who you are. It is about having a say in who knows what about you, when and why.**

7. MY VOICE

MY RIGHT

I have the right to have a voice in my own life and in the world around me. You have ideas, experiences and views that matter. You have the right to express your views about decisions that affect you and to have those views taken seriously. You also have the right to seek and receive information, to share ideas, to meet and organise with other people, and to take part in discussions and decisions in your school, community and society.

These rights belong to you regardless of your sexual orientation, gender identity, gender expression or sex characteristics.

Having a voice does not mean that you must always speak. **You also have the right to decide when you want to speak, what you want to say and, as far as possible, what you want to keep private.**

WHAT DOES THIS MEAN FOR ME?

Adults make many decisions that affect adolescents' lives. Your family may make decisions about you. Your school makes rules that affect you every day. Health professionals may recommend treatment. Governments make laws and policies affecting education, health, safety, identity and many other parts of your life.

You have the right to be heard in decisions that affect you. Being heard means more than being allowed to speak. You should receive information that helps you understand the issue. You should have a genuine opportunity to express your views. The people making the decision should listen and give your views appropriate weight.

As you grow and your capacities develop, your views should carry increasing weight in decisions about your own life. Sometimes you may want to speak together with other adolescents. You may want to join a student group, youth organisation or LGBTQIA+ group. You may want to organise a meeting, take part in a peaceful protest, campaign for a change in school rules, contribute to a consultation or speak publicly about an issue that matters to you.

These are also ways of having a voice.

No one should punish, threaten or discriminate against you simply because you peacefully express your views or stand up for your rights or the rights of others.

WHAT DO THE YOGYAKARTA PRINCIPLES SAY?

The Yogyakarta Principles protect the rights to **freedom of opinion and expression, peaceful assembly and association**, without discrimination based on sexual orientation or

gender identity. This includes the freedom to seek, receive and share information and ideas about sexual orientation, gender identity and human rights. People must be able to organise, associate and advocate for human rights without discrimination, violence or intimidation. YP+10 strengthens these protections, including in relation to gender expression and sex characteristics.

The Principles also recognise the importance of human rights defenders — people who speak out and work, individually or together with others, to protect human rights. Adolescents can be human rights defenders too.

Yogyakarta Principles: especially Principles 19, 20 and 27; YP+10: relevant additional obligations.

AND THE CONVENTION ON THE RIGHTS OF THE CHILD?

The Convention gives children a particularly important right: **If a matter affects you, you have the right to express your views freely, and those views must be given due weight according to your age and maturity** (Article 12). This is sometimes called the right to be heard or the right to participation.

But your voice is protected by other Convention rights too.

You have the right to **freedom of expression**, including the freedom to seek, receive and share information and ideas (Article 13).

You have the right to **freedom of thought, conscience and religion** (Article 14).

You have the right to **freedom of association and peaceful assembly** — to meet, organise and act together with others (Article 15).

You have the right to appropriate **information** (Article 17).

You have the right to **privacy** (Article 16).

And you have all these rights **without discrimination** (Article 2).

These rights may sometimes be subject to lawful restrictions — for example, to protect the rights or safety of other people. But restrictions cannot simply be imposed because adults dislike what adolescents are saying or because the subject makes them uncomfortable.

WHAT CAN I DO IF MY VOICE IS NOT HEARD?

First, find out **who is making the decision and how you can take part**. You can ask: **Who will make this decision? Can I give my views? How will my views be considered? Can I have the information I need first? Will you tell me what was decided and why?**

You may choose to speak for yourself or together with other adolescents. Sometimes writing a letter, joining a student body, taking part in a consultation, contacting a youth organisation or children's rights institution, or organising with others can make your voice stronger.

If speaking publicly could put you at risk, you do not have to expose yourself in order to prove that your rights matter. You can look for safer ways to participate or ask trusted people and organisations to support you. Having a right to a voice does not mean that you will always get the decision you want. **It means that you must have a genuine opportunity to influence decisions that affect you — and that your views cannot be dismissed simply because you are young.**

And remember: **Your voice is a right, not a favour given to you by adults. You can use it for yourself — and together with others to make things change.**

8. MY FRIENDS AND COMMUNITIES

MY RIGHT

I have the right to belong, to build relationships and to take part in my community. Friends and other people around you can be an important part of growing up. They can give you a sense of belonging, help you discover new interests and ideas, and provide support when things are difficult.

You may belong to many different communities — your neighbourhood, school, cultural or religious community, sports club, youth group, online community or an LGBTQIA+ group. You have the right to take part in community life without discrimination because of your sexual orientation, gender identity, gender expression or sex characteristics. And you have the right to choose the people with whom you form friendships and other relationships.

WHAT DOES THIS MEAN FOR ME?

You should be able to spend time with friends, meet other adolescents and take part in activities that interest you. You should not be excluded from a sports team, youth club, cultural activity or community event simply because of who you are. You may also want to meet other adolescents who have experiences similar to yours. Finding people who understand what you are experiencing can be especially important if you feel isolated at home, at school or in your community.

Online communities can sometimes help adolescents find information, friendship and support that may not be available nearby. But relationships online deserve the same attention to safety, privacy and respect as relationships offline. You also have the right **not** to join a group or community and not to accept a label simply because other people think you should. Belonging should not require you to give up your individuality.

WHAT DO THE YOGYAKARTA PRINCIPLES SAY?

The Yogyakarta Principles protect everyone's rights to **freedom of association and peaceful assembly** without discrimination based on sexual orientation or gender identity. People have the right to meet, organise and form associations with others. The Principles also recognise the importance of participation in cultural and public life and the right to take part in society without discrimination. YP+10 strengthens these protections in relation to gender expression and sex characteristics.

The Principles reject the idea that culture, tradition, religion or community values can be used to justify violations of human rights. Human rights belong to you wherever you live and whatever communities you belong to.

Yogyakarta Principles: especially Principles 20, 21, 25, 26 and 27; YP+10: relevant additional obligations.

AND THE CONVENTION ON THE RIGHTS OF THE CHILD?

The Convention recognises that children grow and develop through relationships with other people and as members of families and communities. You have the right to **freedom of association and peaceful assembly** — to meet and organise with others (Article 15).

You have the right to **freedom of expression** (Article 13) and **freedom of thought, conscience and religion** (Article 14).

You have the right to take part freely in **cultural life, recreation and play** (Article 31).

If you belong to an ethnic, religious or linguistic minority, or if you are Indigenous, you also have the right to enjoy your culture, practise your religion and use your language with other members of your community (Article 30).

You have the right to **privacy** (Article 16) and to protection from **violence and abuse** (Article 19).

And all these rights belong to you **without discrimination** (Article 2).

Communities can help children develop a sense of identity and belonging. But belonging to a community can never mean that you stop being a person with your own rights.

WHAT CAN I DO IF I FEEL EXCLUDED OR ALONE?

Finding even one person you trust can make a difference. It might be a friend, sibling, relative, teacher, youth worker, counsellor or another person who listens to you and respects you.

You may also be able to find youth groups, children's rights organisations, LGBTQIA+ organisations, cultural groups, sports clubs or online communities where you can meet other people and find information and support. Choose online spaces carefully. Protect personal information and remember that people online may not always be who they say they are. If a group excludes, humiliates or discriminates against you, you can seek support and, where possible, challenge the discrimination. You do not have to remain in a space that makes you unsafe simply in order to belong.

And remember: **You have the right to belong without pretending to be someone else. A community should make room for who you are — not ask you to disappear in order to be part of it.**

9. BEING SAFE

MY RIGHT

I have the right to be safe from violence, abuse, exploitation and harmful treatment. No one has the right to hurt you because of your sexual orientation, gender identity, gender expression or sex characteristics — or because of what they think these might be.

Violence can happen at home, at school, in institutions, in public places or online. It can be committed by adults or by other adolescents. It can be physical, sexual or psychological. Threats, humiliation, bullying, harassment, coercion and deliberately frightening or isolating someone can also cause serious harm.

None of this becomes acceptable because someone says they are trying to change, correct, discipline or protect you.

WHAT DOES THIS MEAN FOR ME?

You have the right to protection from violence wherever it happens. At home, you should be protected from physical or emotional abuse, sexual violence, neglect and harmful practices. At school, you should be protected from bullying, harassment and violence by students or adults. In health care and other institutions, you should be protected from forced, coercive or harmful treatment. Online, threats, harassment, sexual exploitation, blackmail and the sharing of private information or images can also put you at risk.

Violence can sometimes be motivated by hostility towards people who are, or are perceived to be, lesbian, gay, bisexual, trans, intersex or otherwise diverse in their sexuality or gender. The fact that prejudice exists does not make such violence inevitable or acceptable.

And being safe does not always mean telling everyone everything about yourself.

You have the right to privacy. If you believe that revealing personal information about yourself could put you at risk, **you can think carefully about when, where and with whom you share it**. Protecting yourself does not make your identity any less valid.

WHAT DO THE YOGYAKARTA PRINCIPLES SAY?

The Yogyakarta Principles say that everyone has the right to **security of the person** and to protection from violence or bodily harm, regardless of sexual orientation or gender identity. States must take steps to prevent violence, investigate it when it happens and hold those responsible to account. They must also address prejudice and discrimination that contribute to violence.

The Principles prohibit torture and cruel, inhuman or degrading treatment and reject harmful medical practices intended to change or suppress a person’s sexual orientation or gender identity. YP+10 strengthens these protections, including in relation to gender expression, sex characteristics, bodily and mental integrity and protection from harmful practices. Children and adolescents are entitled to these protections too.

Yogyakarta Principles: especially Principles 4, 5, 10 and 18; YP+10: especially Principle 32 and relevant additional obligations.

AND THE CONVENTION ON THE RIGHTS OF THE CHILD?

The Convention gives every child the right to protection from **all forms of physical or mental violence, injury or abuse, neglect, maltreatment or exploitation, including sexual abuse** (Article 19).

It also protects children from **sexual exploitation and sexual abuse** (Article 34), abduction, sale and trafficking (Article 35), and other forms of exploitation that harm their well-being (Article 36).

No child may be subjected to **torture or other cruel, inhuman or degrading treatment or punishment** (Article 37).

If you have experienced violence, neglect, abuse or exploitation, you have a right to support for your **physical and psychological recovery and social reintegration** in an environment that promotes your health, self-respect and dignity (Article 39).

Your best interests must be a primary consideration in actions affecting you (Article 3), and your views must be heard (Article 12).

And you have all these rights **without discrimination** (Article 2).

Protection should not mean taking away your voice. **Adults and institutions should work with you to find ways of keeping you safe that respect your dignity, views, privacy and developing autonomy.**

WHAT CAN I DO IF I AM NOT SAFE?

If you are in danger, your immediate safety comes first. Where it is safe to do so, try to reach a person or place where you feel protected. This might be a trusted family member, friend, teacher, health professional, counsellor, social worker, child protection service, children's rights organisation or another person or service you trust.

But not every source of help is equally safe in every place. Before disclosing sensitive personal information, if you can, try to find out: **Can I trust this person or service? What will happen if I tell them? Will they keep my information private? Are they required to tell anyone else? Could asking for help put me at greater risk?** If one source of help does not feel safe, there may be another.

You do not have to confront the person who is harming you or publicly disclose your identity in order to seek protection.

If you have experienced violence, the responsibility lies with the person who harmed you — not with you for who you are, what you said, how you dressed or whom you trusted.

And remember: **Your safety matters. Your identity is never a justification for violence. Seeking protection should not require you to give up your dignity, privacy or voice.**

10. GETTING HELP

MY RIGHT

If my rights are not respected, I have the right to seek help and to have access to an effective remedy. Having a right means more than having words written in a convention, constitution or law. If someone violates your rights, there should be a way to ask for help, challenge what happened, stop the violation and, where possible, put things right. This is sometimes called having access to a **remedy**.

A remedy can take different forms. It might mean stopping harmful treatment, changing a decision, protecting your privacy, returning you to school, providing health care or support, investigating violence, holding someone responsible, providing compensation, or changing a rule or practice so that the same thing does not happen again.

Whatever form it takes, help should be accessible to you as an adolescent and should respect your dignity, safety, privacy and views.

WHAT DOES THIS MEAN FOR ME?

You should be able to ask for help when you believe that your rights have not been respected. You should not need to be a lawyer or understand complicated procedures in order to do this. Information about where to go and what to do should be available in language you can understand. The people responsible for receiving complaints from adolescents should listen to you, take you seriously and explain what will happen next. You should be able to participate in decisions about what happens to you.

Your privacy should be protected, and seeking help should not expose you to punishment, discrimination, violence or unwanted disclosure of personal information.

Sometimes you may need an adult to help you use a complaint or legal procedure. But procedures should not make it impossible for you to seek help when the adult who would normally represent or support you is the person causing the problem.

And getting help does not always mean going to court. Sometimes a problem can be resolved by a school, health service or another institution. Sometimes an independent complaints body, ombudsperson, equality body, children's rights institution or other authority can help. Sometimes legal action may be necessary.

What is available will depend on where you live.

WHAT DO THE YOGYAKARTA PRINCIPLES SAY?

The Yogyakarta Principles say that people whose human rights have been violated must have access to **effective, adequate and appropriate remedies**. States must investigate human rights violations, provide access to justice and take steps to prevent violations from

happening again. People seeking justice must be protected from discrimination, intimidation and further harm.

The Principles also recognise the importance of independent institutions, human rights defenders and organisations that help people understand and claim their rights. YP+10 strengthens these protections and reinforces the responsibility of states to provide effective remedies for violations connected with sexual orientation, gender identity, gender expression and sex characteristics.

Yogyakarta Principles: especially Principles 28 and 29; YP+10: relevant additional obligations.

AND THE CONVENTION ON THE RIGHTS OF THE CHILD?

The Convention requires states to make children's rights **real in practice**, not only recognise them on paper (Article 4).

Your best interests must be a primary consideration in decisions affecting you (Article 3).

You have the right to **express your views** in matters affecting you and to have those views given due weight (Article 12).

You have the right to **information** (Articles 13 and 17), to **privacy** (Article 16) and to protection from **violence and abuse** (Article 19).

If you have experienced violence, exploitation or other serious harm, you also have the right to support for your **recovery and reintegration** in conditions that promote your dignity and self-respect (Article 39).

And all these rights belong to you **without discrimination** (Article 2).

The Convention does not contain one single article called "the right to a remedy". But children's rights cannot be effective if children have no way to challenge violations and seek redress. **A right that cannot be claimed when it is violated is not fully protected.**

WHAT CAN I DO IF I NEED HELP?

Start with the question: **What do I need right now?** You may need someone to listen. You may need information. You may need something harmful to stop. You may need protection. You may want a decision to be reconsidered. You may want to make a complaint. Or you may simply need time and support to decide what you want to do next.

Think about who might be able to help and who you trust.

Depending on where you live and what has happened, this might include a trusted adult, school counsellor, health professional, social worker, youth or LGBTQIA+ organisation,

children's rights organisation, lawyer, ombudsperson, equality body, national human rights institution, child protection service or another independent authority.

Before taking a step, especially if the situation could put you at risk, you can ask: **What will happen if I make a complaint? Who will know? Can someone support me? Can I change my mind? Will I be involved in what happens next? Is there another option?**

Keep information that may help explain what happened, if it is safe to do so — for example, messages, emails, dates or the names of people who were present. And remember that asking for help does not mean giving control of your life to someone else. **Good support should help you understand your choices and make decisions with you, not simply make decisions for you.**

And remember: **Your rights are not only promises. When they are violated, you have the right to be heard, to seek help and to ask for things to be put right.**

11. CHANGING THINGS

MY RIGHT

I have the right to take part in making things better — for myself and for others. You are not only someone whose rights should be protected. You are also someone with ideas, experience and the ability to contribute to the world around you.

Adolescents can question unfair rules, suggest better ones, support each other, organise, create, speak out and take part in decisions. You can act on your own or together with others. You can work for your own rights and for the rights of other people. And you can choose how much you want to be involved.

Having a voice is your right. Being an activist is your choice.

WHAT DOES THIS MEAN FOR ME?

Change can start in many ways. You might notice that a rule at school treats some students unfairly. You might hear someone being bullied and decide not to remain silent. You might realise that information given to adolescents about sexuality, gender or health is inaccurate or excludes some people's experiences. You might want your child/youth club, sports team or community organisation to become more inclusive.

You might join a student body or child/youth organisation, start a discussion, write something, make art, organise a campaign, participate in a peaceful protest or contribute to a public consultation. Or you might simply support a friend who needs someone beside them. **You do not have to change the whole world to change something.**

Sometimes change is public and visible. Sometimes it happens quietly, between a few people. Both can matter.

WHAT DO THE YOGYAKARTA PRINCIPLES SAY?

The Yogyakarta Principles protect your rights to **freedom of expression, peaceful assembly and association**. They recognise the right of people to promote human rights and to work individually and together with others for their protection. People who defend human rights must be able to do so without violence, threats, retaliation or discrimination. This includes people working for equality and the rights of people of diverse sexual orientations, gender identities, gender expressions and sex characteristics.

Children/adolescents can also defend human rights. You do not need a title, an organisation or permission to care about fairness and speak up for human rights.

Yogyakarta Principles: especially Principles 19, 20 and 27; YP+10: relevant additional obligations.

AND THE CONVENTION ON THE RIGHTS OF THE CHILD?

The Convention does not see children only as people who need adults to protect them. It also recognises children as **people with their own views, freedoms and rights**. You have the right to express your views about matters affecting you and to have them taken seriously (Article 12).

You have the right to **seek, receive and share information and ideas** (Article 13).

You have the right to **freedom of association and peaceful assembly** — to meet, organise and act together with others (Article 15).

You have the right to access appropriate **information** (Article 17).

And education should prepare you for responsible life in a free society, in a spirit of understanding, peace, tolerance, equality and respect for human rights (Article 29).

You have all these rights **without discrimination** (Article 2).

Participation is therefore not only about adults asking adolescents what they think. **It is also about adolescents having the space, information and freedom to influence the world in which they live.**

HOW CAN I HELP CHANGE THINGS?

Start with something that matters to you. **What would I like to be different?**

Then find out more: **Why is this happening? Who makes the decisions? Who is affected? What rights are involved?**

Look for other people who care about the same issue: **Who could I talk to? Who could work with me? Is there already a group doing something about this?**

Think about what might help. You could start a conversation, ask a question, collect information, suggest a change, write to someone responsible, join an organisation, create a campaign or work with other adolescents.

Sometimes the most effective action is simply making sure that the people making decisions **hear directly from the adolescents affected by them**.

But you do not have to put yourself at risk. Think about your safety and privacy, especially if speaking publicly about sexual orientation, gender identity, gender expression or sex characteristics could expose you or someone else to harm. You can support change without disclosing private information about yourself. And you can decide to step back.

Protecting yourself does not mean that you care less about human rights.

FROM “MY RIGHTS” TO “OUR RIGHTS”

This Guide began with **Who I Am**. But human rights are not only about *me*.

They are also about how we treat one another and what kind of schools, communities and societies we build together.

The Yogyakarta Principles remind us that human rights belong to everyone, whatever their sexual orientation, gender identity, gender expression or sex characteristics.

The Convention on the Rights of the Child reminds us that these rights belong to children too.

Neither document asks for special rights for some people. They ask us to make **universal human rights truly universal**.

You can be part of making that happen. You may do it by speaking. By listening. By asking a difficult question. By standing beside someone who is being treated unfairly. By joining others. By challenging a rule. By proposing something better. Or simply by treating another person with the dignity you expect for yourself.

There are many ways to change things. **You can find yours.**

MY RIGHTS MAP

Rights become more useful when you know **where to find information, who you can trust and where you can turn for support**. The answers will be different depending on where you live. Use these pages to create your own **Rights Map**.

You can do this on your own or together with friends or other adolescents. You can add new information whenever you find it and share useful resources with others — **but never share someone's personal information or identity without their permission.**

WHERE CAN I LEARN MORE?

Find reliable sources where you can learn more about human rights, children's rights, sexual orientation, gender identity, gender expression and sex characteristics.

A children's rights organisation:

_____
_____

An LGBTQIA+ organisation or child/adolescent organisation:

_____
_____

A reliable website or online resource:

_____
_____

Information available at my school, university or youth centre:

_____
_____

Another useful source I found:

_____
_____

How do I know if a source is reliable?

Before trusting or sharing information, ask:

Who created it?

Is the information up to date?

Does it explain where the information comes from?

Does it respect adolescents and their rights?

WHERE CAN I GET HELP?

Think about people and organisations you could turn to if you needed information, support, protection or help claiming your rights.

PEOPLE I TRUST

A person in my family or someone who cares for me:

A friend:

Someone at my school or university:

A health professional, counsellor or other professional:

Another adult I trust:

ORGANISATIONS AND SERVICES

A children's/adolescents/youth rights organisation:

Contact: _____

An LGBTQIA+ or children/adolescents/youth organisation:

_____

Contact: _____

An ombudsperson, children's commissioner or national human rights institution:

_____

Contact: _____

An equality or anti-discrimination body:

_____

Contact: _____

A service I could contact if I were in immediate danger:

_____

Contact: _____

Another organisation or service that could help:

_____

Contact: _____

BEFORE I ASK FOR HELP

If you are unsure whether a person, organisation or service is safe for you, you can try to find out:

Will they keep my information private?

_____

Are there situations in which they must share my information with someone else?

_____

Can I speak to them without giving my name?

_____

Can I ask questions before deciding what I want to do?

Can someone I trust come with me or support me?

SHARE THE MAP — NOT SOMEONE'S IDENTITY

Your Rights Map can become better when people contribute what they know.

You can compare resources with friends, classmates, youth groups or organisations. You may discover services that other adolescents did not know existed. Add new information when you find it. Correct information that is out of date. Share useful resources.

But remember: **Never add or share personal information about another adolescent without their permission.** A useful network protects people's rights **and their privacy**.

KEEP BUILDING YOUR MAP

Something useful I discovered:

Something I want to find out more about:

A resource I want to share with others:

Something missing in my community that I think should exist:

And one last question:

What could I do to help create it?