



STUDENT COUNCIL GUIDELINES

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child
rights
schools

All children have the right to express their views on matters that affect them, and adults should listen and take children seriously. (Article 12)

Active student councils are essential in helping children to enjoy this right at school. Child participation should permeate all teaching, learning, and actions in the school. However, it is also necessary to set up a group to represent the student body when making decisions in the school.

Name

Many schools will call this group a student council. However, you can get creative with the name such as:

- rights committee
- the rights detectives
- children's committee

Encourage the children to make suggestions and vote on their preferred name.

Purpose

This group influences the school's rights respecting work, ensuring children play a leading role in embedding the principles of child rights in school life.

It provides a link between children, teachers, school leadership and the wider school community when making decisions in the school.

The group could be consulted on matters such as:

- Curriculum planning
- Governing bodies
- Staff appointments
- Evaluating teaching and learning
- Policy development
- Designing the playground
- Running after-school clubs
- Taking on the role as playground mediators
- And many more!

Members

Most of the members should be children who represent the different classes and reflect the diversity in the school. Ensure this is decided through a democratic process, such as an election in each class.

There is no minimum age at which children can participate.

Younger children should be offered appropriate support in line with their evolving capacities, for example, child-friendly documents, playing games, using visual activities.

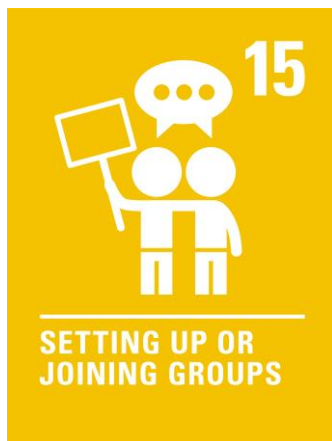
Offer additional support and time for children in vulnerable situations, including those in care, refugees or children with disabilities.

Adults should include at least one member of the school leadership team, along with a selection of teachers. Also include support staff such as a caretaker or a special needs assistant.

Parents/carers and a member of the local community (health worker or faith leader) are also a brilliant addition.

When including adults in the group, however, ensure that they do not dominate – in terms of either numbers or voices. Consider developing a child-led, mutually agreed, simple terms of reference to guide how the group will function, including how to deal respectfully with disagreements.

These groups are most effective when they have support from the principal and school leadership team.



Represent

The members can engage with their peers and represent their views in this group.

For example, if the school is considering a change to the homework policy the group members should share this information with the children in their class to hear their views. The group representatives can bring their classmates' opinions to a committee meeting and make an informed decision.

The group representatives should then provide the feedback from this meeting to their classmates.

Review

The group can carry out detective work to find out how rights respecting the school already is. This highlights what needs work and can inform plans to improve school practice. Every school will do this in a way that suits their own context. Download suggestions from [unicef.ie/child-rights-schools](https://www.unicef.ie/child-rights-schools) such as:

- Safety walk
- Accessibility walk
- Survey

Feedback

When children's opinions are fed into adult decision-making processes, the children must receive timely feedback on what happened: Were their opinions taken into account? If so, how? What was the result? If not, why not?



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Cover photo: children participating in child rights programme, South Africa