

What is human rights education?

Human rights education is all learning that builds knowledge and skills, as well as attitudes and behaviours that reflect human rights. Human rights education enables people to better integrate values such as respect, acceptance and inclusion into their daily lives.

Human rights education encourages using human rights as a frame of reference in our relationships with others. Human rights education also encourages us to critically examine our own attitudes and behaviours and, ultimately, to transform them in order to advance peace, social harmony and respect for everyone's rights.

Learning to live together

For knowledge of human rights to lead to social change, human rights education must not only strive to develop practical skills, it must also work to foster appropriate attitudes and behaviours. "We must not just educate our children and youth 'to know' and 'to do,' we must also educate them 'to be' and 'to live together.'"

DELORS, Jacques et al. *Learning: The Treasure Within. Report to UNESCO of the International Commission on Education for the Twenty-First Century*. UNESCO, 1996.

Why is it important to educate youth about human rights?

Here are just some of the reasons why human rights education is important.

- **Because it's a right:** Article 42 of the *Convention on the Rights of the Child* stipulates that youth have the right to know their rights. Adults have the responsibility to ensure that youth are informed and can exercise their rights.
- **To increase respect for human rights:** Knowing about your rights is the first step in promoting greater respect for human rights. In places where youth are aware of their rights, there is generally a better respect for and less abuse of rights.
- **Because human rights values are universally recognized:** Adults who work with youth are constantly faced with the task of trying to determine which behaviours are acceptable and which are not acceptable. Making these types of decisions often involves relying on personal experiences or values. Human rights education provides a clear framework for evaluating when and how to intervene by referring to the universally recognized values that come directly from the *Universal Declaration of Human Rights*.
- **To encourage the development of self-esteem and active participation:** Once youth become aware of their rights, they come to recognize their own importance as human beings. They also start to realize that what they live, think and feel has value and that they can make a positive contribution to group life, their family, their school and their community.
- **To reinforce positive behaviours among young people:** Human rights education is one of the most effective ways of encouraging positive behaviour because it involves both critical thinking and strengthening of a youth's sense of responsibility. Human rights education encourages youth to consider how they interact with others and how they might change their behaviour to better reflect human rights values. The result is that they are not only more aware of the importance of respect, cooperation and inclusion, but also better equipped to put these values into practice in their daily lives.
- **To encourage active youth participation:** Human rights education makes young people aware that each person not only has the right, but also the responsibility to participate in the life of their community. Young people realize that their ideas and talents are key assets to society and that they have a responsibility to participate in building the world in which they want to live. Human rights education provides people with the tools they need to define their own values and to promote them through meaningful and concrete actions. Human rights education thus encourages the participation of young people while preparing them to become responsible citizens, aware of their rights and responsibilities.