



International Network for School Social Work

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Children's Rights and the School Social Work Role

Promoting and protecting children's rights is part of the school social work role. Children's right to be treated with respect and dignity regardless of gender, race, religion, wealth, opinions and ability is at the heart of the mission of school social work. Making sure that children's basic needs are met (the right to food, clothing and shelter) and that all children receive free and appropriate education (the right to education) are the goals that form the basis of school social work everywhere.

The Convention on the Rights of the Child is the legally binding international agreement that makes it clear that children have the same rights as adults and that they need extra protection that adults do not need. The Rights of the Child apply to all under the age of 18 and have been ratified by every country except the United States and Somalia.

The Convention is comprehensive and sets out children's rights in 54 articles, covering every aspect of child protection, freedoms, child development, health care, education and respect. While every one of the articles affects the work of a school social worker, Article 28 is crucial to children's rights in the educational system. It includes the need to help children with regular attendance and staying in school, appropriate handling of school discipline, development of all of a child's abilities, respect for the child's family and culture, and even the teaching of peace, tolerance, equality of the sexes and respect for the environment.

Article 19 is another article that is especially applicable to school social work. It challenges school social workers to work with school staff and families in preventing, reporting, and following up on any kind of child abuse, including mental abuse both in school and in the community.

There is plenty here for school social workers to apply their problem-solving skills to: improving attendance, reducing drop-out rates, helping schools use appropriate discipline, helping schools understand the child's cultural background, helping families and children from minority groups, teaching peace-building in the school, reporting child abuse and supporting children who have been abused. That is just from 2 of the 54 Articles of the Convention.

Article 28

1. States Parties recognize the right of the child to education, and with a view to achieving this right progressively and on the basis of equal opportunity, they shall, in particular:
 - (a) Make primary education compulsory and available free to all;

- (b) Encourage the development of different forms of secondary education, including general and vocational education, make them available and accessible to every child, and take appropriate measures such as the introduction of free education and offering financial assistance in case of need;
 - (c) Make higher education accessible to all on the basis of capacity by every appropriate means;
 - (d) Make educational and vocational information and guidance available and accessible to all children;
 - (e) Take measures to encourage regular attendance at schools and the reduction of drop-out rates.
2. States Parties shall take all appropriate measures to ensure that school discipline is administered in a manner consistent with the child's human dignity and in conformity with the present Convention.
 3. States Parties shall promote and encourage international cooperation in matters relating to education, in particular with a view to contributing to the elimination of ignorance and illiteracy throughout the world and facilitating access to scientific and technical knowledge and modern teaching methods. In this regard, particular account shall be taken of the needs of developing countries.

Article 29 General comment on its implementation

1. States Parties agree that the education of the child shall be directed to:
 - (a) The development of the child's personality, talents and mental and physical abilities to their fullest potential;
 - (b) The development of respect for human rights and fundamental freedoms, and for the principles enshrined in the Charter of the United Nations;
 - (c) The development of respect for the child's parents, his or her own cultural identity, language and values, for the national values of the country in which the child is living, the country from which he or she may originate, and for civilizations different from his or her own;
 - (d) The preparation of the child for responsible life in a free society, in the spirit of understanding, peace, tolerance, equality of sexes, and friendship among all peoples, ethnic, national and religious groups and persons of indigenous origin;
 - (e) The development of respect for the natural environment.
2. No part of the present article or article 28 shall be construed so as to interfere with the liberty of individuals and bodies to establish and direct educational institutions, subject always to the observance of the principle set forth in paragraph 1 of the present article and to the requirements that the education given in such institutions shall conform to such minimum standards as may be laid down by the State.

Article 19

1. States Parties shall take all appropriate legislative, administrative, social and educational measures to protect the child from all forms of physical or mental violence, injury or abuse, neglect or negligent treatment, maltreatment or exploitation, including sexual abuse, while in the care of parent(s), legal guardian(s) or any other person who has the care of the child.
2. Such protective measures should, as appropriate, include effective procedures for the establishment of social programmes to provide necessary support for the child and for those who have the care of the child, as well as for other forms of prevention and for identification, reporting, referral, investigation, treatment and follow-up of instances of child maltreatment described heretofore, and, as appropriate, for judicial involvement.