



## Thank you for supporting the Young Canadians' Parliament (YCP) hosted by Children First Canada (CFC) on Sept.26, 2020!

There will be one digital forum each month until November 2020. The objectives of the digital forums are to educate children about their rights under the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child (UNCRC), to educate them on their options to take action, for them to advise Parliamentarians on the impacts of COVID-19 on children, and to provide a platform to exercise their rights, including having direct access to Parliamentarians and decision makers to share their recommendations and perspectives.

Each month, this program was co-designed with CFC Youth Ambassadors to contribute to the vision and outcomes of the YCP:

- A coordinated response by the federal government and civil society organizations that responds to the priorities of children and youth impacted by the COVID-19 pandemic.
- Public policies intended to improve the lives of children will be reflective of the interests and concerns of young Canadians.
- Improved outcomes for the health and wellbeing of all 8 million children in Canada.
- Increased political will to address the urgent threats to childhood.
- A coherent policy framework to improve children's wellbeing.



## Introduction

The Honourable Senator Marilou McPhedran provided a short overview on her efforts to change the Canadian voting age from 18 to 16 through B-S219 and the #Vote16 campaign.

Three Breakout Sessions were held on children's Survival, Development, and Protection Rights in relation to the Top 10 Threats to Childhood in Canada developed from the Raising Canada 2020 Report.

Following the breakout sessions, Senator McPhedran and the Honourable Mike Lake (MP), responded to participants' questions and comments including how different levels of government are involved in realizing children's rights.

## Raising Canada 2020: Top 10 Threats to Childhood

#1	Unintentional and preventable injuries
#2	Poor mental health
#3	Child abuse
#4	Poverty
#5	Infant mortality
#6	Physical inactivity
#7	Food insecurity
#8	Systemic racism and discrimination
#9	Vaccine-preventable illnesses
#10	Bullying

# THE RIGHT TO DEVELOPMENT: WHAT CHILDREN AND YOUTH SAID

Unintentional and Preventable Injuries and Physical Inactivity were identified as two of the Top 10 Threats to Childhood in Canada in the Raising Canada 2020 report. These two threats relate to child **development** and are linked to the following rights from the UNCRC:

## Article 17: Access to Information

Children have the right to get information from the Internet, radio, television, newspapers, books and other resources. Adults should make sure the information they are getting is not harmful. Governments should encourage the media to share information from lots of different sources, in languages that all children can understand.

## Article 28: Access to Education

Every child has the right to an education. Primary education should be free. Secondary and higher education should be available to every child. Children should be encouraged to go to school to the highest level possible. Discipline in schools should respect children's rights and never use violence.

## Article 31 - Rest, Play, Culture, and Arts

Every child has the right to rest, relax, play and to take part in cultural and creative activities.

### More than anything else, we want you to know:

- Government has a duty to support kids and make sure they are safe. But, kids are also able to take care of one another. It should be a collaborative effort
- There is a lack of supervision in school and playgrounds. Some caregivers don't realize the need for protection during play
- Sports that require equipment are less accessible especially for children with disabilities

### The COVID-19 pandemic has highlighted some specific development issues:

- Access to the internet was impacted during COVID-19 because of library closures
- COVID-19 has made physical activity challenging. Online gym classes were hard to follow and didn't always meet the physical activity requirement. Sports, parks and gym closures made it difficult to get exercise in public spaces. With the reduced traffic during COVID-19 there was an increased risk because more people seem to be speeding with fewer cars on the roads

We would like decision makers to address our development concerns:

- Government should appoint caretakers to supervise playgrounds to make them safe places for kids
- Schools should find ways to do physical education class safely and include children with disabilities
- Government should raise the tax deductions for parents that enrol their kids in sports including unconventional sports and artistic activities
- Better internet access needs to be addressed during COVID-19 and future shut-downs. Community centres and other accessible locations should be considered
- Drivers need to be better educated about children's safety especially near schools, parks and during COVID-19 when more kids are out of school

# THE RIGHT TO PROTECTION: WHAT CHILDREN AND YOUTH SAID:

The Top 10 Threats to Childhood in Canada highlighted three issues related to children's right to protection. The three threats are: Child Abuse, Systemic Racism and Discrimination, and Bullying. Child **protection** is addressed by the UNCRC in many of its Articles including for example:

## Article 19 - Protection from Being Hurt

Governments must protect children from violence, abuse and being neglected by anyone who looks after them.

## Article 34 - Protection from Sexual Abuse

The government should protect children from sexual exploitation and sexual abuse, including by people forcing children to have sex for money, or making sexual pictures or films of them.

## Article 36 - The Right to Help

Children have the right to be protected from all other kinds of exploitation.

### More than anything else, we want you to know:

- Youth need a platform from the federal government to identify where their rights are not being met
- Stop turning racism into a way to push a government agenda. The government sometimes puts on a show that they support inclusion, but it's not a concrete solution to solve racism. Youth feel that it can be hard to have their problems understood or appreciated when they are not represented in the power structures that they witness
- Some minorities and regions don't have access to the same resources as others  
Emotional abuse is a hard topic to talk about. Because of their age, it can be hard for kids to go to counseling. It can also be hard to talk on the phone if you live with your abuser. Kids are afraid they'll be caught seeking help. Counselors in schools are either too busy or are in short supply

### We would like decision makers to address our protection concerns:

- A youth commission would be a way for youth to have their voices heard regarding the threats they are facing
- We all need education about our rights
- Raise awareness on our history and on the impacts of that history that are still being felt today. This will result in better understanding between people of different races, ethnicities, religions and backgrounds, and will help to ensure that children's right to live without discrimination will come closer to realization
- We need more counselors in schools to ensure kids get help

# THE RIGHT TO SURVIVAL: WHAT CHILDREN AND YOUTH SAID

Poverty, Food Insecurity, Infant Mortality, Poor Mental Health, and Vaccine-Preventable Illness, were included within the Top 10 Threats to Childhood in Canada, and are factors that impact child survival.

**Survival** is an important theme in many Articles of the UNCRC and is linked to the following rights of children:

## Article 6 - Life, Survival, and Development

Every child has the right to be alive. Governments must make sure that children survive and develop in the best possible way.

## Article 19 - Protection from Violence

Governments must protect children from violence, abuse and being neglected by anyone who looks after them.

## Article 24 - Health, Water, Food, Environment

Children have the right to the best health care possible, clean water to drink, healthy food and a clean and safe environment to live in. All adults and children should have information about how to stay safe and healthy.

### More than anything else, we want you to know:

- We want the government to address climate change including through its commitments in the 2015 Paris Agreement and specifically to meet the net-zero carbon emissions goal. We want a future that is liveable and a Just Recovery that ‘builds back better’ and prepares for future crises
- Climate anxiety and the impacts on our future need to be addressed in mental health services
- Many kids rely on schools for meals and more food is needed in food banks to help families in need
- Government refers to us as future leaders but doesn’t let us have a say in what tomorrow will look like

### The COVID-19 pandemic has highlighted some specific survival issues:

- COVID-19 has resulted in unemployment and some families are now experiencing poverty. It has made it hard for children to interact with each other and impacted their mental health

### We would like decision makers to address our survival concerns:

- We want education based on equality and that addresses Canada's past mistakes on aboriginal and black history. In schools we want diversity (race, LGBTQ+, etc.) represented and shown in textbooks to acknowledge minority groups' contributions to Canada
- Schools and governments should better work together to provide services including for mental health
- Healthier food should be more affordable
- When a vaccine is found for COVID-19 everyone should have an equal right to get it
- A Children's Commissioner could advocate for our rights. Lowering the voting age and providing more education to politicians could result in our concerns being addressed in parties' platforms

### Conclusion

Linking Survival, Development, and Protection rights to specific articles within the UNCRC demonstrates the interdependence and interconnectedness of all of the rights it contains. It shows us how the Top 10 Threats to Childhood negatively impact the realization of children's rights especially during the COVID-19 pandemic and in light of climate change.

Our discussions showed us how, despite guarantees of non-discrimination, some children in Canada have not experienced their survival, development and/or protection rights equally with others. We need our systems to address the historic, and persistent economic, social, and cultural barriers that children face in Canada so that the best interest of all children is realized.

Our expressed concerns are a challenge to government, at all levels, to ensure our survival, development, and protection, and to find ways for our input to be considered seriously.

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