







Introduction

The Huron & Perth Charter of Rights of Children and Youth emerged from the voices of children and youth from across Huron County and Perth County, as they considered what rights are important to children and youth in their communities, and what responsibilities are naturally paired with those rights. As the children and youth shared their voices, engaged in discussions, created artwork, and expressed themselves through their words and actions, adults and caregivers observed carefully and documented their voices. Twelve common themes emerged and are depicted in the following booklet. Words and phrases that appear in quotations are those of the children, youth and adults involved in creating the responsibilities.

For the purpose of the Charter, 'adults' refers to parents, educators, service providers, Elders, Knowledge Keepers, and adult members of society in general. Rights are defined as 'a freedom that should be protected,' while a responsibility is 'a duty or something that you should do.' These rights of children and youth, and the resultant responsibilities, are believed to be inherent for the children and youth of Huron County and Perth County.

As parents, educators, service providers and community members, it is important that we view children and youth as capable and competent members of our communities. As we interact with children and youth, we recognize and respect these rights and take them into account in our relationships and every day interactions with children and youth. We also recognize that as children and youth grow, they interact with the world in different ways and as such, the rights and responsibilities adapt as they develop independence and maturity. It is also our duty to ensure that we provide the necessary conditions for the rights of children and youth to prevail, and to bear responsibility for our actions in honouring and championing the rights of children and youth.

Land Acknowledgements

The following land acknowledgement was adapted from the County of Huron's land acknowledgement created in honour of National Indigenous Peoples Day, June 21, 2022. The Charter offers the following land acknowledgement:

"We play today on the traditional territories of the Anishinaabe, Haudenosaunee and Neutral peoples. As we play, we think about how we use the land and water every day to eat, drink, play and learn and grow. We think about the First Peoples and how they continue to care for the land and water. We know that there have been wrongs made in the past and that wrongs are still being made today. We promise to learn more about First Nation, Métis and Inuit peoples. We will use what we learn to help each other grow. We will share the land, and we will work and play together in peace in the future." County of Huron, June 21, 2022.



I have the right to Express Myself

Children and Youth have the right to:

- Have feelings and express a range of feelings and emotions
- Be truly heard
- Be acknowledged and respected
- Be passionate and creative

Adults are responsible for viewing children and youth as “capable and competent,” while acknowledging and validating their feelings. Through actions, words and teachings, adults will help children to express feelings, emotions or opinions. Adults should also be responsible for supporting children and youth to learn how to organize their feelings and emotions, and to develop self regulation and resilience skills.

Children and youth are responsible for expressing and identifying their feelings and using regulation strategies that are appropriate for them as individuals. Children should be accepting, kind and “respectful of the ideas of others and how others choose to express themselves.”



I have the right to Belong

Children and youth have the right to:

- be included regardless of gender, ethnicity, culture, religion, family income, age or ability; and;
- have barrier-free access in their home and community.

Adults are responsible for helping children and youth identify their “gifts, talents and contributions to our shared society.” Adults should support a society that is diverse and inclusive by building awareness and respect so that our communities are welcoming to all.

Children and youth are responsible for “being kind and accepting of others.” Children and youth can be welcoming “to include others” and to demonstrate empathy. They can “invite others” to join them regardless of their differences. Children can demonstrate responsibility by being helpful, showing respect and working together.



I have the right to Caring & Healthy Relationships

Children and youth have the right to family, friends and caring adults who:

- love and comfort;
- are respectful and responsive;
- positively interact with each other;
- delight in each other; and
- support each other.

Adults are responsible for providing compassion, love and support to children and youth. Adults should engage with members of the community, such as extended family, parents, siblings, grandparents, Elders, Knowledge Keepers and other caring adults, to “model and teach” strategies to guide children and youth to thrive within healthy relationships.

Children and youth are responsible for being “caring, helpful, supportive, respectful and kind to others” by solving problems with “open and honest communication.” Children and youth can be empathetic and compassionate to “inspire” peers to treat others with kindness, “cooperate with those you take care of them” and “be thankful for the people who love them and who they can trust.”



I have the right to a Clean Environment

Children and youth have the right to:

- access clean water;
- healthy air to breathe; and
- safe places to play.

Adults are responsible for protecting, preventing future harm and correcting what has gone wrong in the environment. Adults should guide children and youth “by being a living example of how to care for our Earth.” Adults should therefore provide experiences in nature, about nature and for the preservation of nature for generations to come.

Children and youth are responsible for “respecting the environment and the animals on the Earth,” for “not wasting valuable resources and for reducing pollution any way they can.” Children and youth should also be responsible for “keeping the community clean, for not littering, and for respecting the world they are living in.”



I have the right to Learn

Children and youth have the right to:

- literacy, numeracy and social learning;
- have schooling;
- opportunities to explore their interests; and
- have their learning needs supported.

Adults are responsible for taking every opportunity to make learning happen, wherever the children and youth may be. They should acknowledge and respond to the emerging interests and learning needs of children and youth, and advocate for learning supports.

Children and youth are responsible for exploring their environments through play. They should attend school and be a responsible and respectful learner by “listening carefully” and “trying hard to do their best.” They show responsibility by “respecting their teachers and others at their school and supporting their friends.” They can show understanding that everyone learns in different ways.



I have the right to a Healthy Life

Children and youth have the right to:

- access healthcare, vision and dental;
- prevention and treatment of physical and mental health; and
- access assistive devices to live their best life.

Adults are responsible for being a role model for children and youth through healthy eating, movement, self-regulation and taking care of their mental well-being. In addition, adults should teach children and youth about the risks associated with unsafe behaviours and the use of harmful substances. Adults should also advocate for and ensure that children and youth receive the level of health care they need.

Children and youth are responsible for learning about their bodies and how to take care of them and for engaging in activities that promote their physical and mental well-being. "Telling an adult when something is wrong" and asking for help when needed are also actions that children and youth can take.



I have the right to Food, Clothing, and a Home

Children and youth have the right to:

- enough healthy food to eat;
- clothing appropriate for the weather;
- have a safe place to live; and
- a comfortable place to sleep.

Adults are responsible for providing a variety of foods to support healthy eating at consistent meal and snack times. Adults should do their best to make sure the food, clothing and housing needs of children and youth are met, and to empower children and youth to feel safe and confident enough to tell them when their needs are not being met.

As children and youth get older, they learn more about food and become responsible for eating in a way that is healthy for them. They become more responsible for choosing to wear clothing appropriate to the weather, "taking care of their clothes," and helping with chores so their living and playing space is clean. They can talk to someone if they do not have enough food, clothing, or a safe space.



I have the right to dream and hope

Children and youth have the right to:

- feel optimistic about the future;
- be given opportunities to explore their goals; and
- celebrate the present and the future.

Adults are responsible for acknowledging and encouraging the dreams and hopes of children and youth, and guiding and supporting them in reaching their goals. They are responsible for helping children and youth to envision a future where they have a pathway and opportunities to participate in society.

Children and youth are responsible for “making the future their own” and actively “participating” in their community. They can express their hopes and dreams in a respectful way. They can be responsible for “their own mind set” and “for taking time for themselves to think about what they need and want.”



I have the right to be safe & protected

Children and youth have the right to:

- feel secure at home, at school and in their communities;
- privacy;
- freedom and protection from bullying, violence and abuse; and
- learn how to keep themselves safe.

Adults are responsible for making sure our communities are safe for children and youth to live in. They should teach children and youth how to be aware of danger, and empower children and youth to respond if they find themselves in an unsafe situation.

As children and youth mature, they become more responsible for trusting their instincts and “being aware” of danger. As they get older, they begin to “know how to stay safe, and how to get help” in situations where help is needed. They can recognize and “stand up” against violence and bullying.



I have the right to play, explore, and rest

Children and youth have the right to:

- be active;
- have fun;
- have free time;
- imagine;
- explore nature; and
- play games and sports.

Adults are responsible for providing safe opportunities for children and youth to play and explore. They can encourage play as a way for children and youth to learn about themselves and the world around them. Adults should acknowledge that children and youth need a balance of time to play, explore and rest.

Children and youth are responsible for having fun and for “playing fairly and safely.” They can explore and be active while also learning how to rest and regulate their bodies.



I have the right to make choices

Children and youth have the right to:

- have their own opinions;
- be given choices; and
- participate in decision-making.

Adults are responsible for asking children and youth their opinions and for listening to the voices of children and youth.

They should include children and youth in decisions that may affect them, and guide children and youth, through their actions and teachings, to make responsible choices.

Children and youth are responsible for exploring their options, and participating in making choices and learning from them. They can be aware that their choices and opinions may be different from others. Children and youth can be respectful of the opinions and choices of their peers.



I have the right to be me

Children and youth have the right to:

- be unique and free from judgement;
- celebrate and practice who they are;
- adorn clothing, accessories, or symbols that represent who they are;
- know where they come from; and
- be respected for who they are.

Adults are responsible for honouring, supporting and respecting the identity of children and youth. Children and youth should also be asked their opinions on matters of importance to them. Adults should guide children and youth as they explore options and are made aware of the outcomes as they make decisions.

Children and youth are responsible for “being their own person,” for being true to themselves, and “for not judging others.” Children and youth should also learn to “respect others’ identity” and be accepting that “everyone’s needs are different.” Children and youth can also “be kind to those who need more help than others.”



Reach out for support

211 is a helpline that easily connects people to the social services, programs and community support they need.

211 offers a wide range of topics including ages, income, housing, 2SLGBTQQIA+, employment and mental health. If you or someone you care about has questions, support them to reach out to 211 by phone, text, email or website.

Website: <https://211ontario.ca>

Email: gethelp@211ontario.ca

Text or Dial 2-1-1

For more information about the Huron and Perth Charter of Rights of Children and Youth and Associated Responsibilities, please visit:

www.huroncounty.ca/social-services/childrens-services/

or

<https://www.stratford.ca/en/inside-city-hall/childcare.aspx>

