

The **BEST** for our children and youth

In Singapore, the Government wants children and youth to have the best possible upbringing.

Singapore acceded to the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child (UNCRC) in 1995. The UNCRC's 54 articles are generally based on these four principles: non-discrimination; best interests of the child; right to life, survival and development; and respect for the views of the child. Here is how Singapore practises the four principles of the UNCRC.



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NON-DISCRIMINATION – RESPECTING DIVERSITY

Every year, on July 21, schools in Singapore observe Racial Harmony Day. You may have dressed up in *saris*, *cheongsams*, *baju Melayu* and *baju kurung*, learnt how to draw *kolams* (right) or tasted different *kuehs* on this day.

Racial Harmony Day reminds us to celebrate Singapore's unique multi-racial identity, and reflect on how our race and heritage have shaped us. By celebrating with friends, we learn to appreciate and respect other cultures and traditions.

This is in line with Article 2 of the UNCRC, which says that the Convention applies to every child, regardless of ethnicity, religion or language. This means that every child in Singapore deserves the

best possible upbringing regardless of who they are and where they come from.



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DISCUSS What are some ways where everyone is cared for regardless of their background? How have you been cared for that differs from someone less fortunate?

BEST INTERESTS OF THE CHILD

As a youth, your interests and well-being matter, and should be considered in issues that concern you. This is in line with Article 3 of the UNCRC.

The Government regularly reviews its laws and policies to ensure that children's interests are taken into consideration. For example, we recently amended the Children and Young Persons Act (CYPA), a law that protects abused or neglected children and addresses the needs and risks of youth with offending behaviours. This includes giving a second chance to youth offenders who turn over a new leaf – they need not declare that

they have a criminal record if they successfully complete their Youth Court orders. This change is for the best interests of youth offenders who wish to change for the better, and allows them to put their past behind them.



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DISCUSS What are the times where your parents or teachers took your interests and well-being into account when making decisions? How did you feel about it?

RESPECTING THE VIEWS OF CHILDREN

Last year, 50 youth participated in the Singapore Together Emerging Stronger Conversations session hosted by Minister for National Development Desmond Lee and Parliamentary Secretary for Health Rahayu Mahzam.

These youth gave their time to exchange views on topics such as volunteerism, mental health, as well as economic solutions for a post-Covid-19 Singapore.

Through such sessions, youth like yourself can positively shape Singapore's future. This is aligned with the UNCRC's principles, whereby children should have opportunities to engage with issues that affect them.

DISCUSS Do you share your hopes for the future with your friends and family? What do you have to do to achieve them?

THE RIGHT TO LIFE, SURVIVAL AND DEVELOPMENT

To ensure that every child can lead a healthy life, the Government has put in place measures to help ensure that every stage of your development is cared for.

The public health¹ risks in our country have evolved over the years. In the 1960s, risks included crowded living conditions and poor sanitation. Today, with better living conditions such as a readily-available potable water supply and greater access to primary medical care, there have been fewer deaths and overall better health for everyone.



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There are diseases that can be prevented through vaccination. Under the National Childhood Immunisation Programme, the Ministry of Health has a list of recommended vaccinations for all children. These include injections to protect you from diseases such as tuberculosis, polio and measles, which were easy to contract in the past, when the healthcare system was less developed.

Vaccinations and health screenings are available at polyclinics for younger children, and the School Health and School Dental Services provide screenings and check-ups for growth and developmental issues and oral diseases, so that any health issues can be detected and you receive help early.

Initiatives like these are in line with Article 24 of the UNCRC, which says that every child should be provided with the health care they need.

DISCUSS Why is it important to check our health regularly? Ask your parents whether they remember being given milk or brushing their teeth with their classmates in school, and compare some of the differences between then and now.

¹ Public Health is defined as "the art and science of preventing disease, prolonging life and promoting health through the organised efforts of society" (Acheson, 1988; WHO).