



# Change Your Life With Human Rights



**A Self-Advocacy  
Book for People  
with Disabilities**

Harvard Project on Disability ([www.hpod.org](http://www.hpod.org))



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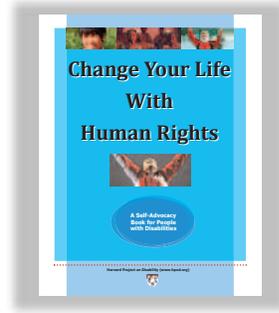
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## A Self-Advocacy Book

This book is for people with disabilities who want a better life. Learn how to speak up to make change happen. Learn to use the power of human rights.

Become a self-advocate. Self-advocates speak up for themselves. Self-advocates take action to claim their human rights.

This book includes explanations, exercises, and resources that teach you:

- What the Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (CRPD) is
- What human rights are
- What human rights can do
- What advocacy is
- How to take action to help yourself and other people with disabilities

Learn to make change happen. And live a better life.

**Australia.** Photo: Tutti Ensemble Inc.



# What is the CRPD?

## Voices

The CRPD “will offer a way forward to ensure that those with disabilities enjoy the same human rights as everyone else.”

Former UN Secretary General, Kofi Annan



Photo: Dalma Foldes

The United Nations made a new law in 2006. It says people with disabilities have the same human rights as other people.

This law is named the Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities, or CRPD. A convention is a special type of law. It is an agreement between countries.

**If your country signs the CRPD it must take action so you are treated equally. Governments must:**

- Improve laws and make new laws
- Enforce laws
- Protect people with disabilities’ human rights
- Educate the public about your rights
- Involve people with disabilities in decision-making
- Tell the United Nations what they are doing for people with disabilities

Countries that “ratify” the CRPD promise to make these changes.



Photo: Dalma Foldes

**You have human rights!**

# What are human rights?

## Voices

“Where after all do human rights begin? In small places, close to home.”

Eleanor Roosevelt

Human rights are what people need to live with dignity and enjoy freedom. All people have human rights. Including all people with disabilities.

People have human rights because they are human. Nobody is more or less human than anyone else. So nobody has more or less human rights than anyone else.

### Human rights apply equally to all people, including:

- Women and men with disabilities
- People with all types of disabilities, including intellectual, physical, psycho-social, and sensory disabilities
- Children with disabilities

People have human rights no matter their race, religion, or nationality. You have human rights!

### People with disabilities have the human right to:

- Be treated as equals
- Choose where to live
- Go to school and choose where they go to school
- Work and choose what work to do
- Marry and have children
- Vote

As well as many other human rights (Go to page 22 for a list).

**Romênia.** Photo: R. Antonovici



# What human rights can do

## Human rights are powerful. Human Rights:

- Help us respect ourselves and our abilities
- Help us change our lives and communities for the better
- Let us argue “This is our human right!”
- Allow us to say “This is a human rights abuse” when people with disabilities are treated badly

Because people have human rights by being human, no one can take your human rights away. Even if your government, community, or family stop you from enjoying your human rights, you still have them.

Today many people with disabilities don't enjoy their human rights. For example they are not treated as equals. They can't choose how they live. And they can't get work.

This is changing because we have the CRPD. This law says we have human rights. Now people with disabilities need to claim their human rights. So they can enjoy them.

**We can speak up.** We can say “These are our human rights!” We can work together to make life better. We can claim our human rights!!

## Learn more about your human rights:

- Use “We Have Human Rights” available at:  
<http://www.hpod.org/publications/human-rights-training>

## Voices

“A right is not what someone gives you; it's what no one can take from you.”

Ramsey Clark

**Angola.** Photo: Handicap International



# What is advocacy?

## Voices

“If you really want something, and really work hard, and take advantage of opportunities, and never give up, you will find a way.”

Jane Goodall

**United States:** Self Advocacy Association of New York State



## We need to make societies change. Advocacy provides a way to do this:

- Advocates are people who take action to make positive social change
- If you speak up for yourself you are a self-advocate
- Self-advocates, their families, friends, and supporters will need to work together to make societies change
- Advocacy can be for yourself, a group of people with disabilities, or the entire disability community
- Advocates can work for change in their lives, their families, communities, countries, or internationally
- Advocates can work for different rights

Use the power of human rights and the CRPD to improve your life. Advocate for people with disabilities in your community and elsewhere.

### Become a human rights advocate!

You are worth the effort. You can do it!

## Next learn how you can advocate to:

- Get your country to join onto the CRPD
- Change your life
- Change your community
- Change your country

# Get your country to join onto the CRPD

Countries join onto the CRPD by signing and ratifying the law. Countries sign the CRPD to show they agree with the law. Countries that ratify the CRPD promise to make changes so that people with disabilities are treated equally. Find out if your country has signed and ratified the CRPD. Go to [www.un.org/disabilities](http://www.un.org/disabilities).

## Make change happen

- Has your country ratified the CRPD? If not, encourage your government to ratify. Make posters showing why your government needs to promise to protect your human rights. Write to your government. Ask them to ratify the CRPD.
- Use the media like the radio, television, and internet to educate the public about the CRPD. Get a reporter to write about the CRPD.
- Make up a song or puppet show. Tell why your government should promise to protect your human rights. For instance say "We want a right to education".

## Fact

82 countries signed the CRPD on the first day it was open for signature. The highest number of signatures to a United Nations Convention on the opening day.

[www.un.org/disabilities](http://www.un.org/disabilities)

**United Nations** Photo: Katherine N. Guernsey



# Change your life

**Iraqi.** Photo: Special Olympics



Photo: Special Olympics



## Educate yourself and your family

- Learn about your human rights (Go to page 22 for help).
- Make a poster for your home showing your human rights.
- Educate your family and friends about your human rights. Ask them to become advocates.

## Make change happen

- All people with disabilities have the right to make decisions about their lives. And to have those decisions respected by others. Talk to your family about important decisions you need to make. Such as where to go to school. And where to live and work.
- Speak up for yourself if a service provider (such as a doctor or banker) treats you unfairly.
- Take part in activities in the community. Get involved in a sport. Go to the library.
- Have a sweetheart, if you want to. You have an equal right to get married and have children.
- Get a job, or volunteer to help others.

### Example

Loretta had a job. She wanted to open a bank account. The bank manager told Loretta she could not manage money. Loretta told the bank manager she had a right to this service. Now she has a bank account and manages her own money.

# Change your community

## Educate your community

- Teach other people with disabilities about their human rights. Ask them to become self-advocates.
- Make art for your community center showing your human rights. Make up a song about your rights (Go to page 11).
- Speak at schools. Tell students about the human rights of people with disabilities. Talk about what it is like to be a person with a disability in your community today. Say what you hope it will be like in the future.
- Talk with people from your daily life. For example shopkeepers, teachers, doctors and other service providers. Tell them about the CRPD.

Find it hard to remember what to say or write? Take this handbook (or another from page 23) with you!

## Make change happen

- Teach service providers like doctors to work better with people with disabilities.
- Organize a meeting with community leaders. Tell them “We have a human right to...” Ask them to protect the human rights of people with disabilities.
- Arrange a meeting with employers. Ask employers who employ workers with disabilities to talk about why this is a good business decision.
- Choose a human right you need protected. Copy out what the CRPD says about that right. Send this with a letter to your local government asking for a law to protect the right you have chosen. (Go to page 22 for a list of your human rights. Read the CRPD at [www.un.org/disabilities](http://www.un.org/disabilities).)
- Form a disability organization.

**Cambodia** Photo: Handicap International



# Change your country

Photo: "Working with Gratification" by Ms. Lai Yau Wan



Photo: "The warmth of a teachers hand" by Mr. Thoi Luu Thuan



## Educate your country

- Educate the public about the CRPD. Use the media. For instance, ask a radio station to have a show about the CRPD. Post a blog entry.

## Make change happen

- Become involved in the decisions your government makes about the laws and services that affect people with disabilities in your country. You know your lives better than anyone else.
- Many governments will be putting together national disability action plans. These say what action your government plans to take for people with disabilities. Find out if your government will be doing this. Find out if your national disability organization will be involved. Get involved!
- Ask your government to pass a law to protect your human rights. And to give you the chances you need to succeed. Get people including lawyers to sign a letter asking for a law for people with disabilities.
- Use your laws. For instance educate teachers and employers about what the law says.
- Vote in elections.
- Compete in sporting events to show what people with disabilities can achieve.
- International organizations like the World Bank work with governments to help them get money for projects to improve the lives of their people. These projects build things like hospitals, schools, and roads, or they might train people. Find out what kinds of projects are happening in your country. Advocate for people with disabilities to benefit from these projects.

# Advocacy activities

These advocacy activities can help you to make change happen.

## Activity one

**Goal:** Express yourselves to:

- teach your community about your human rights
- organize people with disabilities to take action

1. Form small groups
2. Choose a message. Such as “We have human rights” or “We have a right to education”.
3. Make up a song, dance, puppet show, comedy, or play. Choose what people in your community would enjoy.
4. Practice your performance.
5. Take turns performing.

Tell how you could use these performances to:

- Educate your community
  - Educate people with disabilities
  - Organize people with disabilities
- For example perform for a class of children or your neighbors.

## Activity two

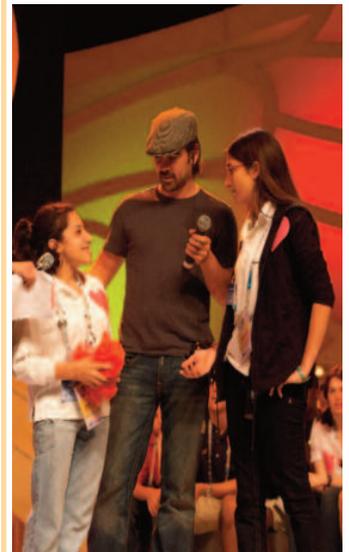
**Goal:** Teach people how to treat you

1. Make a list of how you want service providers like doctors or businesses to treat you.
2. List how you don't like to be treated.
3. Invite service providers like doctors or business managers to meet with you.
4. Tell them how you want to be treated. Share your lists with them.
5. Tell them about your human rights.

**Mali.** Photo: Handicap International



**China.** Photo: Special Olympics



# Advocacy activities



Photo: Special Olympics

## Activity three

**Goal:** Tell your family how you want to live

**Task:** Hold a family meeting

1. Talk to your family about your dreams for the future such as:
  - Where you want to go to school
  - Where you want to live
  - What job you want to have
  - How you want to meet new friends
  - What art or sport you would like to try
2. Talk to your family about what stands in your way of fulfilling your dreams such as:
  - Bad ideas your community has about people with disabilities
  - Bad laws
  - Not enough resources, such as information about how you can best learn
3. Think about how they could help you live your dreams. What could you do to help other people with disabilities live their dreams in the future?

## Activity four

**Goal:** To help people with disabilities find jobs

1. Invite a group of employers to a meeting.
2. Find an employer who does employ people with disabilities.
3. Have them explain to the group why they found it a good idea to hire people with disabilities.

## Activity five

**Goal:** Stop people with disabilities from being called bad names

1. Do people in your community call you names you don't like?
2. Make a list of the words for disability you like.
3. Make a list of the words you don't like.
4. Invite people from the media to meet with you. Explain to them the words for disability you like, and what are bad words.

## Report on progress

Gathering information to help solve human rights problems is called monitoring. Information is collected to show how countries are treating people with disabilities. And also to expose human rights abuses. Human rights abuses occur when people can not enjoy their human rights. For instance not being allowed to go to school is a human rights abuse.

### Get involved:

- Report any human rights abuses you experience. Tell your National Human Rights Institution (find them at <http://www.hpod.org/networking/nhri>) or a non governmental organization.
- Report human rights abuses in your community including:
  - Abuses experienced by individuals with disabilities
  - Government policies that hurt people with disabilities
  - Bad ideas in the media (newspapers, radio, television, etc.) about people with disabilities
- Participate in a “shadow report”. These reports say how the government has or has not lived up to its promises under the CRPD. A United Nations group called the Committee on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities will read and act on these reports.

### Example

Disability Rights Promotion International (DRPI) monitors the human rights of people with disabilities. They gather information about the human rights of people with disabilities around the world.

To learn more about DRPI’s work go to:  
<http://www.yorku.ca/drpi/index.html>



Photo: Blind messaging  
by Castaneda

# Ten steps to advocacy

## Voices

"If there are no struggles, there is no progress."

Frederick Douglass

Would you or your group like to become human rights advocates but are unsure what to do next?

### The steps below can help you:

- 1) Find a problem that needs solving
- 2) Identify the human right you are working on
- 3) Decide what action to take
- 4) Gather resources
- 5) Organize
- 6) Make an action plan
- 7) Practice
- 8) Take action!
- 9) Think about what happened and what to do next
- 10) Follow up

These steps are explained further below. There are also exercises that can help you.

## 1) Find a problem that needs solving

What are the biggest problems you and other people with disabilities have?

### Exercise one:

Aim: Find a problem to solve.

Task:

- Tell or write down the problems you and your community face.
- What do you think are the most important problems to solve? Put a mark next to those.
- Think about: "What problem is most important to you?"
- Decide what problem you want to work on.



Sri Lanka Photo:  
Handicap International

# Ten steps to advocacy

## 2) Find the human right you want to work on

### Exercise two:

**Aim:** Learn what human right is not being enjoyed.

**Task:** Tell or write down what human right is connected to your problem (with support if needed). Go to page 22 for a list of human rights, and choose the human right most relevant to your problem.

### Optional

Find the human right chosen in Exercise two in the UN Enable Easy Read guide.

(Go to [www.officefordisability.gov.uk/docs/international-agreement-rights-disabled-people.pdf](http://www.officefordisability.gov.uk/docs/international-agreement-rights-disabled-people.pdf) to find the text.) Read it out loud.

### Optional Group Work

Find the human right chosen in Exercise two in the CRPD. Read a few words out loud at a time. Ask what it means. Take turns.

(Go to [www.un.org/disabilities](http://www.un.org/disabilities) to find the text.)

### Fact

Far fewer people with disabilities have jobs than their peers without disabilities.

Photo: "Harvest Handicap" by Joiner



# Ten steps to advocacy

## Optional Exercise: My Hope for the Future

**Aim:** Find out what you hope your life or community could be like.

**Task:** For the human right chosen on page 15.

- Think about what you want your life or community to be like
- Tell, write down, gather photos, or draw what your life or community would be like if you could enjoy that human right
- What change would have to occur in your community, and life? What support would you need to live like this? Is that support available?

### My hope for the future

Glue or draw picture here	<b>What change needs to occur?</b>
	<b>What support would you need?</b>

# Ten steps to advocacy

## 3) What action do you want to take?

**Aim: Think about what is causing your human rights problem. Decide what action to take.**

Human rights problems can be caused by: your family, media like television and radio, businesses, teachers, doctors, government, organizations, or institutions.

**(a) Tell or write down who is causing your human rights problem and how.** For instance: Your community's attitude toward people with disabilities. What the government is not doing? What doctors do?

Actions you can take include educating people about your human rights, organizing, asking for a new law, teaching people like service providers how to work with you, protesting.

**(b) Say or write down what action could help solve your human rights problem.**

What action do you want to take? Think about "What am I good at doing?" "Who can help?" Decide on an action.

### Optional:

Tell or write down: What action could be taken to make "My Hope for the Future" a reality?

Need help with ideas for your action? Choose your favorite ideas from Chapter 2. Tell or write down these ideas in your own words.

Next prepare to take action.

### Voices

"Overcoming poverty is not a gesture of charity. It is an act of justice. It is the protection of a fundamental human right, the right to dignity and a decent life."

Nelson Mandela

**United States.** Photo: Self Advocacy Association of New York State



# Ten steps to advocacy



**United Nations** Photo: UN photo Mark Garten

## 4) Gather resources

Find information, people, and materials that can help you take the action you have identified. For example:

- Find out if your country has joined onto the CRPD. If so that means the government has promised to protect your human rights. Go to [www.un.org/disabilities](http://www.un.org/disabilities).
- Learn about your issue. Find information that will help others understand your issue. Collect statistics. Learn what the government is doing. Find out what your national law says, if you have one.
- Find peers and people in authority that will help you.

## 5) Organize

It is often easier to work with other people to achieve your goals.

### • **People and organizations**

Consider joining or creating an organization of people with disabilities (DPO). Find other disability organizations that could help you. When different groups join to work together on an issue this is called a coalition. Building coalitions creates strong movements of people. We can achieve much more together than apart.

### • **Non governmental Organizations (NGOs)**

Find organizations that work on a similar problem. Ask if they will help you.

### • **National Human Rights Institutions (NHRIs)**

Find out if your country has a NHRI. If so, consider asking them for help. These organizations can help people to claim their human rights. You can find out more about NHRIs using <http://www.hpod.org/networking/nhri>

**China.** Photo: Special Olympics



# Ten steps to advocacy

By this step you have:

- Identified a problem you want to work on
- Identified the human right it is related to
- Decided on the action you need to take to help solve the problem
- Gathered resources (information, people, organizations, NHRIs) to take that action

## 6) Make an action plan

Now you need to make an action plan. Write down the issue you are working on. Write down the specific actions you will take. Who will do them? Where and when will these actions happen?

Action plans can be used by individuals and groups.

Photo: Dalma Foldes



<b>Action Plan</b>
<b>Specific Action:</b>
<b>Who will take action:</b>
<b>When and where will this action happen:</b>
<b>What was the result?</b>

### Optional:

Find out if your national disability organization has an action plan. How can you help?

# Ten steps to advocacy

## 7) Practice

Make sure that everyone involved understands the action plan and what roles and responsibilities they will have. Role-playing can be one way of doing this.



Photo: Self Advocacy Association of New York State

### Exercise four:

**Aim:** Practice speaking up by role-playing.

**Task:** Tell your problem to the group. Explain your human right. Explain what you want so that you can enjoy this human right. For example role-play speaking to a government official. Explain "We do not have adequate training to get a job. We have a right to work. We would like to have access to vocational training."

### Exercise five:

**Aim:** Practice your action.

**Task:** For example, if you are going to talk to a class, use a role-play to practice. Have people pretend to be the students and ask questions. After it is over ask for suggestions on what worked and what did not. Always be supportive and respectful when giving suggestions.

Photo: Self Advocacy Association of New York State



# Ten steps to advocacy

## 8) Take action!

Carry out your action plan!

## 9) Think about what happened and what to do next

After you have taken your action, take time to think and talk about what happened. Did you achieve what you wanted to achieve? What could you have done better?

## 10) Follow up

Repeat steps 3-9 to decide what, if any, further action should be taken.

Don't give up if things don't work out exactly as you planned.

### Keep trying!

Making change happen takes time.

### Voices

"Basic education is, and always has been, the key to freedom..."

U.N. Cyberschool

**Indonesia** Photo: Handicap International



# Our human rights

## **The Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (CRPD) says you have human rights, including the right to:**

- Be treated as equals (Article 5)
- Equal treatment for women with disabilities (Article 6)
- Equal treatment for children with disabilities (Article 7)
- Change attitudes about people with disabilities (Article 8)
- Access (Article 9)
- Life (Article 10)
- Assistance in emergencies (Article 11)
- Be treated equally by the law (Article 12)
- Access to justice (Article 13)
- Be free and safe (Article 14)
- Not be tortured or treated cruelly (Article 15)
- Not be used or abused (Article 16)
- Be free from medical exploitation (Article 17)
- Move around freely (Article 18)
- Independent living and being part of the community (Article 19)
- Get around (Article 20)
- Be free to say what you want and to get information (Article 21)
- Respect for your privacy (Article 22)
- Marry and have children (Article 23)
- Education (Article 24)
- Health (Article 25)
- Services to help you be independent (Article 26)
- Work (Article 27)
- A decent standard of living (Article 28)
- Be involved in politics (Article 29)
- Be involved in sport and leisure (Article 30)



Photo: Father and teacher from Fiji from AbilityAsiaPacific

## **Read the Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (CRPD):**

- Read the full law at [www.un.org/disabilities](http://www.un.org/disabilities)
- Read an easy to read version at <http://www.officefordisability.gov.uk/docs/international-agreement-rights-disabled-people.pdf>

# Getting help

The following resources and organizations may be able to help you.

## Learn more about your human rights:

- Use “We Have Human Rights” available here: <http://www.hpod.org/publications/human-rights-training>
- Use “Human Rights. Yes!” available here: <http://www.humanrightsyes.org>
- Use the Disabled Peoples’ International Ratification and Implementation Toolkits available here: <http://www.icrpd.net>

## Useful organizations:

- **Harvard Project on Disability:** <http://www.hpod.org>
- **Disabled Peoples’ International:** <http://www.dpi.org>
- **UN Enable:** <http://www.un.org/disabilities>
- **Advocating Change Together:** <http://www.selfadvocacy.com>
- **Ratify Now:** <http://www.ratifynow.org>
- **Disability Rights Promotion International:** <http://www.yorku.ca/drpi/index.html>
- **Special Olympics:** <http://www.specialolympics.org>
- **Mental Disability Rights International:** <http://www.mdri.org>

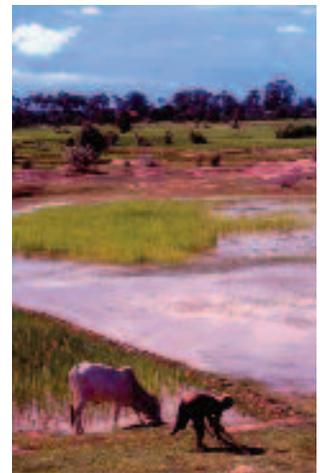


Photo: “Within Nature”  
by Serge Corrieras

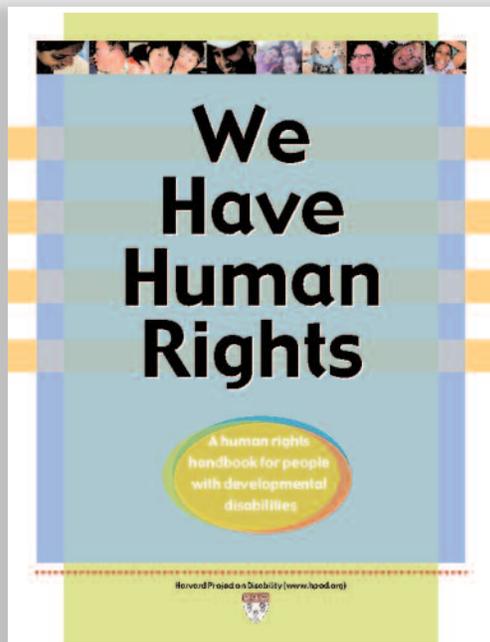
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The Harvard Project on Disability is generously supported by a grant from Foundation Open Society (Zug).



**China** Photo: Special Olympics



# We Have Human Rights

This book is for people with developmental disabilities. You can use this book to learn about your human rights. You can also use this book to talk with others about your human rights.

<http://www.hpod.org/publications/human-rights-training>

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To learn more about disability rights, get this companion book:

*Human Rights. Yes!* is a human rights curriculum on the rights of persons with disabilities. It was written by people with a wide range of experience in human rights and disability. It will be valuable to human rights workers, advocacy groups, and people working on human rights education.

[www.humanrightsyes.org](http://www.humanrightsyes.org)

