



Make a Commitment To Keep Children Safe

Introduction

For 120 years CHILDREN 1ST, the Royal Scottish Society for Prevention of Cruelty to Children, has been working to give every child in Scotland a safe and secure childhood. We support families under stress, protect children from harm and neglect, help them recover from abuse and promote children's rights and interests. We provide 32 services in 17 local authorities as well as three national services including ParentLine Scotland which is the free, national telephone helpline for parents and carers.

Throughout Scotland our staff and volunteers use their skills to help children overcome the difficulties in their lives and rebuild trust and confidence. For more information about how we work to keep children safe in Scotland, visit www.children1st.org.uk

The Manifesto

CHILDREN 1ST believes that everyone has a responsibility to keep children safe. CHILDREN 1ST has taken a lead in harnessing the support of the public, business, and public agencies to make it happen.

In drafting this Manifesto, CHILDREN 1ST has drawn on the experiences of the children and families with whom we work, on the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child as well as the UN's last report on the UK's compliance on the Convention, published in October 2002.

CHILDREN 1ST calls for the following action in relation to policy as well as structural reform. All the actions we seek are underpinned by recommendations already made by the UN Committee on the Rights of the Child.

Policy Reform

✓ *Protecting children should be a national priority to ensure child protection becomes 'everyone's business'.*

CHILDREN 1ST believes that public information is a necessary basis for keeping children safe. The UN recommended that the Government carry out large scale public education campaigns and programmes aimed at reducing child abuse with information on the role of statutory and other services in protecting children. The reporting system should be strengthened and that training should be targeted at teachers, law enforcement officials, care workers, judges and health professionals in the identification, reporting and management of cases of ill-treatment.¹

Promote children's right to be safe.

We need a clear commitment to the rights of children to safety and security in all areas of their lives - at home, in our schools and in public places. The UN Committee recommended that the UK develop a co-ordinated strategy for the reduction of all forms of violence against children.²

✓ *Give children the same protection from assault as adults currently enjoy.*

Children are very unprotected from the threat and use of physical punishment by their intimate carers. We believe that violence or the threat of it has no place in the family. There is overwhelming evidence about the damaging effects of using physical punishment. The UN wants the UK to adopt 'with urgency legislation to remove the "reasonable chastisement" defence and prohibit all corporal punishment in the family'.³

1 Sections 39, 40 (d) & 40 (h) Committee on the Rights of the Child Concluding Observations: United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland CRC/C/15/Add.188, 9th October 2002.
2 Section 40 Ibid.
3 Section 38 (a) Ibid.

✓ **Deliver a public information campaign on positive, non-violent discipline.**

Promote positive, participatory and non-violent forms of discipline and carry out public education programmes on the negative consequences of corporal punishment.⁴

✓ **Deliver more support for parents and families.**

CHILDREN 1ST recognises that there is a lack of universal support for parents and families particularly at key transitional stages e.g. parents of teenagers. Parents have difficulty in accessing the information and support that does exist when they need it.

✓ **Enable children to give their best evidence in court and establish a more positive environment for children who are giving or have given evidence e.g. ensuring access to support.**

Establish effective procedures and mechanisms to receive, monitor, investigate and prosecute instances of abuse, ill-treatment and neglect, ensuring that the abused child is not victimised in legal proceedings and that her/his privacy is protected. Also, provide for the care, recovery and reintegration of victims.⁵

Introduce intermediaries, based on the successful operation of the system in South Africa over the last 11 years, to enable children to give their best evidence at court. Increasing prosecutions as well as the conviction rate will prevent abuse by repeat perpetrators who have successfully avoided detection.

✓ **Raise the age of criminal responsibility from 8 years in Scotland and 10 years in England.**

Raise the age of criminal responsibility to 16 years of age and ensure special measures for all under 18s who are accused of criminal offences.⁶

4 Section 38 (b) Ibid.
5 Section 40 (e) & (g) Ibid
6 Sections 59, 60 & 61 Ibid.
7 Section 26, Ibid.
8 Section 9 Ibid.
9 Section 14 Ibid.
10 Section 12 Ibid.
11 Section 14 Ibid.



Structural Reform

✓ **The UK should adopt the best interests of the child as a paramount consideration in all legislation and policy affecting children.⁷**

✓ **Incorporate the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child into domestic law so that the provisions and principles of the Convention are widely applied in legal and administrative proceedings.⁸**

✓ **Adopt and develop a comprehensive plan of action for implementation of the Convention in all parts of the UK.⁹**

✓ **Ensure effective co-ordination of the implementation of the Convention throughout the UK including across Government departments, the devolved administrations and local authorities.¹⁰**

✓ **Adopt a rights based approach to policy development by using the Convention as a framework.¹¹**

CHILDREN 1ST

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