

Global Responsibility for Children

Policy Possibilities for Public Discussion



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Global Responsibility for Children

As an Area of Concern



Do you wonder who is responsible for our children in our global society, and what their responsibilities are or should be?

Children, almost by definition, are the most vulnerable social group in our global society. They are often among the first victims of social crises: be they humanitarian crises arising from natural disasters; military crises arising from wars and other international conflicts; political crises arising from revolutions; human rights crises arising from abusive political regimes; psychological and physiological crises arising from sexual molestation and child abuse; or family crises arising from the divorces, breakups, and crimes of their parents. Children have been neglected, abandoned, and even killed by their parents and caretakers—both in mythology and in real life—and infanticide has a long history in Europe, China, and India. Indeed, the history of mankind has recorded wide scale abuses against children arising from the poverty, ignorance, and hatred of adults, caretakers, and other children—and from the unintended consequences of well-intended public policies designed to protect them.

Many authors have described the abuse of children in orphanages, workplaces, and at home. But children are not only vulnerable to abuse. They are also vulnerable to abusing others. They are notorious for bullying smaller children. They molest and rape other children, sometimes brutally, and they frequently give birth to children they cannot financially and emotionally support. They also use drugs, sell them on the street, and entice other children into addictions. They steal. They organize gangs that terrorize neighborhoods. And, with seemingly increasing frequency, they kill other children, adults, and even their parents.

Churches, labor groups, teachers, and other reformers have long lobbied for child labor laws. And laws in Europe and the United States gradually shortened the hours, improved the conditions, and raised the age at which children can work. The United Nation's 1989 Convention on the Rights of the Child, however, was the first

legally binding international instrument to expand the full range of human rights to children. It says that children everywhere have the right to survive; the right to develop their potential to the fullest; the right to protection from harmful influences, including abuse and exploitation; and the right to participate fully in family, cultural, and social life. It also sets standards in health care; education; and legal, civil, and social services. Most of the nations of the world have ratified it. And they have, by doing so, committed themselves to develop and undertake all of their policies and actions in light of the best interests of the child—or, simply put, to assume global responsibility for our children.

This discussion guide is intended to help you to explore emerging concerns about global responsibility for children—and different policy possibilities for addressing them. As you consider the concerns and possibilities that are described in it, you might want to explore some of the following questions about global responsibility for children:

- What, exactly, is a child? Should we regard everyone under a certain age as a vulnerable child—or everyone over that age as a responsible adult?
- What are the different dimensions of childhood, and the different dimensions of taking responsibility for children?
- What are children vulnerable to—and what can, and should, adults do to protect them from harm?
- What constitutes abusive actions toward children—and what moral values, cultural beliefs, and societal goals might be related to them?
- How can a political convention, or a state, protect children when the world around them has been torn by war, natural disasters, or the breakup of their families?

- How can a political convention, or a state, protect the human rights of children when they conflict with the beliefs, values, and traditions of their families, societies, and cultures?
- How can we know what is in the best interest of a child?
- What concerns might parents, family members, and societies have about states assuming responsibility for their children—or about holding them responsible for their children's actions?
- What other perspectives, questions, and concerns should we take into account when thinking about global responsibility for children?
- What are some of the different ways in which public policy might address these various concerns?

A group of citizens from twelve different countries struggled with these questions—and many more—through a series of intensive exploratory discussions. They developed the seven contrasting policy possibilities that are described in this discussion guide as a result. These possibilities represent different ways of thinking about global responsibility for children. They arise from different concerns and embody different beliefs, values, goals, and interests. They are intended to help stimulate your own discussions about it. They are not intended to advocate for or persuade you to adopt any particular approach. We present them in the hope that by thinking about them and discussing them with your friends, neighbors, or fellow citizens, you will come to a better understanding of what you think about global responsibility for children and about what the world, as a global society, might do about it.

A. Protect Our Children

This possibility would try to protect children from things that may cause them harm.



Do you believe that children are innocent, vulnerable, and in need of protection from the world—and that protecting them is one of our primary tasks in taking responsibility for them?

Protecting Children From Harm

This possibility maintains that the primary responsibility of parents and communities is to protect their children and keep them safe. It also maintains that violence by, toward, and among children is on the rise and that children are not only increasingly becoming victims and perpetrators of violent actions, but are doing so earlier and earlier in their lives. It would thus launch awareness campaigns to educate society about the prevalence of violence among and against children. It would create protocols to help non-professionals detect violence toward children, especially in their homes, and teach them how to execute these protocols. It would also strengthen social support networks to work with children who are victims and

perpetrators of violence. It would encourage greater global communication and cooperation between international police organizations that are charged with investigating violence toward children, and greater communication and cooperation among international humanitarian agencies and governments to evacuate children from war zones. And it would impose and enforce strict laws regarding the liability and criminal consequences for child abusers—including prison terms.

A Dangerous World

The fact that violence by, toward, and among children is on the rise may be due to several factors. It may, for example, be due to the fact

that violence in our society is generally out of control. It may be due to the violence that many children see firsthand at home, or to the real and fictional violence they see on television and other media. It may be due to the impoverished conditions in which many of them live, or to the fact that many of them today grow up in countries at war. Or it may be due to the accelerating pace of their physical and psychological development. Children are clearly vulnerable to many things. But regardless of the cause, this possibility holds that children are generally innocent and cannot make their own decisions or be held responsible for them, and that taking responsibility for them means protecting them from violence in all of its forms—including poverty; ignorance; illness; and physical, sexual, and psychological abuse. It also holds that taking responsibility for children in a global context requires a special effort to protect them from such organized international violence as war; child slavery; drug trafficking; child trafficking; and cognitive abuse due to commercialization, disinformation, and the manipulation of their minds by mass media.

And a Dangerous Virtual World

The world has always been a dangerous place for children. But the recent creation of the “virtual world” of cyberspace has made it more dangerous still. Today, children are exposed to much more graphic violence than ever via television shows, movies, news websites, video games, and other forms of “entertainment.” And they are also exposed to sexual predators who seek them out online. This possibility would thus also take steps to reduce their exposure to and interaction with such violent media, and to monitor their presence and communications on the Internet.

Other Perspectives

But even if you agree that we should protect our children from violence, harm, exploitation, and the horrors of the real world, you may also feel that protection can go only so far. You may feel powerless to protect your children from violence. You may feel that we cannot watch over our children 24/7, or that we can no more prevent people from being violent toward our children than we can prevent our children from being violent toward each other. And you may think that the sooner we recognize that we cannot protect them from all possible harm, the more prepared we may be to teach them how to protect themselves. If you think this way, then you may also think that—as important as it may be to keep our children safe from harm—we should focus our attention upon educating them instead.

Questions for Exploration

- If this policy possibility were in place, what effects do you think it could have?
- How might it help children in a global context?
- What broader impacts might it have on our society?
- What trade-offs might it require?
- What unintended consequences might it have?
- In what other ways might this policy possibility be implemented?
- Can you think of ways that the policy could be improved to help it reach its goals?

B. Educate Our Children

This possibility would aim at providing children with a good education that will enable them to grow into mature and responsible adults. It would also aim at continually improving the education we provide them in an effort to keep pace with our changing world.



Do you believe that one of our primary responsibilities toward children is to provide them with a good education, and that one of the primary goals of a good education at all levels is to prepare people to take responsibility for themselves?

The Value of Education

This possibility maintains that educating children develops their knowledge and skills, increases their competitiveness, gives them better opportunities and choices in life, offers many of them a way out of poverty, and generally makes the world a better place for them to live. It thus aims at providing children around the world with good educations, and at continually improving the educations we provide them to keep pace with our changing world. It would thus take steps on a global level to encourage governments to provide free education for all children and to ensure that they all have equal access to it. It would increase collaborations between schools and external

organizations, such as businesses, charities, churches, hospitals, and governments. And it would require that teachers at all levels be properly trained and credentialed professionals with university degrees both in pedagogy and in a special scientific or humanistic field.

Learning Responsibility

This possibility would also focus on teaching the relationship between rights and responsibilities in an effort to prepare children to take responsibility for their lives. Today, many people are focused on their rights and oblivious to their responsibilities. Some do not seem to think that they have any responsibilities at all. Others are unprepared to take responsibility for

their lives, let alone the lives of their children. And still others try to shift their responsibilities onto others. The upshot is that we now live in a world of shared irresponsibility. This possibility maintains that one of the primary goals of education at all levels is to prepare people to take responsibility for themselves. It would thus focus on increasing social awareness about responsibility and about the relationship between rights and responsibilities. It would design a learning-by-doing process for developing the child's sense of responsibility. And it would try to balance the rights and responsibilities of children both in their own minds and in the minds of their elders, with the hope of preparing them to become autonomous and responsible adults.

Taking Responsibility

Taking responsibility for educating our children may pose a lot of problems. Today, educators around the world disagree about what they should teach and how they should teach it. Parents, governments, and taxpayers also disagree about who should pay for education and how much they should pay for it. And some societies do not value education at all, and may even punish their children for trying to learn. Here, focusing on responsibility in educating our children may help prepare adults to take responsibility for educating their children. This possibility would thus create discussion forums about the nature and value of education to help educators decide what constitutes a good education and to encourage parents, governments, and taxpayers to accept the responsibility for financing it. It would also try to eradicate the culture of competition within our schools, including the emphasis placed on teaching evaluations, student performance, accountability, and "passing the test."

Other Perspectives

But even if you agree that children are naturally curious and want to learn, you may feel that we should not let governments educate them. You may think that teaching and learning are two different things, that schools focus too much on the one and not enough on the other, and that teachers too often impede learning by intimidating their students, killing their curiosity, and boring them to death. You may think that the only thing government knows how to do with education is to throw money at it, and that we simply cannot give a child an education in the same way we can give him a dollar bill. Or you may think that public education has failed, that it is now primarily a jobs program for teachers, and that children today learn more by browsing the Internet than by going to school. But if you think any or all of these things, then you may prefer to preserve parents' rights to seek other ways of educating their children than sending them to school.

Questions for Exploration

- If this policy possibility were in place, what effects do you think it could have?
- How might it help children in a global context?
- What broader impacts might it have on our society?
- What trade-offs might it require?
- What unintended consequences might it have?
- In what other ways might this policy possibility be implemented?
- Can you think of ways that the policy could be improved to help it reach its goals?

C. Let Children Be Children

This possibility would let children be children and resist the growing tendency to treat them as adults.



Do you believe that we are increasingly treating our children as little adults and pressuring them in a variety of subtle and not so subtle ways to grow up too quickly instead of allowing them the precious time that they need to just be kids?

Childhood as a Time to Grow and Learn

This possibility flows from the belief that childhood is a precious time in which children slowly acquire that rich complex of duties, rights, privileges, and liberties that constitute moral agency. It also flows from a concern that parents, societies, and especially the media are robbing children of their childhood by pressuring them to think and act like adults before they are ready to do so, and by prosecuting them as adults for their crimes. It would thus foster a debate among children about civic responsibility to help them learn the values of respect and consideration for others. It would also foster joint public and private sector action to prevent children from committing violent crimes, and to reintegrate children who have committed

violent crimes into society. It would use all available tools to determine whether a child was or was not aware of the criminality of his or her action before deciding which legal treatment to apply. And it would outlaw capital punishment for children in all circumstances.

What Makes Someone a Child?

There can be little doubt that age is not always the best, let alone the only, indicator of whether and to what extent we should treat a particular person as a child. Life experiences are also important. And there can be little doubt that more and more children are being exposed to adult life experiences at earlier and earlier ages. Today, children under 10 are soldiers at war in some countries. Others work in factories, fields,

and brothels. Still others sell drugs on the streets. The lucky ones in wealthy Western countries are competing day and night in schools from a very early age in order to secure their futures. And they are increasingly exposed to sexual activity, drug use, and violence in real life and the media. These experiences rob children of their childhood and lead them to act like adults long before they are mentally and emotionally prepared to do so. And many people believe that children are becoming increasingly dangerous to both themselves and society as a result. This possibility would try to counteract these experiences by promoting education in ethics; by teaching respect and tolerance; by supporting discussion groups, sport activities, and more organized after-school activities for children; and by focusing the attention of governments, charities, and other institutions on the task of removing all homeless and unattended children from the streets and finding homes for them in families and committed charitable institutions.

Letting Children be Children

This possibility would thus try to give our children the time and experiences they need to grow and mature into responsible adults. It would also give them the opportunity to make mistakes and to learn from the mistakes that they make. It maintains that children generally have not had the time and life experiences that are, or ought to be, required to treat them as adults; that we should treat children as children whenever possible; and that it is inappropriate to prosecute them as adults—even if they have committed serious crimes such as murder. It would thus explore ways to determine the liability of children who commit serious crimes on a case-by-case basis according to their personal dimensions.

Other Perspectives

But even if you agree that we should treat children as children, you may think that it is becoming increasingly difficult to do so when so many of them are acting like adults. You may think that it is not so much that adults are pressuring children to grow up too quickly as that children are abandoning their childhoods earlier and earlier because they want the freedoms of adulthood. You may think that what we call “childhood” is a conceptual construct of wealthy Western countries that does not exist in nature. Or you may think that a child is as a child does, and that people who commit serious crimes ought to be prosecuted as adults regardless of how old they are. But if you think any or all of these things, then you might also think that we can treat children as children so long as they act like children, and that we should indeed prosecute them as adults once they begin to act like adults.

Questions for Exploration

- If this policy possibility were in place, what effects do you think it could have?
- How might it help children in a global context?
- What broader impacts might it have on our society?
- What trade-offs might it require?
- What unintended consequences might it have?
- In what other ways might this policy possibility be implemented?
- Can you think of ways that the policy could be improved to help it reach its goals?

D. Let Parents Be Parents

This possibility would hold parents responsible for their children. It would also uphold their right to pass on their beliefs, values, goals, and interests to their children without outside interference.



Do you believe that parents have the right to take care of their own children and to pass on their beliefs and values to them—and that communities and states are increasingly trespassing on this right?

Parents' Rights

This possibility flows from the beliefs that parents have not only the right but the responsibility to teach their children in the way they see fit without unwanted “help” from their communities and governments, and that communities and governments are increasingly encroaching upon those rights and responsibilities by teaching children ideas that run contrary to the values and beliefs of their parents. It would thus uphold the right of parents to teach their children. It would change the laws giving the state the authority to provide and organize public education, and enable parents to educate their children as they see fit without having to ask permission of the state. It would also develop parental community groups to support parents

who want to exercise their rights in the classroom to pass on their beliefs and values to their children. And it would create a system of schools that are independent of the state and managed by parents who do not want to subject their children to public education.

Upholding Parents' Beliefs and Values

There can be little doubt that public education has meant a vast improvement in the lives of many children, and that it has played a crucial role in teaching them facts, scientific theories, moral values, and social norms. But this possibility holds that the ultimate responsibility for teaching children these things belongs to their parents and families; that governments and

communities should not interfere with or act contrary to the beliefs and values of a child's parents; and that parents may reserve the right not to subject their children to public education, or any education, that violates their own values and beliefs. It recognizes that parents may teach their children beliefs, values, goals, and interests that are both highly prejudicial and even dangerously false. But it nonetheless maintains that parents have the right to pass on their own beliefs, values, goals, and interests to their children with minimal outside interference, and that communities and states should intervene only in extreme cases—and even then only in limited ways. And it would punish teachers, school administrators, and school staff members who show intolerance toward students with “different” familial, cultural, and religious beliefs and practices.

Parents' Responsibilities

This possibility would also hold parents responsible for their children—not only for their welfare, but also for the harm that their children might cause to other people, and for the harm that children suffer due to their parents' negligence. It would help parents meet these responsibilities by creating radio and television channels devoted to supporting parenting skills and home schooling, by encouraging parents to participate in activities organized by the schools, and by creating parent round tables with teachers and mental health professionals. But it generally maintains that parents can and should be more self-sufficient when it comes to raising their children, that communities and governments should intervene only if the parents themselves believe that they have reached their limits in solving the problems that confront them, and that they should refuse further

public assistance as soon as they can so as not to harm their human dignity by creating unnecessary dependencies.

Other Perspectives

But even if you agree that parents should have the right to pass on their beliefs, values, goals, and interests to their children, you may worry that exercising that right may result in their children holding beliefs that are ill-founded, highly prejudiced, and even dangerously false. You may also worry that their children will simply not learn what they need to know in order to be successful in life, and that this, in the end, will only create the very dependencies we want to avoid. Or you may simply feel that it is difficult, if not impossible, for parents to be self-sufficient these days. But if you feel this way, then you may think that communities and states also have a right and responsibility to build a shared public understanding of what is true and false, and what we, as their members and citizens, should and should not value.

Questions for Exploration

- If this policy possibility were in place, what effects do you think it could have?
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- What broader impacts might it have on our society?
- What trade-offs might it require?
- What unintended consequences might it have?
- In what other ways might this policy possibility be implemented?
- Can you think of ways that the policy could be improved to help it reach its goals?

E. Hold Governments Responsible

This possibility would hold governments responsible for addressing children's needs and for enforcing national and international conventions, rules, and regulations pertaining to children.



Do you believe that it is the responsibility of governments around the world to implement and enforce our laws pertaining to children and children's rights—and that we should hold them accountable if they fail to do so?

A Role for Government

This possibility maintains that governments are, or ought to be, responsible for implementing and enforcing national and international laws designed to protect children and their rights, and that they should focus their efforts upon doing so whenever those rights are violated. But it also maintains that there are no concerted efforts on the part of governments to effectively implement and enforce such laws at the national and international level. It would thus build a political consensus that the protection of children should always be a special government priority, and not only during times of economic and political crisis. It would encourage each country to create a 'National Agency of the

Child'—with sufficient resources and the highest power and status—to coordinate and monitor efforts to protect the rights of children. It would ensure that children and the protection of children are priorities in state constitutions, enhance communication between government and civil society actors about the need to enforce laws pertaining to children, and force governments to formulate global developmental goals for children. It would encourage citizens to report violations of children's rights. And it would use information technologies to develop a monitoring and reporting system to identify what governments are and are not doing to protect children.

What Governments Can Do

Governments are the custodians of our laws, rules, regulations, and international conventions. We have given them the responsibility and coercive power to implement and enforce them. Governments also have the responsibility to invest in the future. And the future of every country is its children. Today there is a lot of talk about children's rights. There are also a lot of laws and rules about them. And many governments have endorsed them. But they are seldom implemented or enforced in ways that can be effectively monitored, and we cannot really evaluate whether and to what extent they are successful. This possibility would force governments to live up to their responsibility to monitor and enforce the national and international laws, rules, regulations, and conventions pertaining to children—and it would encourage the international community to intervene in cases in which children's rights are violated and local governments do nothing about it.

What the International Community Can Do

Holding governments responsible for implementing and enforcing national and international laws, regulations, rules, and conventions pertaining to children could, according to this possibility, go a long way toward protecting children's rights, protecting children from violence, and meeting their basic needs. But it is also necessary to hold governments accountable for their failure to implement and enforce such laws. This possibility would thus urge the international community to take swift and consistent action to protect children whenever local governments fail to do so.

Other Perspectives

But even if you agree that the international community should hold governments responsible

for implementing and enforcing international compliance with the laws, rules, regulations, and conventions pertaining to children, you may feel that the attempt to do so will be very expensive, that governments will probably be reluctant to comply, and that it will ultimately not work. You may feel that everyone, and not just government, is responsible for the protection of children and the enforcement of children's rights. Or you may think that the more people voluntarily comply with our laws, the less we will need government coercion to enforce them. But if you believe any or all of these things, then you may also think that we should try to build moral character among individuals to maximize individual responsibility to comply with our laws, rules, regulations, and conventions so we can minimize the roles that governments and the international community play in enforcing them.

Questions for Exploration

- If this policy possibility were in place, what effects do you think it could have?
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- What unintended consequences might it have?
- In what other ways might this policy possibility be implemented?
- Can you think of ways that the policy could be improved to help it reach its goals?

F. Act in the Best Interests of the Child

This possibility would hold parents, families, communities, and governments jointly responsible for acting in the best interests of children, especially during times of economic, political, and social crisis.



Do you believe that we should always act in the best interests of the child, but that it is often difficult to know what that really means?

Build a Shared Understanding

This possibility maintains that parents, families, communities, and governments should always act in the best interests of their children. But it also recognizes that it may be very difficult to determine what those interests are, and that it may be especially difficult to get parents, families, communities, and governments to all agree about it. There are, in fact, so many competing interests and conflicting policies pertaining to children that individuals and institutions may not always know what their responsibilities toward children actually are, let alone how to always act in the best interests of the child. This possibility would thus try to build a shared understanding about the nature and needs of children—both within each country and

across different countries and cultures—and about what each individual's and institution's responsibilities are. It would encourage each state to institute a 'Law of the Child', consistent with the International Convention of the Rights of the Child, and to budget sufficient funds for children's issues. And it would ensure the accountability of every responsible actor—both human and institutional—for the actions and non-actions they take in the best interest of the child.

Education and Healthcare

This possibility recognizes that different people may have different beliefs about what it means to act in the best interest of the child, and that we may not be able to agree upon one unified platform for taking global

responsibility for children. It also recognizes that what is in the best interest of the child may appear very different when seen from an economic perspective than from a moral, cultural, or social perspective. And it recognizes that children are seldom our top priority during times of political and economic crises, which are always good excuses for cutting back their financial support. It is nonetheless committed to acting in the best interests of the child. It maintains that parents, families, communities, and governments should accept joint responsibility for acting in the best interests of children, especially during economic and political crises. It would thus introduce nationwide proactive integrated social services to support families, including nationwide healthcare programs that are designed specifically for children. It would identify children who are at social and educational risk at an early age and introduce early learning and development programs to help them. And it would encourage parents to foster and strengthen their relationships with their children.

Treating Children Equally

Acting in the best interests of the child means treating all children equally when the needs of one group of children conflict with the needs of another. This possibility would thus try to provide equally for the safety, security, and basic needs of all our children by clarifying the different responsibilities of individuals and institutions that have responsibility for children. It would also educate them about what their responsibilities really are and foster their cooperation in coordinating and harmonizing their responsibilities in a way that serves the best interests of all children equally.

Other Perspectives

But even if you believe that we should always act in the best interests of the child, you may think that it is too ambitious to think that parents, families, communities, and the state will assume joint responsibility for doing it—let alone in an equal or harmonious way. You may think that there is a big difference between acting in the best interests of your own children and acting in the best interests of other people's children—especially when they live half a globe away. You may think that parents and families are closer to their children, know more about them, and are thus in a better position to know what is and is not in their best interests than any community or government could be. You may think that meeting all of the needs of all of our children is simply impossible. Or you may simply think that “the child” is too abstract an entity to think about when we need to care for flesh and blood children who have real needs. But if you think any or all of these things, then you may also think that we should all try to take care of our own children instead.

Questions for Exploration

- If this policy possibility were in place, what effects do you think it could have?
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- What unintended consequences might it have?
- In what other ways might this policy possibility be implemented?
- Can you think of ways that the policy could be improved to help it reach its goals?

G. Cultivate Global Citizenship

This possibility would try to instill in our children a sense of global citizenship, based upon a respect for all human beings, in an effort to prepare them to assume an active role in civil society and to interact justly, peacefully, and responsibly with people from communities around the world.



Do you believe that globalization has made the world too small for people to not be conscious of other cultures and the problems that people in other nations face, and that the more people know about different countries and cultures, the more likely they are to act peacefully toward them?

Global Exposure to Different Cultures

This possibility maintains that one of the main responsibilities for parents and caretakers is to prepare their children to become citizens of the world, that one of the keys to doing this is to teach them to respect all human beings, and that one of the keys to teaching them to respect all human beings is to expose them to all of the different countries and cultures in the world, to the problems that they have faced in the past, and to the problems that they currently face. It would thus make global education a central component of K-12 education. It would encourage children to learn as many languages as possible—and make English a mandatory subject in K-12 education in non-English-speaking

countries. It would use information technology to establish more spaces for global educational interactions and more opportunities for international participation in them. And it would develop a global system of cultural-centered educational exchange programs that is open to students from all countries and focused upon-exposing them to different cultures.

Cultivating Global Citizenship

Global citizenship requires us to be conscious not only of our own rights, roles, opportunities, and responsibilities in the world, but also of how they connect with the rights, roles, opportunities, and responsibilities of other people

around the world. We simply cannot do this without knowing about other countries and cultures. This possibility would thus aim at developing our children's knowledge about different countries and cultures—along with their understanding that they are not citizens merely of this or that country, but global citizens of the world. In addition to making global education a central part of K-12 education, it would organize periodic international children's conferences and campaigns specifically about the International Rights of the Child. And it would encourage foreign communities to organize periodic cultural fairs in which they can show off their food, crafts, customs, and fine arts while explaining how people from their countries understand their rights, roles, opportunities, and responsibilities in the world.

The Ultimate Goal

This possibility does not seek to cultivate global citizenship for its own sake. Its ultimate goal is to create a peaceful world in which people from all nations and cultures can interact with respect, sensitivity, and justice toward each other. The reality today is that many people are completely oblivious to the problems faced by people in other countries—where many children grow up seeking revenge for parents and loved ones they have lost to violence and war. We thus need to endow our children with a global consciousness, as opposed to a merely national or local consciousness, if we want to create a peaceful world. And the key to cultivating a global consciousness in our children is to cultivate a common sense of humanity in them and a belief that they are citizens of the world and not merely citizens of this or that nation or local community. This possibility would thus engage the youth of the world in the evolving notion of global civic responsibility, based upon democratic convictions about human rights, privileges, and liberties.

Other Perspectives

But even if you agree that we should cultivate a sense of global citizenship in our children, you may not agree that this possibility is the right way to go. You may worry that cultivating global citizenship is a form of indoctrination, and that it may promote beliefs and values that are highly prejudicial and even dangerous under the guise of equity, openness, and respect for other peoples and cultures. You may think that trying to prepare children to become global citizens who can act responsibly anywhere in the world is a bridge too far for educators who are themselves oblivious to other cultures and for children who are oblivious to their own cultures and often have trouble learning how to read, write, and multiply. And you may think that instead of trying to cultivate global citizenship, we should try to help children learn more about their own cultures.

Questions for Exploration

- If this policy possibility were in place, what effects do you think it could have?
- How might it help children in a global context?
- What broader impacts might it have on our society?
- What trade-offs might it require?
- What unintended consequences might it have?
- In what other ways might this policy possibility be implemented?
- Can you think of ways that the policy could be improved to help it reach its goals?

