



Know Your Rights: A Kid-Friendly Guide for Elementary Students-Rules of Engagement

This guide helps elementary school students in BIPOC communities understand their rights and stay safe when interacting with authorities. Written in simple, reassuring language, it provides practical advice for everyday situations while empowering children to know when and how to seek help from trusted adults.

Why Knowing Your Rights Matters

Understanding your rights is like having a special superpower! When you know what you can and cannot do, it helps you feel confident and safe when you're at school, playing in your neighborhood, or going places with friends and family.

As a young person in your community, it's especially important to understand these rights because sometimes adults might treat you differently based on how you look. This isn't fair, but knowing your rights helps protect you.

Your rights are promises that our country makes to *everyone* – no matter how old you are, what you look like, or where your family comes from. These rights keep you safe and make sure you're treated fairly.

Protection

Your rights protect you from being treated unfairly.

Confidence

Knowing your rights helps you feel brave when talking to authority figures.

Safety

Understanding your rights keeps you safer in difficult situations.

The most important thing to remember is that you are important, your feelings matter, and there are grown-ups who want to help keep you safe. This guide will help you understand what to do in different situations so you can make smart choices.

Staying Safe When You're Out and About

When you're going to school, playing at the park, or walking in your neighborhood, there are some simple things you can do to stay extra safe. These safety rules are like wearing a helmet when you ride a bike – they help protect you!

1 Always Carry Your School ID

Keep your school ID card in your backpack or pocket. This helps people know what school you go to if you need help.

2 Stay Connected to Grown-Ups

Make sure your phone is charged or you have a way for your parents, guardians, or teachers to reach you. Knowing how to contact a trusted adult is super important!

3 Use the Buddy System

Always go places with a friend, classmate, or family member. Having a buddy makes you safer and it's more fun too!

Remember that being prepared doesn't mean you need to be scared. Most days will be completely normal! These tips just help you be ready, like how you practice fire drills at school even though most days there's no fire.



Safety Tip: Make sure you and your grown-ups have a meeting spot picked out in case you get separated when you're out together. This could be by the front door of a store or near a specific playground equipment at the park.

Understanding Police Officers and Their Job

Police officers are community helpers whose job is to keep everyone safe. Most police officers are good people who want to help, but it's still important to understand how to interact with them.

Police officers wear uniforms so you can recognize them. They might drive cars with flashing lights, ride bicycles, or walk around your neighborhood or school. Their job includes:

- Helping people who are lost or in danger
- Making sure people follow safety rules
- Responding when someone calls for help
- Investigating when something wrong has happened

Sometimes, police officers might need to talk to kids or grown-ups to get information or make sure everyone is safe. If this happens to you, remember that staying calm is the most important thing you can do.



Remember: Police officers should treat everyone with respect, including kids. If you ever feel scared or uncomfortable around a police officer, it's important to tell a trusted grown-up about it afterward.

Understanding who police officers are and what they do helps you feel more prepared if you ever need to talk to one. In the next sections, we'll learn exactly what to do if a police officer approaches you and what rights you have in that situation.

If a Police Officer Talks to You

Sometimes a police officer might want to talk to you. This doesn't mean you're in trouble! They might just need information or want to make sure you're safe. Here's what you can do if a police officer starts talking to you:

1

Stay Calm

Take deep breaths and speak in a normal voice. It's okay to feel nervous, but try to stay as calm as you can.

2

Be Respectful

Say "yes, officer" or "no, officer" when answering questions. Being polite helps keep the situation peaceful.

3

Keep Your Hands Where They Can See Them

Don't reach into your pockets or backpack without telling the officer what you're doing first.

4

Answer Simple Questions

It's okay to tell them your name and age. You can answer basic questions, but you don't need to share everything.

If you're not sure what to do, it's perfectly okay to ask the officer, "[Do I need to call my parents?](#)" or "[Can I go now?](#)" These are respectful questions that help you understand what's happening.

Remember that even adults get nervous when talking to police officers, so it's completely normal if you feel that way too. The most important thing is to stay safe and get help from a trusted grown-up as soon as you can.

Understanding Searches: What's Allowed and What's Not

Sometimes, a police officer might want to check you or your belongings to make sure you don't have anything dangerous. This is called a "search." It's important to know what police officers can and cannot do during a search.

What police officers CAN do:

- Pat the outside of your clothes to check for dangerous items
- Ask you to empty your pockets
- Look inside your backpack if they have good reason to think there's something dangerous inside

What police officers NEED special permission for:

- Going through your pockets without your permission
- Searching inside your backpack without a good reason
- Looking through your phone or other personal items

If a police officer asks to search your backpack or pockets, you can politely say: "I don't want to be searched. Can you call my parents?" They might still search you, but it's important that you expressed how you feel about it.

After any interaction with police, especially if they searched you or your things, tell a trusted grown-up exactly what happened. Your grown-ups can help make sure your rights were respected and can give you support if you feel upset or confused.



"Police officers need something called a 'warrant' or a very good reason to search inside your belongings."

❌ **Important:** Never run away or fight back if a police officer wants to search you. This can make the situation more dangerous. Stay calm, remember what happens, and tell a trusted grown-up afterward.

The Difference Between Police and National Guard

Sometimes you might see people in different kinds of uniforms in your community. It's important to understand the difference between police officers and National Guard soldiers.

Police Officers	National Guard
Wear blue, black, or brown uniforms	Wear camouflage (green, tan, and brown) uniforms
Work in your community every day	Only come during special situations or emergencies
Can enforce laws and make arrests	Usually cannot arrest people on their own
Carry regular police equipment	May carry military equipment

The National Guard is a type of military helper that sometimes comes to communities during big emergencies like hurricanes, floods, or when there are large protests. They're there to help keep order and provide extra support, but they have different rules than police officers.

The most important thing to remember is that National Guard soldiers **cannot arrest people** in most situations – only police officers can do that. However, you should still be respectful and careful around them, just like you would be with police officers.

If you see National Guard soldiers in your neighborhood, it doesn't necessarily mean there's danger. They might be helping with an emergency or a special event. Always stay with your grown-ups when there are lots of officials around, and follow their guidance about where it's safe to go.

Your Right to Record



Did you know that in most places in the United States, it's completely okay to take pictures or videos of things that happen in public places? This includes taking videos or pictures of police officers doing their jobs, as long as you're in a public place like a sidewalk or park.

Recording can be an important way to show exactly what happened in a situation. It's like having a perfect memory of events that you can share with grown-ups later.

If you decide to record:

- Make sure you're in a safe spot, away from any danger
- Hold your phone steady and try to capture what's happening
- Don't get too close or interfere with what the police are doing
- Stay quiet so your phone can pick up what people are saying



Safety First! Never put yourself in danger just to record something. Your safety is *a/ways* more important than getting a video.

If a police officer tells you to stop recording, you can politely say, "[I'm respectfully recording from a safe distance.](#)" However, if they insist, it's usually best to stop recording rather than argue. You can always tell a trusted grown-up what happened afterward.

Remember to show any recordings you make to a trusted grown-up right away. They can help you understand what you recorded and decide if the video needs to be shared with others who can help, like a lawyer or community leader.

What to Say If You're Stopped by Police

If a police officer stops you and starts asking questions, it can feel scary or confusing. Here are some helpful phrases you can use that are respectful but also help protect your rights:



"Am I free to go?"

This is a polite way to ask if you can leave. If the officer says yes, you can calmly walk away.



"Can I call my parents/guardian?"

Police should let you contact your grown-ups, especially before answering many questions.



"I want to talk to a lawyer."

Even kids have the right to talk to a lawyer before answering difficult questions.

It's okay to tell the police officer your name and address. But if they ask more complicated questions about something that might have happened, you can always say, "I don't want to answer any more questions until my grown-up is here."

Remember to speak clearly and calmly. It's normal to feel nervous, but taking deep breaths can help you stay calm. Keep your hands where the officer can see them, and don't make sudden movements that might startle them.

After any interaction with police, try to remember exactly what happened and what was said. Tell your parents, guardians, or another trusted adult about it as soon as possible. They can help you understand what happened and provide support if you feel upset or confused.



Practice Makes Perfect: Try practicing these phrases with your grown-ups at home. Role-playing different situations can help you feel more prepared if you ever need to use these words in real life.

When and How to Get Help

Knowing when and how to get help is one of the most important skills you can have. If something happens with a police officer or any authority figure that makes you feel scared, confused, or treated unfairly, there are people who can help you.



Tell a Trusted Grown-Up

Always tell your parents, guardians, or another trusted adult about any interaction you have with police officers, even if nothing bad happened. They need to know so they can help keep you safe.



School Support

Teachers, school counselors, and principals are there to support you. If something happens near school or you're worried about something, these adults can help guide you.



Community Resources

Community centers, churches, and neighborhood organizations often have people who can provide advice and support for families in your community.

If you need more help, the Free DC Project website (freedcproject.org/rights) has information specifically for kids and families in BIPOC communities. This resource can help you and your grown-ups understand your rights better.

Remember, you are not alone. Your community is full of people who care about you and want to help keep you safe. Talking about difficult experiences helps you process them and can help make things better for other kids too.

The most important thing to remember is that knowing your rights isn't about being afraid or distrusting authority figures. It's about being prepared, confident, and safe as you grow up in your community.