



# KNOW YOUR RIGHTS:

## Students – Parents Guide

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**ADC**  
TRULY ARAB, FULLY AMERICAN.

## Introduction

As a parent, you want your child's school to be a safe, fair, and supportive place for learning and growth. Schools should respect every student. It's important to know that your child has rights that protect them while they are at public school. This guide explains some of those key rights.

## Your Child's Rights

### 1. Your Child's Right to Be Free from Discrimination and Harassment

- **What it means:** Your child has the right to be treated fairly and not be discriminated against or harassed because of their race, ethnicity (like being Arab American), national origin (where your family comes from), color, religion (whether they are Muslim, Christian, or have no religion), sex, or disability. Federal laws like Title VI of the Civil Rights Act protect this right.
- **What it looks like:** This means no one at school (students, teachers, or staff) should bully your child, use slurs against them, make offensive jokes, exclude them unfairly, or create a hostile environment based on who they are. This includes protection from bias based on stereotypes or events happening in the world.
- **Your Role:** Encourage your child to treat others with respect and not participate in harassment. If your child experiences or witnesses harassment or discrimination, encourage them to report it, and you should report it to the school as well. It is helpful to maintain a written record of your communication, including making reports electronically and note dates, times, locations, what was said or done, who was involved, and any witnesses. Keep copies of relevant emails.

### 2. Your Child's Right to Freedom of Speech and Expression

- **What it means:** The First Amendment protects your child's right to express their opinions and ideas at school. They can do this through words, writing, wearing buttons or armbands, handing out flyers, etc.
- **Class Discussions:** Your child generally has the right to respectfully share their views in class when relevant, including perspectives related to their background or experiences. However, the teacher can set rules to keep the discussion orderly,

on-topic, and focused on learning.

- **What are the limits?** Your child's speech is protected *unless* it:
  - Substantially disrupts school activities (like yelling in class, blocking halls).
  - Invades the rights of others (like harassment, bullying, threats based on someone's identity). Expressing an opinion is okay; attacking someone personally is not.
  - Is lewd, vulgar, or plainly offensive.
  - Promotes illegal drug use.
  - Violates other school rules (like dress codes that are applied fairly).
  - School Newspapers/Plays: Schools have more control over "school-sponsored" speech and can censor it for valid educational reasons.

### 3. Your Child's Right to Religious Freedom

- **What it means:** Your child has the right to practice their religion at school, as long as it doesn't disrupt school activities or violate others' rights. The school cannot promote one religion over others or force students to participate in religious activities.
- **What it looks like:** This can include your child wearing religious clothing (like a hijab or cross), praying individually or in a group during non-instructional time (like lunch or recess) if it doesn't disturb others, or being excused for religious holidays. Schools should also try to make reasonable accommodations for religious needs, like dietary requirements (halal/kosher) if meals are provided, if it doesn't create an undue hardship for the school.
- **Limits:** Your child's religious practice can't disrupt classes or school events. The school doesn't have to agree to every request if it's truly burdensome or interferes with education.

### 4. Your Child's Right to Privacy

- **School Records (FERPA):** Your child's school records (grades, discipline reports, etc.) are generally confidential. You (or your child, if 18 or older) have the right to review these records. The school usually needs your written consent to share this info with others outside the school system.

- **Searches:** Your child has some privacy rights regarding their belongings, but it's limited in school. School officials only need "reasonable suspicion" (not the higher standard of "probable cause" used by police outside school) to believe your child has broken a law or school rule to search them or their backpack. School lockers are often considered school property and may be searched more easily. Strip searches are highly restricted and should generally not happen without strong justification and following strict protocols.
- **Questioning:** If your child is questioned by school staff or police at school, they generally have the right to remain silent, especially if it's about potential criminal behavior. Advise your child that they can ask for you to be called.

## 5. Your Child's Rights When Facing Discipline

- **What it means (Due Process):** If your child faces serious discipline like suspension or expulsion, they have rights. The school generally must tell your child what they are accused of and give them a chance to share their side of the story before suspending them.
- **What it looks like:** This might be a meeting with the principal where your child can explain what happened. For longer suspensions or expulsions, the procedures are usually more formal. Your child should be informed of the school rules they supposedly broke.
- **Your Role:** Advise your child to know and follow the school's code of conduct. Be involved in any disciplinary processes concerning your child.

## 6. What To Do If You Believe Your Child's Rights Were Violated

If you feel any of your child's rights have been violated, or if they have faced discrimination or unfair treatment:

- **Document Everything:** Help your child document or document yourself what happened: write down dates, times, locations, who was involved, what was said or done, and any witnesses. Keep copies of relevant documents, emails, or screenshots.
- **Communicate:** Encourage your child to talk to a trusted adult at school (like a counselor or teacher). You should also communicate directly with the teacher,

principal, or other appropriate school staff about your concerns.

- **Review the Student Handbook:** Review your school or district's student handbook (usually available online). It outlines student rights, rules (dress code, discipline code), and procedures for filing complaints or reporting bullying/harassment. Remember, specific policies might differ slightly between districts (like in DC, Maryland, or Virginia).
- **Report It Formally:** Use the school or district's official process to file a formal report or grievance regarding harassment, discrimination, or bullying. Put your concerns in writing.
- **Contact Us:** You can contact ADC for information and resources, especially if the issue relates to your child's rights as an Arab American student.
- **Consider Outside Help:** For discrimination issues, you can file a complaint with the U.S. Department of Education's Office for Civil Rights (OCR). For legal advice on specific situations, you may need to consult an attorney.

**Stay informed, advocate for your child, teach them to respect the rights of others, and don't hesitate to seek help when needed!**

**Protect yourself, your students, and your community. Share this to spread awareness!**  
**Contact us at our 27/7 hotline at 844.ADC.9955 (844.232.9955).**



**Disclaimer:** *This guide provides general information about student rights in public schools and is not legal advice. Specific situations can be complex, and laws or policies may change. For legal advice, consult with an attorney.*