

Ages At Which Children Are Legally Entitled To Carry Out Certain Acts

United Kingdom		
Acts	Age	Observations
1. Majority a. civil majority b. penal majority c. penal minority	18 18-21 10-14-15	In Scotland, minors (girls 12-18 years and boys 14-18 years) may carry out many legal acts if they have no parents or guardian or if they have been emancipated. There are various measures and sanctions for young people in this age range.
2. Emancipation	12 girls 14 boys	In Scotland, a minor is considered to be emancipated if s/he leaves home with parental consent over this age.
3. Marriage a. without consent of appropriate authority b. with parental consent c. with consent of the appropriate authority	16 16 16	In Scotland England and Wales: men and women. With the consent of the appropriate authority 16 years old. The local authority who is in possession of a care order shares parental responsibility with the child's parents. The local authority has the power to determine the extent to which a parent or guardian of the child may meet his parental responsibility for him but not exercise the power unless that are satisfied that it is necessary to do so in order to safeguard or promote the child's welfare. It seems therefore that there might be occasions when the local authority decided that it was in the child's interest to marry without parental consent and in these circumstances they would be given consent in their place.
4. Work a. full time b. part-time c. apprenticeship	16 13	May also dispose of own earnings. Subject to strict conditions.
5. Residence	16	
6. Contracts a. without parental consent b. with parental consent	18 (in Scotland - minors: girls 12-18, boys 14-18)	If s/he has a sufficient degree of understanding. England and Wales: for his/her own needs. The law of minors in England and Wales provides that generally speaking a minor may not enter into a binding contract regardless of parental consent. There are occasional contracts which are found to be binding for younger people where they are entered into for necessities but the case law is complicated. The simple rule is that young people under 18 cannot enter binding contracts.
7. Will	12-14 18	In Scotland a minor child (girls 12-18, boys 14-18) may make a will concerning movables.
8. Purchase of certain products a. alcohol b. tobacco	18 16	
9. Religion (refuse or change)	18	It is virtually impossible to prevent a child refusing religion or changing its religion once it is of an age to make its views felt. Legally, a parent could change a child's religion under 18 or force a child to go to church. A local authority with a child in care cannot cause the child to be brought up in any religious persuasion other than that in which she would have been brought up if the care order had not been made.
10. Adoption (refuse to agree to)	18	Under the present adoption legislation a child is always

Ages At Which Children Are Legally Entitled To Carry Out Certain Acts

adoption)		consulted but his consent is not officially required. A child cannot be adopted once he has reached the age of 18.
11. Name (refuse to change name)	18	A parent is legally entitled to force a child to change his name until he reaches 18. Again in practice this would be extremely difficult. A local authority with a child in care is not entitled to change the child's name and no other person is entitled to change the child's surname whilst the child is in care.
12. Nationality	18	
13. Medical matters (refuse to allow doctor to inform parents)		A child of 16 and over can consent to treatment. However, if he refuses treatment his refusal may be overridden either by his parents or the court. There are guidelines as to how doctors should behave when treating young people. The impact of this is that generally speaking a doctor should not inform a young person's parents of any treatment that the child is seeking but he may refuse to give the treatment unless the child agrees to the parents being informed.
14. Recognition of a child		We are not entirely sure what this means. If it means can a person recognize a child as his and take parental responsibility for him then the answer is that there is no age requirement for assuming parental responsibility. Under section 4 of the Children Act 1989 an unmarried father may acquire parental responsibility for a child either by agreement with the mother or an application to the court.
15. Personal matters (give his opinion)	Any age	Generally in England and Wales a young person is entitled to be consulted about a very wide range of matters. When a child is in care he is entitled to be consulted about all aspects of his life. This also applies where he is simply being looked after by a local authority and is not formally in care.
16. Legal proceedings a. take part in court decision b. request court appointment of legal representative other than parents c. inform court of self-concerning matters	Any age Any age -	There is no age requirement for this. The general rule is that a child may take part if he is of sufficient age and understanding. For a child to commence proceedings under the Children Act he will require the leave of the court who will only grant it if they consider the child to be of sufficient age and understanding. A child may appoint his own legal representatives where he can convince the solicitor concerned that he is of sufficient age and understanding. A child is always represented in proceedings by a guardian ad litem appointed by the court or the Official Solicitor rather than his parents in public as opposed to private proceedings. A child is eligible for legal aid under the Children Act. In any proceedings the child will always be consulted so far as possible.
17. Army a. enlist in armed forces b. active national service	16 18	
18. Savings accounts a. deposits b. withdrawal	? ?	
19. Passport	5	
20. Participation in the functioning of the school system	Any age	

Source: Council of Europe (1998). *Ages at which children are legally entitled to carry out a series of acts in Council of Europe member countries*. Strasbourg: Council of Europe.