

No one is above the law

Imagine you are in a team sport. You enjoy playing the game, but don't like playing in the weekend round of competition. You notice the umpire does not penalise opposition players for breaking the rules, which then results in a goal for their team. Or, the umpire does not send off players who engage in rough tactics and deliberately cause injury to another player.

And then imagine if you found out that a player in the opposing team was the child of the umpire.

All these examples would be considered **bias** behaviour towards the team that challenges theirs, and therefore highly unfair. How could your team possibly win a game?







This scenario can help us better understand the importance of needing fair principles of play that reflect the rule of law ideals we value in our communities. The rule of law idea has been around since ancient times. Its concept has evolved over time to become a guiding influence on how people are governed or ruled in their societies.

So, what is the rule of law exactly?



It's an idea, or an expectation, that forms the basis of an agreement for **ruling authorities** to **abide** by for the protection of its citizens. All people, including the government should be ruled by the law, be willing to live by its expectations, and obey it.

Everyone is expected to live and make decisions within the principles of the rule of law – regardless of their position in their society. This means that no person, government official or government is above the law. The following principles are fundamental in preserving the rule of law:

-  All people are ruled by the law.
-  Law enforcers, the government and judges must **adhere** to the law without bias or **prejudice**. The court system is the **arbitrary** body that is made up of law enforcers, and its responsibility is to resolve disputes in a fair and public manner. Law officers are expected to remain **impartial** when deciding how a case should be determined.
-  Everyone must **know** the law. Laws must be clear enough for each person to be able to determine if his or her own behaviour is in violation of a law. Laws and **statutes** must be clear and fair. If laws are **vague**, the citizens do not know or understand what their obligations are and can end up being punished for a crime they were unaware of.
-  All citizens must have access to justice. Everyone must have the opportunity to defend themselves and explain their point of view. Laws being unfair and unjust leads people to feel frustrated, frightened, and **oppressed**. Knowing and understanding the law can help people take responsibility for their actions.
-  No new law can be written that is either outside the law, **violates** a higher law or does not **conform** with fairness – without agreement from the people.
-  And finally, **punishment** for each law must be determined by a court and be **proportionate** to the offence.



WHY DO WE NEED TO TALK ABOUT
EQUALITY AND HUMAN RIGHTS
IN SCHOOL?



The rule of law is *fundamental* to maintaining the freedoms of individuals in a society, and for the protection of people's rights.

Complete the cross word to help you learn the definitions and understand terminology about the rule of law. You can find clues to the answers in the text.

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ACROSS

DOWN

1	An opinion, not based on actual experience	1	Equally the same as something else
6	To treat everyone equally	2	People in positions of making legal judgements
7	A written law passed by a governing body	3	To have knowledge of information
8	A random choice or decision, without reason	4	Treatment towards another person considered to be unfair
9	To 'stick to' and follow	5	Central importance, necessary
11	To comply (or act) with rules and laws	8	To accept or act in following a rule or decision
12	Failing to comply with rules and laws	9	To experience harsh rule and authority
13	To be uncertain or unclear		
14	A penalty for an offence		

ANSWERS

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