

PERHAPS PARLIAMENT IS NOT SUCH A GOOD IDEA IF IT IS SO DIFFICULT TO GET ALONG.

We all have the right to our own opinions. We all have the right to be treated fairly and equally. That is exactly why we need a parliament – parliament allows people to say what they think. When everyone has had their say, the members vote and parliament takes a decision.

How can minority groups be represented if nobody will speak on their behalf? Parliament is about giving everyone - including men, women and children - equal rights. It allows everyone a voice. That is the meaning of democracy.

The government, and not parliament, is responsible for doing those things. Parliament is there to act as your voice, and to speak to the government about what is needed. So you should make sure that it knows what the problems are.

Government can be national, regional or local, and some things are the responsibility of local or state government. If so, your local town councillor or member of state parliament might be able to help. These people are like members of parliament except that they work only in your local area.

IF PARLIAMENT IS THAT GOOD, WHY DOES IT NOT FIX OUR ROADS, SCHOOLS AND NEIGHBOURHOODS?

To have your say, you can write to your member of parliament. When you're old enough, you could join the youth group of a political party. Get involved in your community and be an advocate representing the interests of others.

I'M TOO YOUNG TO VOTE. CAN I STILL HAVE A SAY IN WHAT HAPPENS?

It is important for you and everyone else to know what is going on in parliament. Parliament is about treating people fairly and with respect, and about everyone being entitled to their opinion. If you support those values, parliament should be important to you.

WE HAVE A PARLIAMENT, SO WE DON'T HAVE TO WORRY.

HOW CAN I FIND OUT MORE ABOUT PARLIAMENT?

Your parliament might have a website or information sheets. There might even be tours through the building and the tour guide will tell you more about how parliament works.

Q & A

on parliaments for schoolchildren

A PARLIAMENT DOES NOT GUARANTEE A DEMOCRACY BUT THERE CAN BE NO DEMOCRACY WITHOUT A PARLIAMENT.



What do citizens expect from their parliament



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WHAT IS DEMOCRACY?

Democracy means that everyone in the country has a say in deciding who will be in charge of the government. Democracy aims to protect our fundamental rights and freedoms. Those who are old enough vote to choose a group of people to be their voice in government, to speak to the government on their behalf and to make laws. That small group that people have voted for are the members of parliament. We expect those men and women to listen to the people and to do their job well and honestly.

Once every few years people get to choose again. They can decide to pick the same men and women to be members of parliament, or they can choose new ones.

WHY SHOULD I BE INTERESTED IN PARLIAMENT?

Without a parliament, people would not have a say in how their country is run. The government would not have to listen to what the people want.

Also, parliament is a place where important issues affecting the country are discussed and where decisions are made about them.

WHAT SHOULD PARLIAMENT DO FOR ME?

Members of parliament are there to speak to the government about the things that people in the country are concerned about. You should expect your parliament and its members to –

- listen to what people are saying;
- let everyone know what they are doing, and not keep their work a secret;
- make it easy for people to write to them, visit parliament and talk about the things that concern them; and
- work hard, do their best and be honest.

BUT WHAT IS THE GOVERNMENT?

The government are the people whose job it is to manage the country and provide things that we all need such as schools, hospitals, roads and police.

The government needs the support of the members of parliament. The leaders of government have to listen to what members of parliament tell them. If citizens do not like what the people in government do, citizens could vote them out and replace them with others.

AND WHAT IS PARLIAMENT?

Parliament is the place where members of parliament speak to the government and let it know what people are thinking. Parliament is also the place that makes laws. It keeps an eye on what the government is doing. The members of parliament stay in touch with the people, and tell the government what people want.

SO WHAT ARE LAWS?

Laws are rules that everyone must obey. These laws must be fair for everyone. They set out how we should do things and they help us live in peace with one another.

Most countries also have one "big law", called the Constitution. That is a basic law that says how our government and our parliament work. It even lays down how parliament makes other laws.

It is important that parliament also speaks with the voice of all the people. This means that it is we who decide, through parliament, what our laws are going to be.

WHY DO MEMBERS OF PARLIAMENT SOMETIMES DISAGREE WITH EACH OTHER?

Members of parliament speak on behalf of different groups of people. Sometimes one group wants one thing but another wants something else. Not everyone agrees all the time and in that way parliament reflects the different views in society. In a democratic society people respect the right to free speech and tolerate the opinions of others.

Parliament is a place where people can disagree but still decide together on what to do.

CAN A MEMBER OF PARLIAMENT SAY ANYTHING HE OR SHE WANTS TO SAY?

Members have to be polite to each other, and they must speak about the subject that is being discussed. As long as they do that, they must be allowed to give their point of view even if other members disagree totally.

We represent different political views, people, organisations and community groups. We all feel strongly about what we believe is right, but it is important that we respect other members even if we do not agree with them.

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