



# Children's Rights in Sport Principles

## Forward

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### Ryoko Akamatsu

Chairperson

Japan Committee  
for UNICEF

The Convention on the Rights of the Child, adopted on 20 November 1989, says that every child has the “right to play.”

Sport has the important power to promote children’s sound growth, regardless of their age, gender, place of birth, or whether or not they have any disabilities.

However, globally, there are cases of sport adversely affecting children.

With the hope that the sport would genuinely promote sound growth and prosperous lives of children, Japan Committee for UNICEF, together with UNICEF, has developed *the Children’s Rights in Sport Principles*.

I am sincerely grateful to everyone who helped us develop the Principles, and to all of you who have shown your support to the Principles.

Thank you.

Millions of children take part in sporting activities every day across the world. For some, this is purely for recreation and fun. For others, sport may be their chosen future career, as talented athletes, coaches, or officials.

All children have the right to participate in sport in a safe and enjoyable environment. At the most fundamental level, **play is a child’s right**, as noted in Article 31 of the Convention on the Rights of the Child.

The UN along with many other development actors have long held that sport not only helps to fulfil this right, but that it also helps achieve broader social and economic development outcomes. We however are also aware of the reality that, in many corners of the world, sport can bring risks such as violence and abuse. Sport therefore has a duty to safeguard all children taking part.



### Andrés Franco

Deputy Director  
UNICEF Private Sector  
Engagement

*The Children’s Rights in Sport Principles* are UNICEF’s first document of this kind to address this old but still emerging issue, which concerns every one of us.

We thank the Japan Committee for UNICEF for this initiative, and members of the drafting committee for their interest, work, and participation, in particular a number of Japan’s Sport Bodies led by Japan Sport Agency. Our sincere gratitude also goes to UNICEF UK’s child rights and child safeguarding experts for their valuable contributions. UNICEF plan to use this pioneering work by our colleagues, friends and partners in Japan as the starting point towards the development of a global set of principles, as we further develop our understanding of child rights and child safeguarding in context of sport.

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## Congratulation

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Let me congratulate you on the completion of *the Children's Rights in Sport Principles*.

The right of all people to lead a life of happiness and abundance through sports is made explicit in the Basic Act on Sports. The core of the value of sports is the *fun* and *joy* to be attained through *doing* sports; that continuing to *do* sports makes us know courage, confidence, friendship and other values, while realizing personal growth, improved physical and mental health, and a life full of meaning and purpose.

Children stand at the start line of life. Ensuring they can savor the value of sports for the rest of their long lives is important not only to the children themselves, but for society as a whole.

The Japan Sports Agency completed an international sports strategy on September 6. That strategy also notes the need for a foundation upon which human rights are protected to ensure that all people can enjoy sports. That will require safety in all sports venues as well as fairness and equality in the management of sports.

These things are in common with the *Children's Rights in Sport Principles* you have completed. I have confidence that efforts in line with *the Children's Rights in Sport Principles* will ensure that the value of sports reach all children.

Let me conclude by expressing my great regard for all those involved in the drafting of these principles, including the Japan Committee for UNICEF, while hoping for the spread and popularization of these principles.



**Daichi Suzuki**  
Commissioner  
Japan Sports Agency



## ***Children's Rights in Sport Principles***

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Expectations for Sports Organizations, Educational Institutions, and Coaches

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- 01** **Commit to Respect and Support the Rights of Children**
  - 02** **Consider Balanced Growth of Children through Sports**
  - 03** **Protect Children from the Risks of Sports**
  - 04** **Protect the Health of Children**
  - 05** **Develop Governance System to Protect the Rights of Children**
  - 06** **Ensure Understanding and Engagement by Adults Involved with Children and Sports**
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Expectations for Sponsoring Companies

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- 07** **Incorporate Children's Rights in Sponsorship Decisions**
  - 08** **Engage with the Organizations who are Sponsored**
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Expectations for Adult Athletes

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- 09** **Approach and Hold Dialogues with Stakeholders**
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Expectations for Parents and Guardians of Children

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- 10** **Support the Healthy Growth of Children through Sports**
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## ***Preamble***

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Sport has the important power to promote children's sound and well-rounded growth and to convey a wide and active message to the world through its vast influence.

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Every child has the "right to engage in play and recreational activities appropriate to the age of the child and to participate freely in cultural life and the arts."<sup>i</sup> Similar to education, play and sport can have a great, positive influence on the lives of children<sup>ii</sup>. Children can learn about their society through participation in physical education, physical activity and sport (hereinafter referred as 'sport') including cooperation with others, self-control, observation of rules, and respect for others. Programs for reconciliation and peace through sports activities have also been implemented around the world and been a force for good.

Sport is universally shared across human culture, based on voluntary participation. Lifelong participation in sport can promote prosperous living and cultural development, and is integral to the pursuit of health and well-being, including for children.

Unfortunately, diverse cases have been observed, of sport adversely affecting children's rights, such as corporal punishment, bullying and allowing children to over train in the course of sports instruction, practice, and matches<sup>iii</sup>. As the scaling-up, commercialization, and early specialization in sport continues, it has been pointed out that the understanding and development of systems related to the protection of the rights of children is inadequate.

Against the backdrop of the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child - which provides for the protection of children from all forms of physical and mental violence, unfair treatment and exploitation - the reality that sport can be a context where such maltreatment takes place has been gradually recognized and addressed in recent years.

When we get it right in sport we can have wider impacts on other aspects of lives of children because of the great influence sport has. In this context, there are some movements that have taken action. For example, the World Players Association, of which more than 100 professional sport associations from more than 60 countries are members, has adopted the Declaration on Safeguarding the Rights of Child Athletes<sup>iv</sup>. While the power of sport is attracting much global

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attention due to various mega sports events including Olympics/Paralympics, FIFA, Rugby and other World Cups and world matches, and the spread of sports across borders, it is extremely important for a wide range of stakeholders to work together to ensure that sport truly supports the sound growth of children and does not negatively affect their rights<sup>v</sup>.

The Children's Rights in Sports Principles exist so that all stakeholders involved in sports including sports organizations, educational institutions, sponsor companies and organizations, adult athletes and their organizations, coaches, parents and guardians should support these Principles by<sup>vi</sup>:

- Expressing their commitment to take actions towards implementing the Principles;
- Striving to actively disclose and explain the status of that implementation to promote mutual collaboration and dialogue in this area.

## ***Definition***

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### **Children:**

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Every person under the age of eighteen years.

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### **Children in Sport:**

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Children that participate, in any form, in physical education, physical activity and sport, including those who aspire to become professional athletes or officials, and those who play sports or participate other aspects of sport for leisure, recreational and exercise reasons (e.g. ball-boys and girls). Young persons aged 18 years and older may receive protection in accordance with these Principles if they have similar needs for protection and support.

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### **Sports Organizations:**

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Sports organizations include all organizations where their main purpose is to conduct or oversee sporting activities.

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# 01 *Commit to Respect and Support the Rights of Children*

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Commit to respect and support the rights of children, based on the spirit of the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child. Specifically, endorse the following universal values and share them within and outside of their organization.

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**a.** Always act in the best interests of the child

Make the best interests of the child the paramount consideration in all actions concerning children. Noting that the “win at all costs” mentality does not always serve the best interests of the child, or foster children’s lifelong participation in sport.

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**b.** Respect the views of the child

Respect that children can express their views freely in all matters affecting themselves, including their willingness or unwillingness to participate in matches and practice, in accordance with their age and maturity. Respect the views of the child on how they wish to participate in and enjoy sport, including those aiming to become professional athletes and those wishing to enjoy sport as a leisure and recreation activity.

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**c.** Non discrimination of children

Ensure no child is discriminated on the basis of their gender, ethnicity, birth, sexual orientation or identity, language, religion, culture, political or other opinion, national or social origin, disability, or economic or other status of the child or his or her parents or guardians.

For children with a disability steps should be taken to provide parasport activities, or to adapt sports so that participation can be enjoyed alongside children without a disability. This may involve making facilities universal in design, ensuring they are appropriately supported by officials, coaches and other support personnel, or adapting the rules of the sport or equipment to be inclusive for disabled athletes.

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**d.** Protect children from all forms of violence and adverse impact on their rights

Eliminate all forms of violence and abuse against children and address issues that adversely affect the rights of children.

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**e.** Commit to supporting the rights of children through sport

Commit to actively support children’s rights through supporting sound and well-rounded physical and mental development through sport, as well as promoting the fundamental values of sport including fair play, teamwork and respect.

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## 02 *Consider Balanced Growth of Children through Sports*

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Help children achieve holistic and comprehensive personal development by considering how to balance with other non-sporting activities including rest, time spent with family, leisure and recreation and learning. Specifically, the following perspectives should be taken into account, and efforts should be made in accordance with the size, character, and activities of each organization.

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**a.**

### **Promote balanced growth of children**

Respect the time children spend with their families and ensure their right to family life.

To help the child develop his or her personality, talents, and mental and physical abilities to their fullest potential, promote balanced growth of children by allowing them sufficient opportunities to engage in learning, play, sport, leisure and recreational activities appropriate to the age of the child, and to participate freely in cultural and art activities.

Promote honesty, fairness and integrity of sport and the virtue of fair play and teamwork among children, and provide them with the information needed to promote balanced growth such as on the importance of education, the need for a healthy and balanced diet and lifestyle, and for protection from all forms of violence against children, including bullying.

Also provide information about the risks and dangers associated with a sporting career, including that the lifetime as elite athletes can be short and that opportunities for sporting success may be interrupted due to accident or injury.

**b.**

### **Ensure opportunities for education/learning**

Afford all children involved in sport, including those who are aspiring to be elite athletes, sufficient time for learning.

Provide children with access to appropriately qualified academic and life advisors outside of sports, and assist with preparing them for the transition to the next phase of their lives, including potential future employment outside sport.

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## 03 *Protect Children from the Risks of Sports*

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Protect children from risks such as violence and abuse and ensure an environment in which children can play sports safely. Specifically, the following perspectives should be taken into account, and efforts should be considered in accordance with the size, character, and activities of each organization.

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### **a.** Protect children from violence and abuse

Throughout the course of sports instruction, practice and matches, eliminate all forms of physical or mental violence, injury, abuse (including sexual abuse), excessive training, harassment (sexual and power harassment), bullying, hazing, neglect, negligent treatment, maltreatment, exploitation, excessive rules and/or punishment and trafficking.

Do not tolerate any physical or mental abuse or demeaning language or treatment of children, including that conducted by other children or via social media.

Collect data on cases of injury during sports instruction, practice and matches and analyze the underlying causes of the results.

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### **b.** Make sure children are taught by qualified personnel with appropriate coaching skills

Make sure that all personnel who are involved in teaching, coaching, medical support and administration of sport have appropriate qualifications, training and access to continuous professional development.

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### **c.** Guarantee a safe sporting environment for children

Guarantee a safe and secure environment for children to practice, compete and officiate in sport, including by ensuring the prevention of sport-related accidents, and ensuring a secure sporting environment which is only accessible to persons who have passed background checks.

Provide children with safe and appropriate transportation of a suitable quality, housing, and meals when they travel to play sports.

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**d.**

**Ensure the sporting environment for children free  
from fraudulent conduct**

Ensure that children can play sports without engaging in fraudulent conduct (e.g. match fixing, corruption and manipulation) triggered by prestige or economic interests.

Recognizing that children are more likely to become victims of such misconduct compared to adults, as the scaling-up and commercialization of sports progresses, educate and discipline all persons involved in children's sports (also known as "entourage"<sup>vii</sup>) on this matter.

Prevent persons, including coaches, who have the authority to decide whether or not to allow children to participate in games, from receiving economic or other rewards that may influence their decisions, to ensure fairness and transparency.

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**e.**

**Protect children from all forms of exploitation**

Make sure that children are protected from all forms of exploitation including political, social as well as economic exploitation.



## 04 *Protect the Health of Children*

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Protect the physical and mental health of children, including protecting them from doping. Specifically, the following perspectives should be taken into account, and efforts should be made in accordance with the size, character, and activities of each organization.

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**a.**

### **Protect the physical and mental health of children**

Consider the appropriate type, intensity and method of teaching sport according to the age and development of the child.

Based on scientific and medical knowledge, ensure that sport does not negatively affect the physical and mental health of children, including through burn-out, by excessive training. Recognize that pushing children into those situations may constitute a form of child abuse. Contribute to setting rules on the limit and extent of training and participation in matches, in collaboration with relevant stakeholders outside of the organization as appropriate.

Recognize that adults tend to have unrealistic expectations that can cause children to over-work without due consideration for the risks of serious injuries that could affect their future lives, and encourage children to make calm judgments by means such as appropriately notifying them of the risks associated with sports, and effectively protecting the mental and physical health of children, by creating an environment in which all persons involved respect the judgment of children without imposing excessive pressure on them.

Provide children with ready access to certified athletic trainers and/or medical doctors, as well as other relevant professionals to educate and counsel the children on physical and mental health.

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**b.**

### **Protect children from doping and provide nutritional guidance**

Based on scientific and medical knowledge, protect children from all doping and ensure that legal substances, such as nutritional supplements for the purpose of performance enhancement are never provided to children without duly considering the effect on children's short and long-term physical and mental health. Recognize that pushing children into doping may constitute a form of child abuse.

Provide all persons involved, including coaches medical staff and caregivers, with access to education on proper nutrition, the need for a healthy diet, and the appropriate use of medicines and supplements for children, from an appropriately qualified professional.

Provide all relevant persons with the information they need to identify and refer to for support, in cases of eating disorders or disordered eating amongst children taking part in sport, recognizing the particular risks in weight-making sports.

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**c.**

### **Help establish an appropriate and balanced lifestyle**

Recognizing that 24 hours is not all for sport, help establish an appropriate and balanced lifestyle for children, setting appropriate time allocation for sports vis-a-vis time for learning and other activities, as well as for rest and sleep.

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## 05 *Develop Governance System to Protect the Rights of Children*

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Develop a governance system to effectively implement Principles 1 to 4. Specifically, the following measures should be implemented in accordance with the size, character, and activity of each organization.

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**a. Formulate and publish basic policies**

Formulate a policy for committing to Principles 1 to 4 (including those covering wider aspects including the rights of children) and publicize the policy inside and outside of the organization.

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**b. Identify and assess risks and adopt appropriate measures according to the level of risks**

Identify and assess any actual or potential adverse impact on the rights of children in accordance with the nature and activities of each sports organization, and implement measures according to the identified risks.

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**c. Establish and implement rules, guidelines, and codes of conducts**

Establish specific rules, guidelines, and codes of conducts to implement the policies for respecting and supporting the rights of children set out in Principles 1 to 4, and ensure that they are followed by all persons involved.

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**d. Monitor and continuously improve**

Monitor regularly whether violence, overtraining and other issues that adversely affect the rights of children occur in the course of sport instruction, practice, and matches.

Continue to review and improve the status of efforts to respect and support the rights of children based on the results of monitoring.

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**e. Secure reporting mechanisms and remedy channels to address problems**

Ensure that children have access to services to report and consult safely and confidentially on violence, overtraining and other issues that adversely affect their rights. Provide children with information about their rights and about how they can report and discuss their concerns.

Prepare mechanisms that allow third parties or anyone who is worried, to report or make their concerns known on issues that might adversely affect the rights of children.

Ensure access to effective remedies that are appropriate to the needs of children by placing top priority on the best interest of the child when receiving concerns or complaints. Ensure that remedy channels are accessible to children and that children are able to participate in them meaningfully.

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## 06 ***Ensure Understanding and Engagement by Adults Involved with Children and Sports***

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Promote understanding and dialogue among all persons involved in order to ensure effective implementation of the Principles. Specifically, the following measures should be implemented in accordance with the size, character, and activity of the organization.

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**a.** **Ensure appropriate recruitment and education  
of persons supporting children in sport**

Adopt appropriate standards for recruiting persons supporting children in sport, including coaches, officials, teachers, trainers and volunteers, to ensure that they do not adversely affect children's rights, through such measures as incorporating respect for children's rights in recruitment standards, and checking prior records of abuse.

Hold regular educational and training opportunities to promote the proper understanding and implementation of these Principles, in collaboration with relevant organizations as appropriate.

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**b.** **Promote understanding of all concerned through engagement**

Promote the understanding of the Principles among all those involved through regular dialogues within the organization including with the children, and with external stakeholders including guardians, schools and adult athletes, so that the Principles are properly implemented according to each specific situation. Provide children with a safe and secure space in which to share their issues, concerns and ideas.

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## **07** *Incorporate Children's Rights in Sponsorship Decisions*

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In deciding whether or not to sponsor a sport organization or an educational institution, take into account the state of the sport organization's efforts in respecting and supporting the rights of children as set out in Principles 1 to 6. Where appropriate, require the sport organization or the educational institution to make explicit commitments to respect and support the rights of children, in accordance with Principles 1 to 6, as a condition of sponsorship.

## **08** *Engage with the Organizations who are Sponsored*

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Ask sports organizations and educational institutions who are sponsored to explain their efforts to respect and promote the rights of children, as stipulated in Principles 1 to 6, in accordance with their specific risks, and use leverage to encourage them to implement any measures which have not been fully implemented.



## 09 Approach and Hold Dialogues with Stakeholders

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Given that children are often placed in a position that makes it difficult for them to speak out on issues that negatively affect their rights and those of other children due to their vulnerabilities, expectations and pressure from others and the extent of their ability to articulate their concerns, adult athletes who may have similar experience, and represent or support children or share their concerns, should be encouraged to work with other stakeholders to support children in the following ways.

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**a.** **Encourage stakeholders including sports organizations to support and protect children**

Based on their own experiences, hold dialogues with stakeholders including sports organizations and sponsor companies on how to respect and support the rights children, and urge them to implement initiatives in accordance with Principles 1 to 8.

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**b.** **Hold Dialogues with Children**

Share, to the extent possible and appropriate, their experiences with children and their guardians, raising awareness and understanding of the issues children can face in sport to make it easier for children to discuss and seek help on issues such as violence, overtraining, and other issues that adversely affect children's rights.

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## 10 *Support the Healthy Growth of Children through Sports*

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Parents and guardians of children should support the sound and balanced growth of their children by taking the following measures, taking into account the important role they play in providing children with physical and mental support, and their role in communicating the power and opportunities of sports, and the ways in which they can support the activities of sports organizations and educational institutions.

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**a.**

### **Support Healthy and Balanced Growth of Children**

Recognizing the importance of their role as the foremost protector of their children, help them reach their potential and enjoy their time in sports, by caring for them with consideration to a balanced lifecycle. Ensure they discuss with their child how he or she wants to participate in and enjoy sports, what kind of support the child feels they need, and do not create any negative impact on children including by excessive expectations or involvement. Recognize that children can sometimes push themselves too hard and adults may need to set appropriate boundaries to protect them from this.

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**b.**

### **Hold Dialogues with Stakeholders and Take Actions to Protect Rights of Children**

Implement the relevant items in Principles 1 to 4 from the standpoint of parents and guardians, while holding constructive dialogues with other relevant stakeholders including the sport organizations.

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**c.**

### **Support Addressing Issues that Adversely Affect the Rights of Children**

Continuously monitor whether there are issues that adversely affect the rights of the child. If advised by the child or if they identify themselves violations of child rights, support developing a solution to the problem in a manner that gives top priority to the best interests of the child.

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## Note

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<sup>i</sup> Article 31, paragraph 1, of the Convention on the Rights of the Child, “State parties recognize the right of the child to rest and leisure and the right of the child to engage freely in cultural life and the arts, as well as playing and recreational activities appropriate to his or her age.”

<sup>ii</sup> Committee on the Rights of the Child, “General comment No.17 (2013) on the right of the child to rest, leisure, play, recreational activities, cultural life and the arts (art. 31).”

<sup>iii</sup> For example, UNICEF Innocenti Research Centre, “Protecting Children from Violence in Sport: A Review with a Focus on Industrialized Countries”, 2010.

<sup>iv</sup> Published on 8 November 2017. Stipulates the best interests of the child as the guiding principle and includes such components as protection of children from violence, abuses and other risks in sport, ensuring right to education, and hearing children’s voices.

<sup>v</sup> This document is formulated based on the Children’s Rights and Business Principles (CRBP) as its model. The CRBP set out ten principles for companies and organizations to respect and support children’s rights, complementing the UN Guiding Principles on Business and Human Rights which require companies and organizations to assess and address adverse human rights impacts as part of their responsibility to respect human rights.

<sup>vi</sup> When there are individual circumstances which makes it inappropriate to implement these principles in their entirety, efforts shall be made to explain the circumstances.

<sup>vii</sup> Guidelines for the Conduct of the Athletes’ Entourage approved by the IOC Executive Board in Durban- 4 July 2011 define the Entourage as “all the people associated with the athletes, including, without limitation, managers, agents, coaches, physical trainers, medical staff, scientists, sports organisations, sponsors, lawyers and any person promoting the athlete’s sporting career, including family members.”

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for every child, play and sport

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*Children's Rights in Sport Principles*

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