



# PARENTING FOR SUCCESS

## Winter Sport Parent Information

### CHILDREN'S RIGHTS IN SPORT



Many of us have heard of a child's 'right to play', but what does this phrase really mean? The *United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child* recognizes 'the right of the child to rest and leisure, to engage in play and recreational activities appropriate to the age of the child'. Following Norway's record-setting tally of 39 medals at the 2018 Winter Olympics the Norwegian sport model has attracted some attention. A fundamental element of this model, the 'Children's Rights in Sport', is a set of principles governing youth sport (through age 12) rooted in a child's 'right to play', placing paramount importance on the interests and well-being of the child, allowing children the time they need to develop intrinsic motivation. While the pressures of professionalization, early specialization, and a 'win at all costs' attitude threaten the well-documented potential for sport to positively contribute to a child's overall development, these 'Children's Rights in Sport' serve as a useful guide for our priorities surrounding youth sport. These rights are:

Parents play the primary role in protecting their children, ensuring that they enjoy sport and reach their potential. How can you, as parents, support your child's rights in sport?

- Ask your children what they hope to get out of their participation in sport
- Ask them what support they need to achieve their goals
- Openly discuss the potential negative impacts of sport (overtraining, injury, excessive time commitment)
- Emphasize the fundamental benefits of sport over 'winning at all cost': Personal development, teamwork, fair play, and a healthy lifestyle
- Constructively engage with your child's coaches and the SSWSC regarding how we are working to protect the rights of your children

1. **Safety and Security:** Children have the right to be protected from all forms of violence and abuse and be guaranteed a safe and secure environment for practice and competition. This includes protections against overtraining, injury, bullying, and hazing.
2. **Friendship and Well-Being:** In order to ensure a balanced lifestyle, boundaries should be placed on the time demands of sport, while fair play and teamwork should be promoted.
3. **Based on the Children's Needs:** Practices and competitions should be adapted to the age, maturity and physical development of the child.
4. **Mastery:** Children must be provided the opportunity to learn through their sport and have access to qualified coaches who possess the appropriate skills.
5. **Influence:** Children must be given the opportunity for their viewpoints to be heard and to participate in the planning and evaluation of sport activities.
6. **Freedom to Choose:** The right to choose which sports children participate in, how many sports and how much they want to train.
7. **Competitions for Everyone:** Children have the right to choose if they will participate in competitions, or not.

These principles have laid the foundation for a thriving sports culture and the environment in which Norway's Olympic champions developed. The concepts also connect to the SSWSC core values, and our programs are in many ways aligned with these rights: Offering a diverse range of programs; allowing children the freedom to choose their sport(s); and encouraging multi-sport participation. They also suggest how we could improve: New guidelines for the number and type of competition for each age-group? Give young athletes more freedom in the design of their training? Could we incorporate these rights into our long-term athlete development model? We will explore this more in upcoming *Parenting for Success* topics.

