

Policy for Children's Gymnastics

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Abstract

The Policy for Children's Gymnastics is a guideline towards a more child-centred coaching approach. The goal is to strengthen the enforcement of the rights of the child in gymnastics while raising the quality of children's gymnastics and working towards supporting children's overall well-being. This policy evolved from the need for change in the gymnastics culture.

The policy aims at making it possible to offer all children equal opportunities to do gymnastics. The policy also considers the perspective of sustainable development.

The policy is used to influence the following aspects in children's sports: safety, amount of training, limiting the costs of the hobby, supporting the well-being of gymnasts, continuation of the hobby, longer careers and supporting body peace. The policy has a significant role in supporting children's inclusion and agency.

The policy contains binding policies for the member clubs of the Finnish Gymnastics Federation as well as recommendations and guidelines for those involved in gymnastics. The aim is to guide the activities for children under the age of 12 within Finnish gymnastics as a whole, and also to make recommendations for carrying out activities for young people (13–17 years). The policy gives tangible support especially for clubs and adults who are involved in the hobby, including coaches, instructors, and dance teachers.

At the heart of the policy are the rights of the child, which are binding on adults, and cannot be ignored in gymnastics (chapter one). The policy defines how matters of responsibility are divided between different actors (chapter three).

There are both binding policies and recommendations for competitions, camps and events that take place abroad (chapter four). The binding policy is that a child can participate in international activities in the year they turn 10. This policy enters into force on 1 January 2024. The recommendation is that children participate in international activities at the earliest in the year they turn 12. The intention is to raise the binding age limit to 12 years by 1 January 2026. The Finnish Gymnastics Federation prepares this matter together with the club actors.

The policy also introduces in more detail the age limits for starting competing in national and international competitions, the evaluation in competitions, the reporting of results as well as both binding policies and instructive guidelines related to competition attire.

The policy is a comprehensive document guiding children's activities in the member clubs of the Finnish Gymnastics Federation, which has been prepared in cooperation with both experts and clubs.

Contents

Introduction.....	3
1. Rights of the Child as a Basis for the Policy	5
1.1. Five Main Points of the Policy for Children’s Gymnastics	5
1.2. Gender-neutral Conduct.....	6
1.3. Competing as Part of the Hobby	6
1.4. Safety and Responsibility.....	7
1.5. Inclusion.....	7
2. Childhood Growth and Development, and Forming Groups.....	9
2.1. Team/Group Selections	9
2.2. Dividing Children into Groups	10
3. Matters of Responsibility	11
3.1. Finnish Gymnastics Federation is Responsible for	11
3.2. The Club is Responsible for.....	11
3.3. The Coach is Responsible for:.....	13
3.4. The Guardian is Responsible for:.....	13
3.5. Cooperation With Parents.....	14
4. Policy for Competing	15
4.1. International Competitions, Events and Camps.....	15
4.2. Competition Attire (including performance outfit, hair etc.).....	16
4.3. Training Outfits.....	18
5. Points for the Organiser to Consider in Children’s Competitions	20
5.1. Principles for a Safer Space	20
5.2. To Consider at Events	20
6. For Choreographers and Persons Putting Together Routines to Consider	22
7. Tips to the Instructor/Coach About Emotional Skills and Giving Feedback	23
8. Guidelines and Policies for Children’s Gymnastics.....	24
8.1. Policy for Responsible Flexibility Training	25
8.2. Policy on Body Peace	25
8.3. Policy on Food Peace	26

Introduction

The purpose of the Policy for Children's Gymnastics is to guide our actions. It gives concrete support to clubs and people who are involved in the hobby, including coaches, instructors and guardians of the gymnasts. The document contains policies of the Finnish Gymnastics Federation as well as recommendations for those involved in gymnastics.

The policies are based on our national legislation and the international human rights treaty, the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child. In addition, the National Child Strategy, the strategy of the Finnish Gymnastics Federation for 2021–2024, as well as changes in the society and perceptions of human-centred coaching have been taken into account.



The rights of the child in sports include all children. The rights do not depend on the child's or their parents' gender, ethnicity, religion or belief, sexual orientation, body structure, physical development, need for support, or other reasons relating to an individual.

The primary objective of the policy is to strengthen the realisation of the rights of the child in gymnastics.

In addition, the policies ensure the implementation of the ethical principles of gymnastics and the various aspects of the responsibility programme of gymnastics (safe operating environment, non-discrimination, equality, and environmental responsibility) in children's gymnastics.

The policies will also affect the costs of gymnastics. This will strengthen the opportunities for all children to participate in gymnastics.

The matters that are addressed in this document are divided into three levels:

- policies, which are obligatory and binding on the member clubs of the Finnish Gymnastics Federation as well as on their actors and activities;
- recommendations, which point out actions that the Finnish Gymnastics Federation recommends clubs and those involved in their activities to take into account;
- guidelines, in which the Finnish Gymnastics Federation instructs clubs and those involved to review their operations.

The Finnish Gymnastics Federation has processes and guidelines on how to sort out and handle possible violations, inappropriate actions, and unclear situations (www.voimistelu.fi/vastuullisuus). In addition to these, all clubs must have their own processes for handling issues on a club level. Violations are defined in the general competition and disciplinary rules of the Finnish Gymnastics Federation.

If the clubs or actors do not follow the binding policies, the cases will be taken to the federation's ethics working group, which will evaluate possible follow-up measures.

The policies will come into force on 1 January 2024, but the Finnish Gymnastics Federation recommends that all actors familiarise themselves with the policies during the autumn of 2023 and develop their operations in the direction of the policies.

If necessary, the gymnastics disciplines will update their national rules for competitions and judging in the direction of the policy, and they have a right to a transitional period until the beginning of the next licensing period on 1 September 2024. The development groups of each discipline will provide information on possible refinements and clarifications to their competitive systems.

The policies will be developed in the coming years, and any changes to e.g. the age limits for international activities will be communicated no later than June of the previous year.

1. Rights of the Child as a Basis for the Policy

Everyone under the age of 18 are children – those who practise the sport as well as young instructors.

Rights of the child are binding on everyone. The special protection obligation comes from both national legislation and international human rights treaties, especially from the children's own human rights treaty, i.e. the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child.

Children have rights and adults have the responsibility of the realisation of those rights.

The goal in children's gymnastics is to ensure a safe training atmosphere for the children, and the opportunity to do gymnastics for as long as possible, following their own gymnast's path. Children and adolescents should be given opportunities to influence the activities they participate in, and to be involved in the development of sports.

Adults are responsible for the total costs of the hobby. In recent years, the training volume has clearly increased, and the overall cost of the hobby is now, in some areas, as much as two or three times higher. The increase in amount of training, improved training conditions, salaries of professional coaches, travel and camp expenses, training outfits and equipment, competition attire and other related costs have increased the total costs of gymnastics. The policy aims to address the increased costs through various policies, recommendations or guidelines.

The policy is intended to influence the position of children in gymnastics. The policy expresses the values that form the basis for practicing in gymnastics clubs.

1.1. Five Main Points of the Policy for Children's Gymnastics

A prerequisite for high-quality children's gymnastics is child-centred instruction and coaching. In gymnastics, we implement the following main points of the Policy for Children's Gymnastics.

- 1. We create a safe training atmosphere and a safe operating environment.**
- 2. We offer children opportunities for inclusion and influence.**
- 3. We promote joy and meaningfulness in children's physical activity and strengthen autonomy and long-term development (adopting a physically active lifestyle).**
- 4. We enable a diverse and playful children's sports culture.**
- 5. We take into account the growth, development, health and well-being of children in our gymnastics culture; our goal is that children are healthy and believe in themselves. The child's well-being and health should always be more important than competitive success.**

In the strategy of the Finnish Gymnastics Federation, high-quality children's gymnastics focuses on the activities for children under the age of 12 but does not exclude high-quality hobbies for the youth. When talking about rights of the child, the term **children** (under 18 years of age) is always used. Therefore, the Policy for Children's Gymnastics applies not only to children but also to those who practise in groups for adolescents and those who compete in the sport.

High-quality children's hobby activities emphasise the goals of children's gymnastics: enthusiasm, quality and succeeding together. The most important thing is to train in a safe, inclusive, and accepting atmosphere, in a way that supports growth and development.



1.2. Gender-neutral Conduct

When instructing and coaching children in a high-quality manner, we do not talk about girls and boys, but children are called by their own names or other gender-neutral expressions (e.g. children, gymnasts, team members, dancers).

Every child has the right to be themselves. Everyone has the right to define their gender and participate in hobby groups and national competitions for children under the age of 12 according to their identity.

1.3. Competing as Part of the Hobby

This policy takes a stand on how far children can travel to compete, which competitions children are allowed to participate in, and how a coach can influence the costs of competitions.

Competitive activities, that take children into consideration, belong to gymnastics. They motivate many children to learn new skills, to practice, to exercise and to develop social skills.

Competing is part of the hobby, but it must be done on children's terms.

Children's competitive activities should focus on the joy of action, athleticism and developing it further, as well as learning to compete and to manage emotions, rather than competitive success and appearance-oriented aspects (attire, make-up).

It is recommended that result lists, categories, and the number of children to be awarded a prize are taken into account in the development of the disciplines' own competition systems. Based on research evidence, intense competition too early and public result lists for young children are reflected in the early drop-out phenomenon and the early waning of interest.

In children's competitive activities, it is recommended to offer children positive learning experiences and to set goals according to the different stages of their own path of development. Children should not be compared too much.

The children's activities also call for responsible judges' conduct. Judging must promote the development of the participant. Written feedback must highlight the strengths, and be supportive as well as promote development. The feedback must respect the body peace of a growing young person.

We strive to ensure that all children have the opportunity to practice the sport in a group. For practical reasons, not everyone can be in the same group in clubs, but the child and their guardians have a right to receive information on how the groups are formed.

1.4. Safety and Responsibility

Children have the right to a safe hobby environment without pressure, abuse, discrimination, harassment or violence. A child has the right to physical and mental integrity, growth, and body peace.

Flexibility training must be safe, and pushing in positions is not allowed. The coach is obliged to correct (incorrect) positions, but the difference between assisting and pushing must be distinguished.

For children under the age of three, only family exercise classes are recommended. For classes for over three-year-olds, at least one adult instructor (over the age of 18) or an appointed parent in charge must be present in the same room. Ultimately, they are obliged to take responsibility in emergency situations.

In addition, depending on the size of the group, other instructors or assistant coaches may run children's exercise activities. We recommend that the instructor in charge of each group is of age and has completed Level 1 training, as well as the Responsible Coach online course of the Olympic Committee, and the You Are Not Alone online course.

1.5. Inclusion

Children have the right to participate in recreational activities and competitive activities. The purpose of children's hobbies is to strengthen the child's friendships as well as skills in social situations. A sports club is a good learning environment.

Learning to tolerate disappointment is also a part of children's everyday life. Along with the parents, the instructor is responsible for helping the child to process the feelings that come with disappointment. In a safe training atmosphere, children can also be expected to respect each other and their instructors/coaches, and to practice good manners.

Children have the right to express their opinions. They should have the opportunity to participate in planning and execution of their sports activities together with their coach/instructor.

When consulting the children, their age should be taken into account. For example, small children can also express their opinions with a thumb vote or drawing.

After collecting feedback, it is important to bring forward the feedback that has been given, and to inform how it will be handled, to make it visible that the feedback has been processed.

The child must have the right to choose their sport and they must be asked how many times a week they are willing to practice. The child must also be asked whether they want to compete or not.

All children should have the opportunity to engage in hobbies, regardless of their family's financial situation and without the pressure associated with costs. Clubs should strive to organise low-threshold activities in which children in that region have opportunities to participate. In addition, clubs are encouraged to identify possible sponsors or others who could provide financial assistance in their area, and who the families can contact or whose contact information is communicated on the club's website.

2. Childhood Growth and Development, and Forming Groups

In a group where children are born in the same calendar year, the maturity of the children can vary considerably. Children of the same age can have big differences between physical and social growth, and cognitive growth. Moreover, the differences in emotional maturation can be several years. This may pose a challenge to the coaching and the group's common goals.

When groups are formed, clubs should consider, whether it is necessary to stick to age and gender groups, and where the level of children's development could be considered.

A child must be guaranteed body peace and opportunity to unhurried growth. The child's body must not be commented on. For nutrition education it is required to make use of experts, and the education must be sensitive. A child has the right to rest and play and, alongside training, to well-balanced and sufficient nutrition and sleep.

It is the responsibility of the parents and the coaches working with the child to pay attention to the well-being of growing children. Growth and one-sided sport-specific training increase the risk of strain injuries ("overuse injuries").

The balance between physical activity, rest and other leisure activities is important for a growing child. School holidays cannot be totally filled with a discipline's camp activities – the child's right to rest must be taken into account.

Training for children under the age of 7 should include practising a wide range of basic physical activity skills. Play should be an integral part of training. Clubs should encourage children to be active also outside the club activities.

Training for 7 to 9-year-olds in clubs should be versatile and develop physical qualities on a wide range, so that each child has a sufficient foundation of movement skills for practising and developing sport-specific skills. Play should still be an integral part of training.

Classes for over 10-year-olds should pay attention to having a high activity level to ensure basic skills, and to building a technical basis.

In all age groups, children should also be encouraged to engage in diverse and multi-sport physical activity, also outdoors and outside of sports clubs as well as in other sports clubs.

We recommend that the following is taken into account when forming groups and teams.

2.1. Team/Group Selections

- In group selections, the best interests of the child must be taken into account: the goal is, for each child, to find a training group that suits their level of skills and development. A child should also have opportunities to find a group of their own level according to their own interest and motivation.
- The club groups must not be too fixed and should allow moving between different levels. Compositions should be flexible.

- In team sports, children (under 12 years), who are selected for competitive coaching, must be guaranteed a spot on a team, and no one can be excluded except in cases of illness or injury, or when a child wants to take a break from competitive activities.
- When forming a team, the selection criteria for the group must be transparent for everyone. The criteria as well as information about the persons responsible for the group selections must be communicated openly in advance.
 - If the group has predefined goals, it is also a good idea to communicate them openly in advance. Examples of such goals: is the long-term goal for the children's group reaching the national team, national competitions, recreational competitive activities or enjoying recreational sports?
- A child can ask for feedback to support their development. The reasoning behind selections for a team or a group must be given to a child in an understandable way and with an accuracy that is suitable for their age.

2.2. Dividing Children into Groups

- Being too strict when dividing children into groups does not benefit the goal of getting as many enthusiasts as possible to commit to the group.
- When putting together different (level/skill) groups for children under 12 years of age, equal opportunities for everyone to aspire to be selected in the group should be taken into account. It is important to note that identifying talent in under 8-year-old children is difficult and early selections do not guarantee that the group will have participants when reaching adulthood. For clubs to consider: could we give more opportunities for everyone to engage in activities according to their own resources and wishes, and not make decisions too early for the children?

Example: a child under 8 years of age may choose, together with their family, whether to participate in the group's activities two, three or four times a week. This allows the family to engage also in other sports. The club would not have level groups selected by the coach, but groups would be put together according to different goals and amount of training sessions, from which the family would choose the most suitable form of hobby.

- Parents should be informed in good time about potential group divisions and explained what it takes to be a gymnast in a competitive group in terms of commitment -> it is recommended to have an open discussion with the parents about resources and family's use of time.
- Group compositions should be flexible and allow changes because children's growth and development is not steady and uniform. Changes in level of motivation and enthusiasm also vary.
- Groups cannot be set up according to assumed ambition. Also, no one can be excluded just because the coach interprets a child's motivation level as lowered.
- Age-group divisions should take into account varying situations and possibilities for adaptation (flexible age limits).
- Team building and supporting the sense of togetherness is important.

Questions for clubs to consider when forming training groups:

- How will the children be heard and when?

- Do we recognise what is in the child's best interests?
- What do we as adults do with the information we receive when consulting the children? How do we make the advantages and benefits of being heard visible to the children, even though not all children's (or their families') wishes can always be addressed?
- Are we ready to change the gymnastics culture in our club based on the children's opinions?

3. Matters of Responsibility

Clear allocation of responsibilities is a prerequisite for us achieving common goals in gymnastics. The Finnish Gymnastics Federation recommends the following allocation of responsibilities.

3.1. Finnish Gymnastics Federation is Responsible for

- developing measures of support and guidelines for safe hobby activities.
- overseeing the implementation of the policies and making sure that any shortcomings are addressed when necessary.
- ensuring the development of the Finnish Gymnastics Federation's responsibility programme and sharing information.
- providing opportunities for competence development for instructors, coaches, and club actors.
- carrying out international advocacy work to raise age limits and to develop rules and gymnastics culture, among other things.
- communicating openly about the policies, common guidelines, and rules.

3.2. The Club is Responsible for

- appointing a person in the club, whose work role includes acquainting themselves with the rights of the child and the policies of the Finnish Gymnastics Federation. The person also instructs and implements them into the club's operations and makes sure that the club's board is familiar with the matter.
 - making use of online courses on the subject so that each actor has time to develop their competence
- organising parents' evenings on a regular basis for those involved in competitive and performance activities
- establishing a policy on instructing and coaching (*required from Tähtiseura clubs).

- supporting the instructors' development of competence and ensuring that everyone knows their own path of education or knows where to find information on them on the Gymnastics Federation's website.
- checking the extract from the criminal record of each new person entering an employment relationship.
- documenting children's activities (seasonal plans, safety guidelines): they indicate when children have been offered opportunities for inclusion and information on safe hobby activities.
- arranging for at least one adult (over 18 years of age) to be present at each training session. This person may be other than the instructor. The priority is to know who ultimately bears the responsibility.
- ensuring that no instructor is alone with a group of children in sensitive situations when talking about possible inappropriate behaviour or safety skills.
- advising instructors on how to respond to private messages on social media.
 - an instructor has always educational responsibility
- bringing forward different ways and opportunities for children to influence and participate in club activities.
- organising a safe sports environment and safe conditions for activities (apparatus and equipment in good condition, first aid supply)
- organising activities where no one is left out. The activities are equal with equal opportunities regardless of gender, age, ethnic or national origin, nationality, language, religion and belief, opinion, disability, health, sexual orientation or other reasons relating to an individual.
- It is recommended that the clubs take into account the different aspects of accessibility and availability in their operations. The club may need to make special arrangements to achieve actual equality of operations. The different aspects are
 - Accessibility of the operating environment
 - Social access
 - Accessible communications, information and services
- allowing a child to participate in other hobbies as well: too early compulsive-like commitment to only gymnastics excludes other hobbies and can lead to too one-sided training. The structure of classes in clubs must from time to time be flexible to allow performances and tournaments in other hobbies, if it is possible within the allocated time slot in the training hall. It must be allowed to be absent sometimes, also from team practice.
- asking for feedback from participants and their guardians about the activities each year or providing a channel for continuous feedback.
- providing a feedback channel for reporting any inappropriate actions.
- asking a child's and parents' consent for photography and filming if the club uses photos/videos of the child in their communication (especially when the child can be recognised in the photo/video).
 - A child (even a young one) must be asked whether they want to appear in the pictures (even after several years) or not.
 - When children are presented on social media, it is advisable to use only children's first names and/or nicknames as identifying data.
- making sure that the photo angles in the photos that are published are in the best interests of the child. For example, in many flexibility positions, the angle and clothing can be unfavourable for a child.
- ensuring equal news coverage on the club's website and not focusing only on the competition results on those who have been successful at competitions.

3.3. The Coach is Responsible for:

- knowing the rights of the child and acquainting themselves with the rights if they are not familiar with them. In addition, it is everyone's responsibility to ensure that the rights of the child are realised in their own club.
- promoting interaction between the coach and the gymnast and maintaining a positive and learning-friendly atmosphere.
- planning the activities in a way that takes into account the children's everyday life, including significant events and leisure time. For example, every child should have the opportunity to celebrate a friend's birthday or take part in a school outing in order to develop a social life alongside sports.
- telling children about their rights, safety skills and who to contact if a child is feeling unsafe.
- providing opportunities for children to be heard and to participate in activities as themselves without fear of being bullied.
- creating a safe environment in the gym and making sure that proper language is used, and everyone is treated with respect and appreciation.
- always intervening in bullying, discrimination, racism, or humiliation.
- reporting discrimination, violence, and harassment. If handling of the matter is insufficient within the club or federation/discipline, the police must be contacted if necessary (if a crime is suspected).
- together with the guardians, to the best of their ability, taking account of the overall load of the hobby and ensuring that the child also has the opportunity to rest. An ill child should not be allowed to practice, and no medal is valuable if achieved at the expense of well-being. When planning camps and competitions for school holidays, the child's right to rest must be taken into account.
- ensuring that no one comments on or compares children's bodies or controls their eating. The coach should strive to ensure that harmful body ideals are not maintained in gyms, camps, competition events, or in the daily life in sports.
- supporting the child and their parents in a lifestyle that promotes well-being and health, for example by guiding to an adequate total amount of physical activity.
- planning the competition programmes and routines in a way that allows the child to experience a sense of control over their competence, and building the routines/programmes on themes, music and movement that are suitable for the child's age.
- providing opportunities for children to maintain a fan culture by organising opportunities to attend club's or federation's competitions and events where children's idols compete or perform.

3.4. The Guardian is Responsible for:

- ensuring adequate opportunities for the child to rest and recover, as well as enough time for social relationships and development of friend skills.
- taking care of a varied and sufficient diet at home and teaching the child best practices for snacks, packed lunch etc.
- showing interest in the child's hobby, supporting and encouraging the child on what is important to them.
- ensuring adequate hygiene and amount of sleep, e.g. by paying attention to washing and bedtime.

- paying attention to the well-being of growing children. Growth and strenuous exercise increase the risk of strain injuries (“overuse injuries”), which is why it is important to pay attention to growth and cooperate with the coach so that the intense growth spurt can be taken into account.
- ensuring that the child's competition license is properly taken care of, if necessary.
- taking care of the costs of the child's hobbies and, if necessary, discussing cost reductions if the situation so requires.
- making sure that the child does not train when ill or return too early to intense training after being ill.
- with the child's consent, engaging in a dialogue with the coach about the child's hobby and their progress or changes in motivation.
- letting the child's coach work in peace and supporting the relationship between the child and the coach.

3.5. Cooperation With Parents

Building effective cooperation with parents is in the interests of all actors, especially the child. Good and open interaction is the basis for cooperation.

- The key is to be open: sharing the joys and successes, but also talking openly with the parents about possible challenges.
- The team leader(s) and/or the board of the club support the instructor.
 - Coach(es) and instructor(s) need support and feedback both in their work with children as well as in working together with the parents.
- Each season a meeting is held with the parents, where the instructor goes through the seasonal plan and the safety plan, the ground rules of the group and confirms with the parents the ground rules made together with the children. Also, the key issues of the season (such as outfits, performances, competitions and costs) will be discussed and agreed on, and the instructor goes through the importance of total amount of physical activity, sleep and nutrition as part of the child's growth and development.
 - It is important for the parents to communicate well in advance about the costs of the hobby and what the fees for consist of.
- Email communication as an important part of providing feedback and interacting with the parents.
 - You can send a report to the parents once in the spring and once in the autumn season. Clarifying things and providing information (good news and, without hesitation, also the "bad" ones) to parents reduces ambiguity, provides answers to questions, and potentially prevents conflict.

4. Policy for Competing

For many children and young people, challenging themselves, performing and competing, is an important part of sports and gymnastics. At best, competitions are learning events. It is important that sport remains fun, and the main focus is not just on success before adulthood.

Emotions – joys and disappointments – are part of the sport. However, the competition result cannot in itself be a determining factor of engaging in a hobby. For competitions, it is a good idea to set the goal to succeed in movements and elements at one's own skill level, and to each child's personal development. The journey in the sport, the learning experiences, and the feeling of competence when training are more important than medals.

Children are allowed to participate in Stara events without an adult in the same year they turn 6 (binding policy). Before that, children can participate in Stara in a family exercise programme.

A child can start competing in the year they turn 7 (binding policy). In disciplines where the starting age is already higher, the age limits will not be changed. For young gymnasts, if possible, it is recommended to participate in competitions nearby to avoid unnecessary travel.

In competitions for children under the age of 10, the emphasis is not on the competition results and ranking lists.

- It is recommended to use categories in the competition results.
- The discipline may choose whether to reward everyone with a participation medal. * NB: this is a cost issue
- In competitions, it is recommended to give honourable mentions and/or to award in other ways also participants, who were not in the top.
- It is recommended that not all scores are published in Kisanet and at the competition venue, but only categories and potentially the scores for those who will be awarded with a prize (*taking into account the competitive systems of the disciplines).
- If scores are used in the discipline, it is recommended that for children under 10 years of age the scores will be displayed either on a scale or as categories. This should be done by 1 September 2024 at the latest.

The development groups of each discipline will provide information on possible changes to the reporting of the scores no later than 06/2024. The change cannot weaken the athlete's legal protection in terms of evaluation. I.e. the evaluation within the discipline must provide feedback to the athlete and their coach. When evaluating children, written feedback supports their development as athletes.

In competitions for children under the age of 12 (10–12), it is recommended to use categories and publish the scores for the top gymnasts. Categories in competition results can be used in selecting teams/gymnasts for camps.

4.1. International Competitions, Events and Camps

Children may participate in competitions abroad in the year they turn 10 at the earliest (binding policy). The Finnish Gymnastics Federation recommends that the age limit for participating in competitions abroad is 12

years. The clubs should take into account the child's best interests and listen to the families' opinions when considering participation in international activities.

It is recommended that longer trips abroad in Europe are allowed at the age of 12 at the earliest. When it comes to travelling to other continents for competitions, it is recommended to consider it on a case-by-case basis, with the best interests of the child in mind, and taking into account the overall load of the competition. When planning competition trips, the absences from schoolwork and the resulting requirements for self-study as well as high costs must also be taken into account.

It is the responsibility of the clubs that enter children for major competitions to discuss competition trips with both the child and their guardians. No medal is worth the risk of exhaustion. There are always health and safety risks associated with travel. A coach cannot decide on competition trips and camps alone.

Competitions, events, and camps abroad are not for children under 10 years of age:

- The goal is to give children time to practise a wide range of basic skills and not to specialise too early. Training that is based only on competition rules may lead to early specialisation.
- Events, camps, and competition trips abroad increase costs: travel, accommodation, expenses of guardians/coaches, competition attire, etc., and they also take time away from family time.
- Competing and being away from home and school can be mentally burdensome for a child.
- Intense competition too early can lead to an early exit from the sport: losing interest in competing and training.
- Unnecessary international flights are not environmentally responsible and therefore not in accordance with the environmental programme.

International activities can be organised in Finland for over 10-year-olds.

4.2. Competition Attire (including performance outfit, hair etc.)

When planning and purchasing children's competition attire, it is important to consider the principles of sustainable development, economic aspects, and the fact that a child has the right to look like a child rather than a small adult.

In children's gymnastics, simple outfits, that completely cover the torso with coloured fabric and have little or no decoration, are recommended. In addition, the Finnish Gymnastics Federation recommends reusing outfits within the club and between different clubs, as well as borrowing outfits. The Finnish Gymnastics Federation encourages clubs to share tips and good practices on renting and reusing outfits as well as recycling them.

The outfits and equipment may be chosen according to gender self-identification, i.e. the child's right to define who they are and how they want to be seen must be respected.

- In gymnastics, make-up and washable hair dyes are not allowed in national competitions for children under the age of 12. Face paint or adhesive rhinestones on face or skin are also not allowed (binding policy).

- Exception: in themed shows and themed competitions in *Voimistelupäivät* it is allowed to use face paint, e.g. for mice you may paint whiskers, but the child also has the right to refuse face paint.
- Designing attire according to the theme of the programme is not recommended for children under 10 years of age, so that the focus is more on gymnastics, and not on expensive and decorated competition attires.
 - Exception: for themed shows, you may use props that fit the theme, if sustainable development and cost-effectiveness are taken into account when designing the outfits. That is, various props, such as mouse ears etc. are allowed.
- In competition attire for children under the age of 12, flesh-coloured fabric must not be used in the hip area (binding policy). Using flesh-coloured fabric is not recommended for children, because a growing child should have an outfit with sufficient coverage (it is the coach's responsibility to ensure that critical areas are covered: hips, chest). For children and young athletes, consideration is recommended as to the coverage of the outfits, so that the young person feels comfortable in the competition attire.
 - With flesh-coloured and coloured fabrics, different kind of cuts can be used create the illusion of another type of body structure than the child naturally has, and this can lead to an emphasis on appearance rather than performance.
- The outfits are recommended to be worn for at least a full year (when changes in teams/groups, outfits are recommended to be reused or recycled.)
- The total cost of a competition attire for children under 12 years of age may be no higher than approximately 150 €/season (for a new attire: including fabrics, design, sewing and decorations), or the purchase or rental price of a second-hand attire (binding policy).
 - Also, when it comes to attire for over 12-year-olds (young people), it is recommended to stick to a moderate amount of decorations and to limit costs, so that the main focus remains on sports and developing performance, and not on attire, making it more about appearance.

There is no mention in the rules of any gymnastics discipline that extra points would be given for the competition attire or its decoration. The outfit is a part of a whole. It is the adults' responsibility to ensure that changes occur in the gymnastics culture, also regarding outfits.

The policy on the price will come into effect on 1 January 2024, but it is recommended that the new policy is considered already during the autumn of 2023 when purchasing new outfits.

If necessary, the Finnish Gymnastics Federation will hold discussions with the clubs on the purchase costs of outfits and, if necessary, give warnings if the costs of children's attire exceed the recommended values. If this does not lead to moderation, attire deductions will be added to the national rules of the disciplines.

Clarifying Details on the Competition and Performance Attire Policy

- the attire may have some/a moderate amount of decorations. If the outfits are reused, it is allowed to keep the existing decoration.

- Small hair decorations, scrunchies and hairpins are allowed. (*if the discipline's rules allow them)
- crowns and adhesive rhinestones on hair are not allowed for children under 12 years of age.
- For children under the age of 12, fishnet tights and false eyelashes are not allowed.
- Coach: when thinking about purchasing competition attire and outfits, consider and discuss the total costs of gymnastics before making decisions. Emphasise athleticism, movement, and moderate costs to make gymnastics possible for everyone in the group.
- The Finnish Gymnastics Federation recommends that costs, sustainability, reusability, recyclability, and athleticism are taken into account also when purchasing attire for competing young people (over 12 years of age). The emphasis must be on sports, not on appearance.
- In hobby series and other low-threshold competitive or performance activities, the costs for outfits should be kept moderate so that everyone has the opportunity to stay in the hobby. The primary goal is to enjoy gymnastics and to develop in the sport, not to make it about decorations.

In team/group disciplines, moderation is recommended for the purchase of other clothing so the costs for purchasing team/group garments will not become too high, even if a child changes teams/groups.

In addition to the club's tracksuit and competition attire, we recommend consideration in purchase of ancillary products (shirts, bags, beanies, shoes, jackets, etc.)

When giving instructions on packing and dressing for camps and competitions, they should not pressure into excessive purchases of ancillary products. Purchases must be discussed and decided on in advance, together with the children's guardians.

4.3. Training Outfits

Children can practise wearing a sport attire that suits the discipline. The club and the coach must consider what kind of training outfits are absolutely necessary to acquire and whether there are reasonable grounds for expecting everyone to wear identical clothing in every training. Matching outfits can increase the sense of belonging to a group, but from a cost perspective, it is good to consider opportunities for reuse and recycling when it comes to clothes for growing children.

It is recommended to keep in mind the option of reuse/recycling in club uniforms, i.e. consideration must be exercised regarding group outfits.

A child has the right to wear tights with a gymnastics leotard as well as outfits with long sleeves. A growing child may feel anxious to do gymnastics only in a certain type of gymnastics outfit. When choosing outfits, the changes in adolescents' bodies, and, for example, the onset of menstruation should be taken into

account. Everyone is allowed to wear a more covering outfit if they wish, and there is no need to justify the choice.

The training outfit should be safe and suitable for the sport. In disciplines that require spotting and manual support, there may be grounds for preferring tight-fitting clothing for safety reasons, but it must be discussed with both children and their parents.

When choosing outfits, it is also a good idea to take into account any restrictions arising from different cultural backgrounds, and they should be respected where possible.

5. Points for the Organiser to Consider in Children's Competitions

Indicative competition schedules (for each section/category) should be completed, when possible, in good time so that families can plan participation according to the best interests of the child. Possible overnight stays in hotels increase the costs of the hobby. For the sake of the child's well-being, it is not advisable to repeatedly cut back on sleep due to travel.

Competitions and shows should be held in venues that are accessible to everyone. Wheelchair users and spectators with reduced mobility (possibly children's parents) should, if possible, be able to enter competition venues as spectators and/or participants (if otherwise possible) and no person is to be discriminated against on the basis of disability. The competition organiser has the responsibility to indicate the routes that are accessible for wheelchair users and to ensure that the children's guardians have the opportunity to come see the children's events despite their own disability.

At competitive and performance events, the principles for a safer space should be taken into account. They should be communicated also in advance.

5.1. Principles for a Safer Space

- Respect everyone's personal space, both physical and mental. Respect everyone's right to self-determination. Make sure you ask permission to touch someone. You cannot know where another person's boundaries lie without asking them. You may also ask for space for yourself.
- Do not mock, ridicule, disparage, sideline or humiliate anyone with your words, behaviour or actions. Do not comment on appearances and do not gossip or uphold stereotypes.
- Be open and curious about different appearances and approaches. Do not make assumptions.
- Give space. Do your best to ensure that everyone gets to participate in discussions. Do not disregard other people's opinions; give others the chance to speak. Respect the privacy of others and treat sensitive topics with respect.
- Listen and learn. Take on new subjects, people and viewpoints without prejudice. Think of things and situations as opportunities to learn and develop.
- Apologise if you have intentionally or unintentionally offended others.
- Control your emotions or be aware of when it is a good idea step aside for a moment to calm down if your emotions take over.

5.2. To Consider at Events

At competitive and performance events, it is important to remember that volunteers and other actors in the competition area (coaches and judges) play an important part in building and maintaining a positive atmosphere.

Music that is played at events during breaks should be suitable from the children's point of view. The use of music with sexual undertones in lyrics should be avoided.

The speaker has a significant impact on the atmosphere of the event. Any inappropriate spectator activity must be intervened in. Ultimately, the competition organiser has the right to stop the competition if continuing would break the atmosphere of safe activity.

The responsibility for children's mental and physical safety lies with adults. Discrimination must always be addressed. Racist discrimination is prohibited and the prohibition of discrimination also applies to sexual and gender minorities. All kinds of inappropriate jokes, derogatory gestures and facial expressions are forbidden to children, spectators and other actors participating in the event.

Each event must have a safety officer (an appointed person who is responsible for safety), and a small back-up team for support. The safety officer provides information on the appropriate emergency exits and is present when handling any inappropriate situations. It is the responsibility of the safety officer to remind of the aspects of spectator safety and, with the team, to intervene in a constructive way and immediately in case of any misbehaviour or other defects. Only the exemplary behaviour of adults and immediate intervention in inappropriate situations conveys to children the mutual aim of safe activities.

In situations where the competition organiser together with the safety officer must intervene in the running of the competition, the head judges will also be consulted. Any interruptions in competitions must be reported to the Finnish Gymnastics Federation, which will proceed with the matter. The aim is that everyone can be safe in competitions and adults manage their emotional reactions so that proper behaviour is the standard in all events of the Finnish Gymnastics Federation.

6. For Choreographers and Persons Putting Together Routines to Consider

When planning programmes for children, it is important to make sure that the (possible) music and theme of the programme are age appropriate. If the song is in a foreign language, it is important to find out in advance what the song is about.

In addition, when creating a programme, it is important to look at it from an ethical point of view, i.e. to see that the directions to which children perform as well as the movements are child friendly. It is recommended that children's programmes, movement rhythm and themes are connected to the children's world and are not copies of adults' programmes.

From the safety point of view, the movements and elements in the programme and routine must be chosen according to the children's physical prerequisites and skills. The movements and choreographies that are practiced should be built considering age and skill levels. The coach and choreographer are responsible for safe training and should choose the movements and elements accordingly.

From a high-cost point of view, it is recommended that separate choreography fees for Stara programmes as well as for activities for children under 10 years of age are kept moderate. The priority at this age is to focus on training the basics. From the cost-reduction and time management point of view, it is also a good idea to consider the possibility of recycling and reusing routines and programmes for young children.

7. Tips to the Instructor/Coach About Emotional Skills and Giving Feedback

- Rule of thumb: look for positive feedback, correct mistakes in a concrete way and be sure to tell how to correct the movement/element. The feedback must not be directed to the person, but to the action.
- Give positive feedback also on other than gymnastics skills and pay attention to children's strengths. Learn to consciously use strength skills in your feedback when coaching.
- Say only one thing at a time so that the child can concentrate on that.
- Support the development of a child's self-assessment skills with questions. Encourage the child to think about their emotions and to learn to put them into words.
- It is important that the coach makes sure they give positive feedback to all children in each training situation and notices every participant.
- Support the development of children's emotional skills:
 - It is important that the instructor/coach recognises the gymnasts' emotional states and adapts their own behaviour according to them. For example, games in between technique exercises, if the children are having a hard time concentrating.
 - It is important that the instructor/coach is really present and there for the children, especially in situations where a gymnast experiences feelings of sorrow, anger or failure. It is important to face the child, to help them name their emotional state, and to give them time to process their emotions. It is the coach's job to support the child.
 - Practicing recognising different emotions through games, different kinds of music and movement improvisation.
 - The instructor/coach leads with example: conveying feelings of joy and accomplishment in training situations.
 - A coach should be able to process their own feelings of frustration and disappointment without them being directed at the gymnast. A gymnast can learn from a good example.

8. Guidelines and Policies for Children's Gymnastics

The following guidelines and policies are intended as concrete instructions especially for instructors and coaches. The purpose of these policies is to provide practical instructions for specific situations and to harmonise approaches.

In children's gymnastics, the following are taken into account:

- Ground rules are made together with the children, to outline what kind of activities and participation is desired in the classes.
- In a training hall a child is allowed to behave like a child. Training sessions are planned in a way that allows a child's child-like behaviour, without long and silent waiting in line -> favouring rotational training as well as pair and group exercises -> exercises are more effective and can be shorter.
- A child is allowed to play and learn through play and games. Play is included in every training for children (under the age of 12).
- A child must not be forbidden to move about and exercise or told that they are moving incorrectly. All movement develops. Give children the opportunity to get to know the apparatus/equipment on their own playing follow-the-leader.
- Training halls are places for active movement, but children should also practice respectful behaviour towards others there.
- A child is not a small adult. A child may show their feelings and be a child.
- A child has the right to body peace. Inappropriate comments or jokes about the body are not part of a safe hobby.
 - Every child has the right to safe training without fear. This applies to adult instructors and coaches as well as children and their peers. If there is even one child in a group, who punches, shoves or pinches others, constantly jumps the queue or laughs maliciously at failures, there must be clear instructions on how to tackle this. Undesired behaviour must always be addressed, without being afraid of the guardians' reactions. Instructors must be provided with support to address the issue with guardians.
- A child must be allowed to move about, but no child shall endanger themselves or the safety of others exercising.
 - If there is a child in the group who does not follow the ground rules, that are agreed upon together, or who refuses to participate and even runs away from class, the club should decide in advance who has the responsibility to go after the child. Who stays in the room with the rest of the group?
 - If a child endangers the safety of the rest of the group, cooperation with the guardians must be agreed on to resolve the matter.
- A child does not decide the schedules or family holidays. You should not blame the child for missed practise or being late. Children must not be caught up in adults' issues.
- The instructor creates a safe atmosphere in the class by facing everyone genuinely and approvingly, especially the children in the group, even though they may not always approve of some behaviour. An instructor sees, hears and talks to everyone. The instructor also tells whom the children can tell about their worries without getting into trouble.
 - It is a good idea for the instructor/coach to tell which coaches, captain or guardian one may speak in confidence.
- Gymnasts and their parents are informed that assistance and spotting in the gymnastics disciplines is essential for learning and safety. The gymnast should know that if touching feels inappropriate or

unpleasant, they should immediately tell either the coach or another adult. It is important that the coaches are taught what kind of touching is appropriate and what kind of touching must be talked about with the gymnast. It is polite to ask permission to touch. Situations where safety is a priority may be excluded, for example, when catching a child in the air before falling from an apparatus. NOTE: you do not have to ask permission each time. Assistance, spotting and touching are discussed each season and when new gymnasts and coaches start working together as well as when a coach is substituting/filling in.

- It is the instructor's responsibility to talk about safety skills and the rules of touching. Some gymnastics movements require assistance and that is part of normal coaching activity.
- With their behaviour and attitude, adults set an example that teaches children to feel the joy of exercise and learning. This joy will hopefully accompany them throughout their lives.
- With children you should use age-appropriate language, give clear instructions and show the movements and/or use movement cards, if necessary, to clarify the instructions. Some children learn by seeing, others by hearing.

8.1. Policy for Responsible Flexibility Training

- Favour short stretches, that are held for approximately 30 seconds, over long, passive stretches.
- The gymnast may feel the stretch but stretching must never be painful. Talk with children about what pain feels like.
- Bear in mind that the perception of pain is different for each individual and it should be talked about.
- When assisting a stretch, always ask permission to touch and assist the gymnast.
- Remember mutual interaction during flexibility training.
- The gymnast has the right to refuse assisted stretching or to stop the exercise.
- You may assist and correct the position of a stretching gymnast, but you may not push the gymnast. If the gymnast feels pain, you are pushing. When assisting, no pain is involved, even if the stretch does not always feel so comfortable for everyone.
- It is safer to assist the gymnast to find the right position than to stretch in a wrong position.
- Remember that when it comes to flexibility, the level of performance may vary from day to day.

8.2. Policy on Body Peace

- A young athlete should be allowed to grow and develop in peace. No kind of body or appearance-related speech belongs to gymnastics – not by coaches, gymnasts, judges, spectators or supporters.
- Appreciate the performance and capability of a gymnast's body. You should praise, for example, the skills and physical capabilities of a gymnast.
- With your own example, you can affect positively on the body image the gymnasts develop. Please speak respectfully also about your own body in the presence of gymnasts.
- If there is a concern about an athlete's well-being, nutrition or disordered eating behaviour, the coach should contact the parent or guardian of an underaged gymnast.

8.3. Policy on Food Peace

- Sufficient and varied nutrition is important for both growth and development.
- There is no single correct plate model for a child who does gymnastics. Flexible and permissive eating supports sufficient energy intake and the establishment of a normal relationship to food.
 - When it comes to children, the families play a significant part in ensuring varied nutrition, and therefore dialogue with the families is important.
 - General nutrition and food recommendations can be used as a guideline, taking into account the training load. The focus should be on varied and sufficient eating.
 - Use pictures with children to visualise plate models and recommendations, or learn, for example, how to prepare snacks in practise.
- We ensure food peace in gymnastics. This means that everyone is allowed to use their own judgement and make their own choices during mealtimes. Mealtime is not the best time to comment or express a concern over someone's eating (e.g. for a meagre diet or one-sided nutrition). Keep in mind that single food choices do not always provide an accurate reflection of a person's eating habits.
- Nutrition and food can also be talked about during childhood. We guide and encourage athletes to sufficient and varied eating and drinking. We pay attention to the principles of responsible body and food dialogue: we allow for enough time for eating on camps etc. and we act in a supportive and encouraging manner.
- If there is a concern about a gymnast's nutrition or well-being, we will address it. When talking about nutrition and dietary practises it should always take place in a climate of trust and confidence, and in a safe space. It is encouraged to seek external expertise when tackling possible problems.