

At America SCORES, we believe every child should be able to develop their human potential through sports.

That's why we recognize the rights below, which were developed by **PROJECT PLAY**, an initiative of the Aspen Institute Sports & Society Program that develops, applies and shares knowledge that helps stakeholders build healthy communities.



CHILDREN'S BILL OF RIGHTS IN SPORTS

ALL CHILDREN HAVE THE RIGHT:

1. TO PLAY SPORTS

Children have the right to have organizations make every effort to accommodate their interest to participate, and to play with peers from diverse backgrounds.

- Providers should develop policies, practices, and partnerships to include youth from underrepresented populations, and create programs that both meet and stimulate youth interest in sports.
- Non-profits and other groups that benefit from the use of public facilities have a special duty to protect the right of all children to participate.



Here's how we honor this right:

America SCORES focuses on serving children growing up in neighborhoods characterized by entrenched poverty. Our soccer-for-youth-development programs, along with all equipment necessary to participate, are 100% free of charge for all. Our curricula are intentionally fun, team-based, and holistically integrate soccer leagues with poetry slams and service projects, so that every child, whether they fancy themselves an athlete or not, has an opportunity to lead and shine. Our Guideposts for Advancing Equity & Child Safety Guidelines further detail our commitment to ensuring that all children, whatever their age, gender, race, ethnicity, culture, religion, sexual orientation, or mental or physical disability will be able to participate in America SCORES in a fun and safe environment.

2. **TO SAFE AND HEALTHY ENVIRONMENTS**

Children have the right to play in settings free from all forms of abuse (physical, emotional, sexual), hazing, violence, and neglect.

- They must be provided safe and inclusive playing facilities and equipment.
- While the physical nature of sports means all risks cannot be eliminated, programs should take precautions to protect youth from harm and dangerous situations.
- At all times, the best interests of the child should prevail.

Here's how we honor this right:

America SCORES has ZERO TOLERANCE for abuse or misconduct; the welfare of the child is paramount. Our Child Safety Guidelines detail the steps that will be taken by America SCORES staff and coaches to protect children from harm, discrimination and degrading treatment, and to respect their rights, wishes and feelings, including: taking seriously & responding swiftly to any suspicions or allegations of misconduct or abuse or of poor practices; recruiting (and training) coaches with regard to their suitability for the responsibility of child safety; and working in partnership with parents and children. We provide all children free, age-appropriate soccer equipment and partner with public schools to run our programming on the fields and playing spaces where children already are.



3. **TO QUALIFIED PROGRAM LEADERS**

Children have the right to play under the care of coaches and other adults who pass background checks.

- Coaches also should receive training in, at a minimum:
 - general concepts in coaching youth;
 - sport-specific coaching;
 - the emotional needs of children;
 - injury prevention;
 - CPR and First Aid;
 - and abuse prevention.
- Children and parents/caregivers deserve to know program policies and procedures in these areas.

Here's how we honor this right:

We provide all of our coaches with ~17 hours/year of training. Annual training topics include: positive youth development; trauma-informed and healing-centered approaches to coaching; sport-specific and age-specific coaching; and injury prevention. We source >80% of our coaches from the faculty and staff of the public and public charter schools our participants attend. As such, nearly all of our coaches come to us trained in abuse detection and prevention and either are already designated reporters themselves or coach with one. We encourage coaches who do not receive such training through their day jobs to complete both SafeSport and local abuse prevention training. We periodically train staff in CPR and First Aid, as well as Mental Health First Aid. We don't rely just on policies or training; we are regularly in the field monitoring actual practice. Our staff go out in the field daily during every season to conduct quality-control site visits at all sites and to support newer coaches by modeling how to lead practices and drills.



4. **TO DEVELOPMENTALLY APPROPRIATE PLAY**

Children have the right to play at a level commensurate with their physical, mental, and emotional maturity, and their emerging athletic ability.

- Roster sizes, rules, and equipment should be adapted to those levels.
- They should not be subject to inappropriate pressure or exploitation.
- Reasonable efforts should be made to recruit and accommodate youth with disabilities.
- All children should be treated as young people first, athletes second.

Here's how we honor this right:

America SCORES is a youth development organization first -- soccer is a medium/tool for youth development at SCORES, not the the other way around.

Our model is multi-grade, year-round teams within single schools (K-2nd, 3rd-5th, and 6th-8th). This serves 3 purposes: 1) It facilitates camaraderie and relationships within school buildings, including a strong, positive peer support network. 2) Since most children join SCORES not for a season, but for a lifetime, it positions kids to grow over time from "newbie" to "strong contributor" to "team leader" within the same team, usually with the same coaches. Returning participants model for new participants team values and norms. 3) The America SCORES team is able to be a consistently safe and brave space for all participants.

We focus on age-appropriate competition and participation of all. While elementary school leagues and tournaments are often round-robin, middle school leagues are competitive. We explicitly celebrate sportsmanship -- during practice talks, in pre-game all-team huddles, and with special patches and wristbands for individual players "caught in the act" of demonstrating good sportsmanship (and a stated goal being that all players earn a sportsmanship badge each season). We train our game-day referees in our values and approach. Finally, we provide players and teams with age-appropriate, size-appropriate equipment -- for free. This includes soccer balls, goals, uniforms, pinnies, cones, goalie gloves, etc...



5. **TO *SHARE* IN THE PLANNING AND DELIVERY OF THEIR ACTIVITIES**

Children have the right to share their viewpoints with coaches and program administrators, and for their insights to be incorporated into activities.

- They have the right to identify sport options of their own interest and, especially with younger participants, consideration should be given to how much they want to train.
- Youth should be provided ample space for free play and to enjoy other sport, cultural and family activities.

Here's how we honor this right:

Youth voice is a key part of America SCORES' curricula. Every soccer team in our leagues ALSO writes and performs original poetry together AND designs and carries out service projects together. Both of those initiatives are child-led, adult-facilitated (vs adult-directs, child participates). While our writing coaches teach participants poetry skills, it is children who choose what to write about and in what language. Each spring, children identify a service project of interest, research it, design a plan of action, implement it, then reflect on it together. Throughout, writing coaches provide guidance, but children lead the project.

All of our curricula are designed to be last-mile adaptable to accommodate the needs of individual teams and local idiosyncracies. Among other things, we have many more "practice plan modules" than days in the season so that coaches can select those that best fit their team's needs each week or season, rather than be stuck with a rigid "day x of season you can only do lesson x" approach.

We regularly survey youth participants and their families and incorporate that feedback each season into curricula, policies, and coach training. Many of our local affiliates (program operators) also include youth and young alumni on their advisory or governing boards.



6. TO AN **EQUAL OPPORTUNITY** FOR PERSONAL GROWTH

Children have the right to have programs invest equally in them, free of discrimination based on any personal or family characteristic.

- Policies on minimum playing time in games should be established in recognition of the evolving capacities of youth, with a bias, especially at the younger ages, toward roughly equal playing time over the course of a season.
- Programs should create balanced teams where possible and be judicious in creating competition formats that favor early bloomers to the exclusion of others.

Here's how we honor this right:

All America SCORES programming, including equipment, is provided 100% free to poet-athletes and their families. We do not impose any physical fitness, physical ability, academic, gender, or behavioral pre-requisites to joining an America SCORES team. We encourage equal playing time at all elementary school games. We also offer boys, girls, and co-ed teams for different ages.



7. **TO BE TREATED WITH *DIGNITY***

Children have the right to participate in environments that promote the values of sportsmanship, of respect for opponents, officials, and the game.

- They have the right to make mistakes and fail without fear.
- Policies should be established and enforced to prevent bullying behavior by coaches, parents, spectators, and teammates. Education on these matters should be provided to them, in a variety of formats and languages.

Here's how we honor this right:

America SCORES' Child Safety Guidelines explicitly include zero tolerance for -- and actions that will be taken promptly upon any suspicion or report of -- any form of hazing, abuse, assault, or harassment. We train all coaches in positive youth development practices, and our curricula are grounded in the same.

8. **TO *ENJOY THEMSELVES***

Children have the right to participate in activities they consider fun and which foster the development of friendships, the prime motivations for many to participate.



- Coaches and administrators should create the conditions to help them find comfort and happiness, and which in turn can facilitate a love of sport, self-learning, mastery, and sustained engagement.

Here's how we honor this right:

Our program model and activities are designed with fun in mind. We structure regular game days, soccer tournaments, and poetry slams as community celebrations, and ensure they take place either at kids' own schools or in their communities, so they are readily accessible. Coaches invite participants' schoolmates, teachers, principals, and family and community members to join in. We regularly invite well-known professional soccer players and spoken word artists to meet with our poet-athletes. We partner with professional soccer teams and other community institutions to create memorable field-trip-type experiences for both individual poet-athletes and entire teams, as well their families, at no charge -- including tickets to MLS and NWSL games, serving as player escorts at USM/WNT games, and performing original poetry onstage at community festivals and City Council hearings. We publicly celebrate our poet-athletes and their accomplishments on social media, at program events, and in community publications.

**With the rights of youth as a foundation, we can
build a better house for all of sports.**

**LEARN MORE:
[AS.PN/CHILDRENSRIGHTS](https://as.pn/childrensrights)**