
Guidelines for Children's and Youth Gymnastics

Approved by the Federal Board by 25 February 2022

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Introduction

Gymnastics for children and youth, both training and competition, must be conducted from the perspective of the rights of the child and comply with the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child. The UN Convention is, together with the *Swedish Gymnastics development model* and *Gymnastics code of conduct*, the foundation for how we live our vision, values and for our guiding principles outlined in *Strategy 2028* within Swedish Gymnastics.

Guidelines for children's and youth gymnastics aims to be a detailed help to guide clubs, coaches, and individual members on how to implement *the development model*, *the code of conduct* and the UN Convention into practice. The intention is that this guide should function both as a manual and as instructions to be followed. They should provide guidance on various issues, but above all open up conversations about how the club's activities should be designed.

Sports for children up to the age of 18 years, elite-oriented or not, shall be characterized by long-term perspective and be conducted in line with the Swedish Gymnastics Federation's guidelines for children's and youth gymnastics. Children and youth should be given opportunities to influence their own sports participation and thus their sporting development.

UN Convention on the Rights of the Child

The UN Convention on the Rights of the Child (UNCRC) became Swedish law on January 1, 2020 and is a legally-binding international agreement setting out the rights of every child. Since then, all activities for children and youth in the Swedish sports movement have been covered by the UNCRC, which has complemented and strengthened the values of sport. The UNCRC defines a child as a person below the age of 18. The purpose of the UNCRC is to influence and improve the situation of children around the world.

To ensure that the basic principles of the UNCRC are complied with, the following questions can be asked; Which children and young people are being heard? What groups of children and young people are we listening to? Have we considered the best interests of the child/youth? What do we as adults do with the information and knowledge we get from children and youth? Are we prepared to change our view of how sports should be conducted based on the opinions of children and youth?

The Swedish Sports Confederation's (RF) guidelines for children's and youth sports

The Swedish Sports Confederation's (RF) guidelines for children's and youth sports are intended to be a guide in the application of the Swedish Sports Confederation's statutes. RF's guidelines are based on RF's statutes as well as current research and practical experience. The *Guidelines for children's and youth gymnastics* serves as the Swedish Gymnastics Federation's clarification of what is required of Swedish Gymnastics to ensure that RF's regulations and the UNCRC are being followed.

The five main points in the Swedish Sports Confederation's guidelines are:

1. **Safety and security:** Create safe and welcoming environments
2. **Involvement:** Offer involvement and influence
3. **Fulfilment:** Promote internal motivation and long-term development
4. **Versatility:** Enables diverse and playful sports
5. **Health:** Contribute to long-term health and well-being.

Gymnastics activities for children and youth

Children's gymnastics generally refers to gymnastics up to and including the year the child turns 12. Play is central to children's gymnastics, but children should also be getting the opportunity to try out different sports. Giving children the opportunity for comprehensive sports development is essential. Competition is part of children's play and should always take place on the children's terms.

Youth gymnastics generally refers to gymnastics from the age of 13 up to and including the year the child turns 18.

The division into children's and youth gymnastics is the Swedish Gymnastics Federation's own. This has no bearing on the fact that every person is a child until they are 18 years old. The term 'youth' is thus not used in the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child.

All Swedish Gymnastics members should have the opportunity to learn and grow. However, for practical reasons, not everyone can be in the same training group or club. The composition of the activities must be based on what is feasible for the club, such as, availability of coaches and their training level, facilities, and financial considerations.

Social and sporting values must be balanced in children's and youth gymnastics.

In a cohort of participants born in the same year, the degree of physical, cognitive, social, and emotional maturity can vary considerably (up to 5 years in relation to physical age). In a well-functioning club, all these aspects are considered in the planning and organization of activities.

As decided at the biannual meeting of the Gymnastics Federation (Förbundsmötet) April 23-24, 2022, these *Guidelines for Children's and Youth Gymnastics* should be implemented fully after 2024. *

Together, we create safe and sustainable environments within Swedish Gymnastics.

Stockholm February 16, 2022

Gymnastics Federation

Pelle Malmborg
Secretary General

* Added after the meeting April 23-24, 2022.

1. Guideline for conducting gymnastics training for children and youth

“At first glance, it may appear easy to group young people within their sport, with groupings based on age and level of ambition. At the same time, it is extremely important not to simply group according to year of birth or based on assumptions about ambition. Rather, groupings should be carefully considered, not seen as permanent and the adults' aim must be to group based on the best interests of each individual.”

- The Swedish Sports Confederation's (RF) guidelines for children's and youth sports

The guidelines for how we conduct children's and youth gymnastics regulate training within the Swedish Gymnastics Federation and are binding on its member clubs.

For children's and youth activities (i.e., under the age of 18 years) the following applies:

1. The rights of the child are at the forefront of training conducted by the club, which means that children and youth are offered, as far as possible, comprehensive training, the possibility to have influence over, and the responsibility for their sports, plus the opportunity to practice several different sports.
2. Children and youth active in gymnastics are given the opportunity to play sports together, regardless of gender, transgender identity or expression, ethnicity, religion or other belief, sexual orientation, or disability. It is the duty of the club to ensure that the wishes of the active members are being carried out to the greatest possible extent. Joint training is an obvious alternative when dividing into training groups.

By joint training we mean training in mixed groups regardless of gender, transgender identity, or expression. Joint training can also involve training opportunities with athletes from several clubs.

3. The club recognizes Swedish Gymnastics' development model and plans its activities accordingly in order to conduct age-appropriate training.

By age-appropriate training we mean the right type of training, adapted to the biological age and psychosocial maturity of the gymnast.

4. The club ensures that all coaches follow the *Swedish Gymnastics Code of Conduct*.
5. The club requests a limited register extract from the disclosure and barring service (judicial register) from anyone employed or volunteering in the club and/or who has direct and regular contact with children. References/background checks are recommended for new coaches.
6. The club follows the Swedish Gymnastics Federation's current educational requirements for its coaches regarding ages and qualifications.
7. The club adjusts the number of coaches and assistant coaches according to the group's level and size.

By "level" we mean both the level of maturity and ambition of the participants as well as the level of difficulty in the exercise.

8. The club has at least one adult (over 18 years old) present at every training session and competition.
9. The club has a responsibility to pay attention to the physical and mental health of active gymnasts and coaches. Growing bodies and one-sided training increases the risk of repetitive strain injuries. Balance between exercise, rest and other leisure activities is necessary.
10. The club appoints a responsible adult (responsible for children and youth) who manages issues related to children's rights in accordance with the Swedish Gymnastics Federation's *Guidelines for performance-oriented club environments*.
11. The club ensures that children and youth activities have a documented and active support and reporting system to ensure the safety of both participants and young leaders.
12. The club avoids situations where one coach/adult is alone with one or more children and/or youth in situations that may be perceived as sensitive or inappropriate for integrity reasons. The club is also aware of how private contact (both physical contact and contact via social media) takes place between coaches and individual children and youth.

Articles of the Convention on the Rights of the Child linked to this guideline:

Article 2: All children are equally valuable and have the same rights. No one may be discriminated against.

Article 6: Children have the right to life, survival and development.

Article 12: Children have the right to express their opinion and be heard in all matters concerning the child. The child's opinions must be taken into account, based on the child's age and maturity.

Article 13: Children have the right to freedom of expression; to think and express their opinions, with respect for other people's rights.

Article 19: Children shall be protected against all forms of physical or psychological violence, injury or abuse, neglect or negligent treatment, abuse or exploitation, including sexual abuse.

Article 24: Children have the right to the best possible health, access to health care and rehabilitation. Traditional practices that are harmful to children's health should be abolished.

Article 31: Children have the right to play, rest and leisure.

2. Guideline for conducting gymnastics competitions for children and youth

"According to many children and youth, an important part of sports is to work hard, use the body and be challenged in relation to both oneself and others. It is the struggle in the moment which matters for the feeling of enjoyment, rather than achieving sporting success in the long run. The experience of feeling excited about how it will go, overcoming their nervousness and experiencing feelings of joy and disappointment are for many important parts of the sports experience. The end result thus becomes important and should be allowed to be so. On the other hand, it is of the utmost importance that we do not allow the end result to have long-term consequences or affect the individual child or young person's opportunities for sporting development."

- The Swedish Sports Confederation's (RF) guidelines for children's and youth sports

The guidelines for how we conduct children's and youth gymnastics training apply to all competitions within the Swedish Gymnastics Federation and are binding on its member clubs.

For competitions in children's and youth gymnastics, the following applies:

1. Children can participate in competitions from the year they turn 7, initially in the local area and in simple forms.
2. Youth can participate in national competitions from the year they turn 13.

However, it is important to facilitate opportunities to meet other gymnasts, even for disciplines with few practitioners spread across the country. Therefore, younger gymnasts (but not younger than 7 years old) in certain disciplines are allowed to participate in national competitions if:

- the competition has rules adapted for the target group and
- it is not possible to arrange regional competitions.

National competitions for younger athletes shall be evaluated annually to actively work to create opportunities to meet locally for the younger children with the long-term goal that national competitions should take place in accordance with point 2.

3. According to the *Swedish Sports Confederation's guidelines for children's and youth sports*, the 13-year age limit applies for participation in national championships (USM, JSM, SM), national competitions that require qualification, tryouts for national teams and international competitions.

Comment:

In exceptional cases, athletes under the age of 13 may be allowed to participate in an international competition if it has rules adapted to the target group and if:

- conditions are considered better (such as geographical proximity), or
- special justification is given for why participation should be allowed (e.g., social contexts).

4. Adapted rules, including assessment regulations, for children and youth must be included in all disciplines. Responsibility for this belongs to the national competition committees. The work should be carried out in close cooperation with regional committees or working groups where available.
5. An alternative competition league (in addition to the Swedish Championship leagues) for children and youth will eventually be available in all disciplines. Responsibility for this belongs to the national competition committees. The work should be carried out in close cooperation with regional committees or working groups where available.
6. Results should not be the focus of attention in children's gymnastics.

By "not the focus of attention" we mean that we do not unnecessarily need to create an interest in, for example, the presentation of results.

For children's competitions, the following applies:

- **For competitions with a minimum age of 7-9 years:**
 - No points are awarded during the competition.
 - Leaders can be given a complete list of results after the competition.
 - No results are reported at the award ceremony or on the internet.
 - No ranking of athletes/teams takes place at the competition.
 - Any certificates and/or participant medals are given to every athlete.
- **For competitions with a minimum age of 10-12 years:**
 - Athletes/teams' points may be awarded during the competition.
 - Leaders receive a complete list of results after the competition.
 - No results are reported on the internet.
 - After the competition, the first three athlete/team medals are awarded, and the others are placed in fourth place and presented in alphabetical order. If the class has only four starters, only one and two are awarded medals and others share third place.
 - Any certificates and/or participant medals are given to every athlete.

7. Ranking lists should not appear in children's gymnastics.
8. The Swedish Gymnastics Federation is working towards further compliance over time with the *Swedish Sports Confederation's guidelines for children and youth sports* and has a restrictive approach when it comes to exceptions that are allowed. All divisions in different national competitions and disciplines are stated in the *Swedish Gymnastics Federation's technical regulations*.

Articles of the Convention on the Rights of the Child linked to this guideline:

Article 2: All children are equally valuable and have the same rights. No one may be discriminated against.

Article 6: Children have the right to life, survival and development.

Article 13: Children have the right to freedom of expression; to think and express their opinions, with respect for other people's rights.

Article 19: Children shall be protected against all forms of physical or psychological violence, injury or abuse, neglect or negligent treatment, abuse or exploitation, including sexual abuse.

Article 24: Children have the right to the best possible health, access to health care and rehabilitation. Traditional practices that are harmful to children's health should be abolished.

Article 31: Children have the right to play, rest and leisure.

3. Guidelines regarding training groups divided by age and/or skills, selection and drafting

"Permanent level division and early selection have been shown to have a negative effect on both the feeling of belonging and competence, regardless of the level in which the practitioner is placed."

- The Swedish Sports Confederation's guidelines for children's and youth sports

The guidelines for how we conduct children's and youth gymnastics training regulates training within the Swedish Gymnastics Federation and are binding on its member clubs.

3.1 Guideline for children's gymnastics (i.e., up to the age of 12)

Children's expectations and ambitions of their sports need to vary over time. Every child and youth needs to have the opportunity to find new motivation and goals, but also to have the right not to be able or willing to formulate any sporting goals at all."

- The Swedish Sports Confederation's guidelines for children's and youth sports

1. Selection and drafting should not occur in children's gymnastics. Permanent level grouping is similar to selection.
2. Grouping by gymnastics skills should not occur as a first alternative, without first having considered the positive and/or negative consequences of grouping by:
 - Age - Do the children have the same level of development and rate of development (degree of physical, cognitive, and emotional maturity) within the same age range in the group?
 - Ambition - Children's and youth expectations of, and ambitions for their sports need to be allowed to vary over time. Do the conditions in the group allow for that?

Instead, level-adapted training is recommended based on the active members' interest, development, safety aspects and applicable competition rules to ensure they can train in the same group, according to individual adaptation and conditions.

By level grouping we mean training groups divided based on skills or level of knowledge.

By permanent level grouping we mean a group which lacks the possibility to change or modify its composition.

By level adaptation we mean training where in certain exercises the group is divided into smaller groups based on level of knowledge and skills.

By individual adaptation we mean that the training is adapted to everyone based on interest, skill, knowledge and maturity level. Individualized training can be carried out regardless of how the training group is composed.

3. Elite-oriented gymnastics does not feature as a phenomenon or a concept in activities for children under 13 years of age.

Comment:

The children's best interests must always guide every decision regarding the child and the children themselves must be given the opportunity to be involved and to influence their training. As a club, the guiding principle should be to continuously invest in the well-being of its members to ensure they stay in the club for as long as possible.

In team disciplines, it may be appropriate to compete with more than one team, at the same or at different competing levels, from the same training group. In this case, the team must be put together based on criteria other than elitism. The goal should be to involve as many athletes as possible to ensure that everyone has an active role in the competition/event. This may mean that it is sometimes beneficial to divide the training group into several smaller competition teams.

3.2 Guideline for youth gymnastics (i.e., between 13-18 years old)

"In early adolescence, it is especially important to safeguard cohesion and to actively counteract various forms of selection and exclusion. This requires a flexible approach that is willing to try to meet the needs of each individual practitioner."

- The Swedish Sports Confederation's guidelines for children's and youth sports

1. Selection and drafting should not occur in youth gymnastics. Permanent level grouping is similar to selection.
2. Grouping by gymnastics skills/level may occur. First and foremost, training should be level-adapted based on the interests and development (physical, cognitive, and emotional maturity) of the gymnast, safety aspects and potential competition rules to facilitate that they, according to individual circumstances, can train together.

Comment:

The focus will continue to be on lifelong participation in sports and long-term development rather than short-term results. In youth gymnastics, it is possible that some members of the group do not participate to the same extent in competitions as other members of the same group. As long as everyone is welcomed to participate based on their skill/level and in a safe environment, gymnasts can be allowed to compete at different levels or on different numbers of apparatus.

The youths' best interest must always guide every decision regarding their training and the gymnasts themselves must be given the opportunity to be involved and to influence their training. As a club, the guiding principle should be to continuously invest in the well-being of its members to ensure they stay in the club for as long as possible.

In team disciplines, it may be appropriate to compete with more than one team from the same training group at the same or at different levels. The goal should be to involve as many athletes, and gymnastic apparatuses, as possible to ensure that everyone has an active role in the competition/event. This may mean that it is sometimes beneficial to divide the training group into several smaller competition teams.

3.3 Guideline for activities at JSM and SM level, as well as a specialized team appointed by the Swedish Gymnastics Federation

"A few years into adolescence, some of those who, still or for the first time, dream of engaging in elite sports need to gain sufficient knowledge of what it means to make an elite investment in the sport in question."

- The Swedish Sports Confederation's guidelines for children's and youth sports

1. Selection or drafting based on ability may occur.
2. Permanent level grouping may occur.

Tryouts may occur on certain conditions for a specialized team appointed and managed by the Swedish Gymnastics Federation. These terms and conditions must be clearly communicated to everyone involved.

3. Elite-oriented gymnastics does not feature as a phenomenon or a concept, in activities for children under 13 years of age.

Comment:

The club must carefully consider how any selection should be carried out based on keeping as many members as possible, for as long as possible. As a club, you must have clear guidelines regarding selection and drafting based on ability, which members and parents/guardians should be well informed about. The club must also always be able to offer training even for those who do not reach JSM, SM level or do not want to be at that level. Here, collaboration between different clubs can be a solution.

In team disciplines, another solution may be to set up competitions at different levels within the same training group in order to motivate and keep people engaged for as long as possible.

For elite athletes under the age of 18, it is the parent/guardian who is responsible for the conditions if the active person is to be included in such activities. The club members decide whether elite-oriented training should exist or not and how it should be organized and conducted, within the framework of the club's statutes and Swedish Gymnastics Strategic Plan. Elite commitment, according to RF's definition, means demanding, specialized and organized sports activities with stated performance and result goals.

3.4 Guideline for the national team and competitions at international level

"Elite commitment, (according to RF's definition), means demanding, specialized and organized sports activities with stated performance and result goals. It is to this set of requirements, and what it entails, that the athlete with elite sport dreams need to relate."

- The Swedish Sports Confederation's guidelines for children's and youth sports

1. Selection and drafting take place for the Swedish Gymnastics Federation's national team and for international championships, through tryouts. This is done based on the set requirements in each discipline.

2. Elite-oriented gymnastics does not feature as a phenomenon or a concept, in activities for children under 13 years of age.

Comment:

Within the national team and at the international competition level, performance improvement and good competition results are indicative for selection. Gymnastics is one of those sports where the amount of training many times, even at a relatively young age, can periodically be extensive, to enable athletes to reach the elite sports level in the future.

If a gymnast under the age of 18 is to be included in such activities, it is the parent/guardian who is responsible for the conditions. The club members decide whether elite-oriented training should exist or not and how it should be organized and conducted, within the framework of the club's statutes and Swedish Gymnastics Strategic Plan. Elite commitment, according to RF's definition, means demanding, specialized and organized sports activities with stated performance and result goals.

Articles of the Convention on the Rights of the Child linked to these guidelines:

Article 3: In all decisions concerning children, what is considered to be the child's best interests must be taken into account in the first place.

Article 12: Children have the right to express their opinion and be heard in all matters concerning the child. The child's opinions must be taken into account, based on the child's age and maturity.

Article 13: Children have the right to freedom of expression; to think, think and express their opinions, with respect for other people's rights.

4. Failure to follow the guidelines for children's and youth gymnastics

"All adults - regardless of role in sport - are responsible for children and youth in their vicinity and the activities they are part of or responsible for. Every adult is therefore expected to act when a child or youth signals that something is not right. To be able to act when a child or youth is not feeling well or when something has happened, protocols and follow-up are crucial. "

– The Swedish Sports Confederation's guidelines for children's and youth sports

The sports movement itself must, at all levels, handle matters that may violate the sport's own regulations, the RF's statutes, the Swedish Gymnastics Federation's statutes and/or the sports confederation's statutes, as well as the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child.

Raising issues with the activities of your club:

1. If you have a problem with something in your club, you should first communicate your views (perceived problems) to the responsible coach.
2. If you feel, for any reason, that you cannot reach out to the coach directly, then you should turn to the club's board. The board is responsible for initiating and maintaining a dialogue with the coach concerned. The board is responsible for the club's activities and its leaders, in accordance with the club's statutes.
3. If there are any hindrance to contacting the club's board, such as personal connections or if the concerns are linked to the club's board, then you can turn to the Swedish Gymnastics Federation nationally (*Gymnastikombudsman*) or regionally. The Swedish Gymnastics Federation can and will support the club to comply with the RF's and its own statutes and can seek help from the relevant region.
4. For support in the dialogue with the club's board or for guidance in your contact with the Swedish Gymnastics Federation, you can contact the RF/Sisu district you belong to. There are experts in children's and youth sports who can help you further.
5. If a case cannot be handled by either the club, the Swedish Gymnastics Federation or the RF/SISU district, you can contact the *Idrottsombudsmannen* at the Swedish Sports Confederation or use the anonymous and encrypted whistle blower service, where the sports ombudsman receives complaints.

Raising issues with the Swedish Gymnastics Federation's activities

1. Communicate your views (perceived problems) to the person responsible for the activity.
2. If you are unsure of whom to contact, if you feel that you are not being listened to or if you continue to feel worried about something in the Gymnastics Federation's own activities, then you should contact the *Gymnastikombudsman*, gymnastikombudsman@gymnastik.se
3. You can also contact the sports ombudsman at the Swedish Sports Confederation or use the anonymous and encrypted whistle blower service, where the sports ombudsman receives complaints, idrottsombudsmannen@rf.se

Glossary of terms:

GLOSSARY OF TERMS

Age	In everyday speech, it usually refers to chronological age, which is measured in the number of years and months. Chronological age is not always a relevant measure of development and maturity, therefore in sports biological age and psychosocial maturity should be taken into account.
Age-adapted training	The right training at the right age that is adapted to the biological age and psychosocial maturity.
Comprehensive training	Varied training that includes coordination, mobility, strength, speed and endurance, both physically and mentally.
Child rights perspective	The approach through which the organization in general, and the leaders in it, will work actively to protect the rights of the child in accordance with the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child and in accordance with the Swedish Sports Confederation's guidelines for children and youth sports. The child rights and child perspective (below) mean that adults in one way or another relate to how a child could feel, think or act in a certain context.
Child perspective	The approach through which the organization in general, and the leaders in it, will work actively to protect the rights of the child in accordance with the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child and in accordance with the Swedish Sports Confederation's guidelines for children and youth sports. The child rights and child perspective (below) mean that adults in one way or another relate to how a child could feel, think or act in a certain context
Child 's perspective	The child's perspective requires the adult to ask the individual child what he or she wants or feels. The Swedish Sports Confederation's guidelines for children's and youth sports also state that the sports movement at all levels must pay attention to children's and youth experiences and views. Children and youth should therefore be encouraged to give their views on the activities in which they are involved.
Competition	A specially arranged activity where several people or teams measure their skills in a particular area in order to rank the participants/teams. In a competition, there is usually one winner and one or more losers.
Elite activity	The activity that meets the requirements to be at the uppermost level in Sweden or internationally in gymnastics.
Elite commitment	Demanding, specialized and organized sports activities with stated performance and result goals.
Individual adaptation	Training adapted to everyone based on interest, skill, knowledge and maturity level. Individualized training can be carried out regardless of how the training group is composed.
Joint training	Gender mixed training. Training together regardless of gender, transgender identity or expression. Joint training can also involve training opportunities with athletes from several clubs.
Level adaptation	Training where in certain exercises the group is divided based on level of knowledge and skills.
Level grouping	Where training groups are divided based on skills, age and/or level of knowledge.

Local area	Locally in the same city/region or similar.
Not the focus of attention	Do not create unnecessarily interest in, for example, performance.
One-sided training	The opposite of comprehensive training, i.e. training that is largely focused on one or a few exercises, elements or on the development of one or a few qualities or specific skills.
Permanent level grouping	Groups which lack the possibility to change or modify its composition.
Ranking	A scale that arranges facts/people according to a given system.
Ranking list	Shows a relationship between at least two things/people where one has a higher or lower ranking than the other. Ranking can also mean being ranked equally.
Results list	A summary of all participants' results.
Results report	System for saying, showing or projecting results so participants and/or audiences can take part.
Selection and drafting	To select the best at that time or those who in the future are judged to be the best for competition, camps, teams or training groups. A form of selection that means that the best at a given time gain advantages in competitions, are selected in a team, get more training time, etc.
Training	Activities that aim to increase and/or maintain one or more capacities, both physical, mental and social. Can be both organized and non-organized.
Tryouts	Tryouts/tests for a specific task or for a specific group/team.

References

In preventing that the *Guidelines for children's and youth gymnastics* becomes incorrect due to websites being changed or moved, no links to documents are provided here. To read more about the rules and decisions made at any given time, please refer to the respective website.

To read more about the *Swedish Sports Confederation's guidelines for children's and youth sports*, please refer to the Swedish Sports Confederation's website www.rf.se.

The following documents can be found on the Swedish Gymnastics Federation's website www.gymnastik.se:

- The Swedish Gymnastics Federation's statutes
- The Swedish Gymnastics Federation's code of conduct
- The Swedish Gymnastics Federation's development model
- The Swedish Gymnastics Federation's guidelines for performance-oriented club environments
- The Swedish Gymnastics Federation's technical regulations and all regulations for disciplines and competition
- The Swedish Gymnastics Federation's training requirements for leaders
- The Swedish Gymnastics Federation's guidelines for clubs' children and youth officers
- The Swedish Gymnastics Federation's recommendation on stretching