

# General Principles for Child-Related Measures

(Cabinet Decision on December 22, 2023)

[Explanatory Material]

## Children-Centered Society advocated in the General Principles

– Society where all children and young people can physically, mentally and socially live a happy life –

In accordance with the spirit of the Constitution of Japan, the Basic Act on Children's Policy, and the Convention on the Rights of the Child, a **society where all children and young people** can build the foundation for their lifelong character formation and can **equally grow soundly as independent individuals**, and **can maintain their well-being physically, mentally and socially into the future**, with **their rights being protected equally, irrespective of their physical or mental conditions and the environment they find themselves in.**

All children and young people, while acquiring knowledge necessary for their daily lives with assistance from their parents and guardians and society as a whole:

- can grow healthily both mentally and physically;
- can accept themselves as they are and feel themselves important (have self-esteem), with their individuality and diversity being respected and their dignity valued, and can live a happy life according to their individual wishes;
- can acquire competencies for thriving in society through diverse play and learning and experiences;
- can take on challenges freely depending on their hopes and motivations for achieving their dreams and wishes, and can carve out their own future;
- can make diverse selections freely without being forced to accept stereotypical views and values, and can broaden their own potential;
- can receive diverse support for forming their own views, and can express such views and participate in society;
- can solve and overcome problems with support from adults around them and society as a whole, even when they have anxieties, worries, or troubles;
- are protected from abuse, bullying, corporal punishment and inappropriate guidance, violence, financial exploitation, sexual crime and violence, disaster and accident, etc. and can get help in a difficult situation, and can live safely and securely without being discriminated against or isolated or becoming impoverished; and
- can have dreams and hopes regarding working, making a family with someone, and being a parent.

Additionally, those who are in their twenties and thirties:

- can live a social life as they wish with a secure economic base and can have future prospects;
- can continue participating in society in accordance with their individual hopes and motivations, while balancing work and life appropriately, instead of being forced to give up a career goal they wish to achieve;
- can make a family, have and raise children, and can start parenting without worries, depending on their individual hopes;
- can have positive relationships with their children and enjoy child-rearing in a happy state while receiving support from society and having self-esteem. Under such environment, children can grow in a state of happiness.

- (i) Children and young people can leverage their motivations and capacities naturally as they wish, with their dignity respected and valued. Individuals' wish to have and raise children can be achieved. This is very important for ensuring that children and people raising children are able to surely pursue happiness.
- (ii) As a result, we will aim to bring about a significant change in the current trend of a declining birthrate and depopulation, foster young people who will play a leading role in the future, and strengthen the sustainability of the Japanese society and the economy as a whole.

This will result in creating social values and increasing happiness for all people, not limited to children, young people, and people taking care of children.

## Basic Policies Concerning Child-Related Measures

In accordance with the spirit of the Constitution of Japan, the Basic Act on Children's Policy, and the Convention on the Rights of the Child, the basic policies consist of the following six pillars.

### **(i) To recognize children and young people as independent actors holding rights, respect their diverse individualities and characteristics, guarantee their rights, and seek their best interest at present and in the future**

- Children and young people are born with rights to independently express opinions, participate in society, make selections and decisions, and achieve self-fulfillment, while establishing themselves as independent individuals with support from their parents and/or guardians and society as a whole. It is necessary to respect them as individuals with diverse individualities, guarantee their rights, and seek their best interest at present and in the future. With an attitude of "being with children," society-wide efforts should be made to support self-selection, self-decision, and self-fulfillment of children and young people.
- It is required to ensure that children will not be subject to any discriminatory treatment depending on their rearing environment, etc. Children should be protected from abuse, bullying, violence, etc. and be given relief.

### **(ii) To act with children and youth while respecting the views of children, young people, and people raising children, hearing their opinions, and having dialogues**

- Through forming and expressing opinions and views concerning themselves and expressing such opinions and through participating in society, children and young people exercise their influence on society. Adults should respect the opinions of children and young people in accordance with their age and degree of development from the perspective of seeking their best interest.
- Adults should offer support to children and young people for the formation of opinions, which is indispensable for their expression of opinions and participation in society, and should endeavor to create a favorable environment for them to express opinions. Due consideration should be given to children and young people who are in a difficult situation or who have relatively difficulty in being heard their opinions and views under various circumstances.

### **(iii) To make seamless responses and offer sufficient support to children, young people, and people raising children in accordance with their life stages**

- Society as a whole should offer support to children and young people as required depending on their situations, seamlessly without breaks at certain ages until they become able to live a social life as they wish.
- For both men and women, parenting starts prior to childbirth and continues even after infancy until children grow to adults while passing through the stages of school age, puberty, and adolescence. With such awareness, society as a whole should support people raising children throughout children's life stages.

### **(iv) To secure a favorable rearing environment and endeavor to eliminate poverty and disparities so that all children and young people can grow in well-being**

- The formation of stable attachment should be guaranteed for children from their infancy so that all children and young people can have many comfortable places where they can stay safely with peace of mind, with their personalities and characteristics mutually respected, based on such attachment. Efforts should be made to ensure that all children and young people develop a feeling of self-esteem and self-worth through diverse learning and various experiential activities and outdoor activities, grow in well-being, and live a social life as they wish, with their dignity respected and valued.
- Meticulous support and reasonable consideration should be given to all children, young people, and families in a difficult situation, depending on their individual attributes and needs for support, without leaving no one behind.

### **(v) To stabilize foundations of livelihoods of the younger generation and eliminate bottlenecks that hinder the younger generation from hoping for and realizing marriage and child-rearing from their viewpoints, while treating their diverse values and views as a premise**

- It should be ensured that the younger generation can have chances to leverage their capacities in society and can secure income at present and have future prospects during the so-called "rush hour of life," when various life events occur one after another.
- It is important to respect diverse values and views as a premise and ensure that young people will not suffer disadvantages regardless of any choices they make. Sincerely listening to opinions of the younger generation, society as a whole should offer support from the viewpoints of young people, depending on their wishes, when they independently decide to get married and have and raise children. As the number of dual-income households are increasing and an increasing number of parents want to continue working after marriage or childbirth, it is important to assist them with their efforts for achieving work-life balance. Accordingly, measures should be taken to promote balancing of work and childcare by both men and women and to change the current situation where the burden of childcare is mainly borne by women and encourage men to positively participate in housework and child-rearing.

### **(vi) To ensure the comprehensiveness of the measures and prioritize collaboration with relevant ministries and agencies, local governments and private organizations.**

# Important Matters Concerning Child-Related Measures

Important matters for achieving a Children-Centered Society are presented below by life stage with the aim of providing easy-to-understand explanations from the viewpoints of children and young people.

## 1. Important matters throughout all life stages

- Sharing of the recognition by society as a whole that children and young people are independent actors holding their own rights (dissemination of the Basic Act on Children's Policy; promotion of understanding on children's rights in providing education and care to children; etc.)
- Creation of opportunities for children to enjoy diverse play and experience (promotion of play and experiential activities; formation and establishment of lifestyles; development of children-centered communities; etc.)
- Seamless provision of health and medical services to children and young people (research and support for consultations on child health and development; and support for children and young people with chronic or orphan diseases)
- Measures against child poverty (educational support; support for a stable lifestyle; employment support for parents and/or guardians; and economic support)
- Support for handicapped children and children requiring medical care, etc. (strengthening of support systems in local communities; promotion of inclusive communities, special needs education; etc.)
- Measures to prevent child abuse, promotion of social childcare, and support for young carers (further strengthening of child abuse prevention measures; support for children and young people who need social childcare; and support for young carers)
- Suicide countermeasures for children and young people, and initiatives to protect children and young people from crime, etc. (the development of an environment for safe and secure Internet use; measures against sexual crime and violence; etc.)

## 2. Important matters by life stage

- From prebirth to infancy  
This is the most important period for a child to cultivate the foundation for their lifelong well-being and get a secure start for life.
  - Securement of seamless health and medical care from before pregnancy to the gestational period, childbirth, and infancy
  - Guarantee of children's growth from before birth to infancy and enrichment of their play
- School age and puberty  
School age is the period during which a child grows physically and mentally and develops a feeling of self-esteem, morality and social skills. In puberty when sexual maturation starts, a child starts to change physically and mentally and notices their own inner world. This is the period during which a child considers the meaning of their existence and their value and roles while having contact with other people and society, thereby establishing their identity.
  - Revival of a high-quality public education where children can spend time and learn with peace of mind
  - Creation of comfortable places for children
  - Provision of information and education concerning knowledge that children need to acquire before the age of adulthood
  - Prevention of bullying
  - Support for children who are chronically absent
  - Review of school rules
  - Prevention of corporal punishment and inappropriate guidance
  - Prevention of high school dropout and support after dropout
- Adolescence  
This is the period during which an adolescent adjusts themselves to a new environment after entering a university or starting to work, acquires expertise and professional abilities, and expands their potential with dreams and hopes for the future.
  - Support for enrollment in higher education institutions and enhancement of higher education
  - Support for job-seeking and stabilization of employment and economic bases
  - Support for adolescents wishing to get married and support for their new lives after marriage
  - Enhancement of consultation systems for young people with worries or anxieties and their families

## 3. Important matters concerning support for people raising children

To ensure that people raising children can have positive relationships with their children with feelings of self-esteem and relaxation without suffering from financial anxieties or loneliness or having difficulties in balancing work and childcare, and without feeling an excessive sense of responsibility or burden.

- Reduction of financial burden for child-rearing and education
- Support for child-rearing in local communities and support for education at home
- Promotion of balancing of work and childcare by both men and women and encouragement and expansion of men's positive participation in housework and child-rearing
- Support for single-parent families

## 1. Social participation of children and young people and reflection of their opinions and views

The Basic Act on Children's Policy provides for the necessity of ensuring opportunities for children and young people to express opinions and participate in society in accordance with their age and maturity and for the necessity of respecting their opinions and giving primary consideration to their best interests, as the basic concept of child-related measures. Additionally, the Act obliges the national and local governments to take measures necessary for broadly hearing and reflecting opinions of children and young people upon establishing, implementing and evaluating child-related measures. The Convention on the Rights of the Child provides for a child's right (every human being below the age of eighteen years) to express their views, and it is necessary to promote guarantee of their rights through implementation of the Convention.

Listening to opinions of children and young people and reflecting them in establishing measures and promoting social participation of children and young people roughly have the significance as follows.

- (i) Situations and needs of children and young people can be ascertained more accurately, and it will become possible to establish more workable measures.
- (ii) The experience of exerting certain influence on society and bringing about changes through expressing opinions and being listened to sufficiently will enhance a feeling of self-esteem and a sense of usefulness, and will strengthen independence of children and young people as members of society. This will eventually contribute to fostering future leaders of democracy.

Based on the idea that adults should create society together with children and young people, it is important to provide them with chances and opportunities to express opinions freely, diversely help them form their own opinions, and guarantee them with opportunities to participate in creating society. On that occasion, in consideration of a risk of becoming merely a formality, efforts are required to actualize social participation of children and young people and truly reflect their opinions through devising various means.

- Promotion of participation of children and young people in the process of deciding national policies promotion of the initiative "こども若者★いけんぷらす(Children & Young People ★ Opinion Plus)"; collection of opinions from organizations that are mainly led by young people; appointment of children and young people as members of councils and social gatherings, etc. of ministries and agencies; and creation and dissemination of the guidelines for staffs in national and local governments)
- Promotion of initiatives by local governments (dissemination of the aforementioned guidelines and support for dispatch of facilitators; information provision including best practices; etc.)
- Enhancement of opportunities for participating in society and expressing opinions
- Devices for reflecting diverse opinions in measures
- Fostering of human resources who support social participation of children and young people and reflection of their opinions
- Development of an environment to facilitate activities of organizations that are mainly led by young people
- Investigations and studies concerning social participation of children and young people and reflection of their opinions

## 2. Initiatives to serve as common bases for child-related measures

- Evidence-Based Policy Making (EBPM) for achieving a Children-Centered Society (development of mechanisms and systems; and compilation of data and establishment of evidence)
- Securement and fostering of and support for human resources who engage in measures relating to children, young people, and people raising children
- Building and strengthening of comprehensive support systems in local communities (utilization of Regional Councils for Children in Need of Protection and Regional Councils for Support for Children and Young People; nationwide expansion of Centers for Children and Families; etc.)
- Easing of procedures and clerical burdens relating to child-rearing, and information provision for providing support as required to those in need of support
- Awareness-raising for creating a society friendly to children, young people, and people raising children

## 3. System for promoting measures

- The national government's system for promoting measures (Council for the Promotion of Child-Related Measures chaired by the Prime Minister; formulation of the Action Plan for Achieving a Children-Centered Society; exercise of authority by Minister of State for Policies Related to Children and the Children and Families Council; etc.)
- Setting of numerical goals and indices
- Promotion of local governments' formulation of Plans for Children and collaboration with local governments
- International collaboration and cooperation
- Securement of stable financial resources
- Consideration based on Article 2 of the Supplementary Provisions of the Basic Act on Children's Policy

# Goals and Indices in the General Principles for Child-Related Measures

Attachment 1 shows numerical goals for achieving a "Children-Centered Society" advocated in the General Principles from the views of children, young people, and people raising children, and Attachment 2 shows indices for ascertaining their current situations.

\* Indices for verifying the progress of concrete measures are set in the Action Plan for Achieving a Children-Centered Society.

Society to be aimed at: Children-Centered Society

## Goals (Attachment 1)

(Numerical goals)

Percentage of people who consider that "efforts are progressing for achieving a Children-Centered Society"	70%
Percentage of children who are "satisfied with their life as a whole"	70%
Percentage of children and young people who "like who they are now " (level of self-esteem)	70%
Percentage of children who have acquired social skills	80%
Percentage of children and young people who consider that "they have own individuality"	90%
Percentage of children and young people who consider that "there is someone who gives help to them"	Maintain the status quo (97.1%)
Percentage of children and young people who consider that "they are living social life and daily life smoothly"	70%
Percentage of children and young people who consider that "their opinions on child-related measures are listened to"	70%
Percentage of children and young people who "have bright hopes for their future"	80%
Percentage of children and young people who consider that "Japan has a bright future"	55%
Percentage of people who consider that "efforts are progressing for achieving a society friendly to marriage, pregnancy, children and child-rearing"	70%
Percentage of people raising children who consider that "there is someone they can rely on for daily care and medical care for children"	90%

## Indices (Attachment 2)

- Percentage of people who consider that "children are independent actors holding rights"
- Child poverty rate
- Rate of entrustment to foster parents, etc.
- Number of consultations on child abuse handled by child guidance centers
- Number of suicides among elementary, junior high and high school students
- Maternal mortality rate
- Percentage of children and young people who have at least one place where they can feel safe
- Number of serious bullying cases
- Number of children and students who are chronically absent
- High school dropout rate
- University enrollment rate
- Average wage of young people
- Proportion of never-married at exact age 50
- Percentage of never-married persons who "intend to get married someday"
- Total fertility rate
- Live births
- Average ideal/intended number of children of married couples
- Percentage of couples who cite "It costs too much to raise and educate children" as reasons for not realizing their ideal number of children
- Rate of child care leave taken by men
- Number of hours spent for housework by men with a child younger than 6
- Poverty rate of single adult household with at least one child

etc.