Q & A
Sports/youth Administration
The changes that have taken place in recent years in the social environment connected with eating habits have disrupted the eating habits of children, resulting in unbalanced diets and the skipping of breakfasts. For example, according to the “FY2000 Survey on the Eating Habits of Schoolchildren,” only 80% or so of elementary and junior high school students regularly eat breakfast. Also, according to “National Nutrition Survey 1997,” 32.7% of senior high school students were in the habit of skipping breakfast. It is important to encourage children to have proper eating habits to ensure a healthy life in the future.

To this end, it is necessary for children to have proper knowledge about diets and to learn to determine for themselves how to ensure that their meals are nutritious. At schools, instruction on diets is given comprehensively at lunchtime, in home economics and physical education classes, during homeroom activities, and in the hours for integrated study. MEXT supports these measures at schools by creating and distributing teaching materials on eating habits.

According to the “Physical Strength and Motor Fitness Survey” conducted by the Ministry of Education, Culture, Sports, Science and Technology (MEXT), child fitness is on a downtrend despite the fact that the physiques of children (aged 11 in FY2002) are improving compared with those of their parents’ generation (aged 11 in FY1972 [30 years ago]).

In a report made on September 30, 2002, entitled “Comprehensive Measures to Improve Child Fitness,” the Central Council for Education pointed out the following factors as main contributors to the decline in child fitness.

1) Citizens, notably parents and guardians, no longer encourage children to play outside or play sports because they are not very aware of the importance of these activities.

2) In the environment surrounding children:
   - Lives become more convenient, which has led to a sedentary lifestyle for children.
   - Present children have less time, smaller space, and fewer friends, which are all essential elements for playing sports and playing outside.
   - There is a lack of instructors who can give appropriate instruction according to children’s development stages.
   - Schools do not give sufficient instruction to enable children to enjoy doing exercises because there are no experienced or specialist teachers.

People are concerned about a disturbance of children’s eating habits such as the increase in the number of children who skip breakfast. What measures is MEXT implementing against these problems?

The changes that have taken place in recent years in the social environment connected with eating habits have disrupted the eating habits of children, resulting in unbalanced diets and the skipping of breakfasts. For example, according to the “FY2000 Survey on the Eating Habits of Schoolchildren,” only 80% or so of elementary and junior high school students regularly eat breakfast. Also, according to “National Nutrition Survey 1997,” 32.7% of senior high school students were in the habit of skipping breakfast. It is important to encourage children to have proper eating habits to ensure a healthy life in the future.

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To provide children with the proper knowledge about diets, it is necessary to improve the quality of the teachers who give instruction on diets. MEXT therefore provides these teachers with the latest information and holds seminars and symposiums for teachers to exchange opinions on various diet-related themes.

Under the diet and nutrition teacher license system to be implemented in FY2005, diet and nutrition teachers, as specialists both in education and in nutrition, will play a leading role in giving guidance on diet at schools and will be committed to doing the following.
3) There are some problems in children’s lifestyles, including unbalanced diets and lack of sleep. In response to the report, MEXT is now conducting the following activities.

(1) Nationwide campaign projects to emphasize the importance of physical fitness by such measures as having children create posters and slogans on improving physical fitness

(2) Implementation of a program for face-to-face interaction and instruction with top athletes, in which children can experience the joy of playing sports under the instruction of first-class athletes.

(3) Creation and distribution of sports and health handbooks to motivate children to exercise and have regular habits.

(4) Enhancement of extracurricular sports club activities at schools by utilizing outside instructors

(5) Implementation of practical program to improve child fitness, in which model areas are designated throughout the nation to survey and analyze child fitness and lifestyles and to improve child fitness in a practical manner according to the local situation

MEXT expects citizens, notably parents and guardians, to understand the importance of child fitness and allow and encourage children to develop their mental, physical, and intellectual abilities in a well-balanced manner.
Due to a decrease in the number of children and changes made to the environment such as the popularization of games that children can enjoy playing by themselves, children these days have fewer opportunities to play with each other. Also, they have fewer opportunities to come into contact with local people. As a result, children not being able to express themselves or form good relationships with others in groups is a concern.

In view of this, it is important for children to have opportunities to play freely with friends who are in different school grades or have contact with other people in the neighborhood after school so that they will learn naturally how to get along with others, become familiar with social roles, and improve their ability to assert their own ideas. It is therefore necessary for more adults in the community to participate in activities to build a favorable environment for children in a planned manner.

MEXT formulated the “New Plan for Creating Spaces for Children,” which includes a project to establish “classrooms for children in local communities,” and has been carrying out this plan since FY2004. The plan aims at fostering the sound growth of children through the uniformed efforts of adults in the community to protect children and provide them with spaces where they can conduct various activities.

Specifically, centers for children, where they can conduct activities safely and comfortably, are established at schoolyards, extra classrooms, community halls, and children’s houses. At the centers, local residents, including retired teachers, university students, and people from youth/social education organizations, protect and instruct children as safety mangers and activity advisors.

At the centers, children are provided with opportunities to enjoy playing sports such as football and baseball, reading, playing musical instruments, playing old Japanese games (taketonbo and menko), learning English conversation from foreigners, and experiencing local traditional cultural events. Through these activities, children can not only meet friends who are in the same school grade but also enjoy teamwork with friends who are in different school grades and form relationships with various people.

With adults in the community participating as volunteers, it can be expected that children will actively interact with the adults not only in “classrooms for children in local communities” but on a day-to-day basis as well.

MEXT is carrying out various projects, including the aforementioned project to establish “classrooms for children in local communities,” and believes it important for local citizens to participate in and cooperate with these projects to provide children with opportunities to participate in numerous activities. MEXT therefore expects local communities to further support the administration in projects to bolster the local education of children (please visit the following website for details: http://www.ibasyo.com).

Q3

My child stays in his room to play games, and I am worried about this. I would like him to play cheerfully with his friends once in a way, but the number of play areas for children is decreasing. What measures are being taken to solve this problem?

The number of youngsters arrested for juvenile delinquency and crimes has remained at a high level, and serious juvenile crimes have taken place one after another. The situation is rather dire.

As a backdrop to this, in addition to a decline in social morals, the following factors related to social situations and the youth environment are thought to contribute to the outbreak of these crimes. They are intricately intertwined with each other.

(1) Disciplinary issues at home from infancy
(2) Approaches to instruction in schools
(3) Inadequate daily-life experience

Serious youth crimes frequently take place. Are there any countermeasures being implemented against this problem?
Extracurricular sports club activities are conducted as a part of school education under the supervision of each school, and school teachers play important roles in taking charge of and directing these sports activities. School children participate in extracurricular sports club activities voluntarily, and it is necessary for schools to enable them to conduct activities according to their individual abilities, aptitude, and interest on the basis of voluntarism. In recent years, because of the aging of school teachers and the fact that not all teachers can give instruction on sports events, the following problems are taking place at schools: (1) difficulty meeting the diversified needs of children and (2) children’s decreasing interest in playing sports. Also, due to a decrease in the number of school children participating in extracurricular sports club activities in society with a falling birthrate, there is an increasing number of cases in which certain sports club activities cannot be conducted because there are not enough members to form a team.

MEXT implements projects to promote the use of outside instructors for extracurricular activities to deal with the aforementioned problems.

Also, to provide school children with opportunities to enjoy various sports according to their needs, MEXT has designated certain test communities to carry out practical reach on promoting general school sports club activities so that multiple sports are available each season, joint school sports club activities where teams can be organized with members from several schools, and cooperation between school sports clubs and community sports clubs. Through these measures, MEXT is promoting extracurricular sports clubs activities.

(4) Less consideration for others and a diluted sense of connectedness between people in the midst of material prosperity

To deal with this situation, it is extremely important to teach children a sense of right and wrong, morals, the importance of human lives, and consideration for others at school, at home, and in the community. In dealing with children who have behavioral problems, it is necessary to instruct them with a resolute attitude based on the idea that actions deemed impermissible in society as a whole are also deemed impermissible to children, and even children should follow social rules and comply with laws and regulations.

As for school education, MEXT encourages schools to promote moral education that appeals to the spirits and the minds of children, heightens children’s awareness of rich humanity and sociability. For this purpose, MEXT promotes various experiential activities including experience of community service activities and outdoor and nature experiences. Also, MEXT is establishing support system in local communities, expanding the allocation of school counselors and establishing support teams comprising of schools, boards of education, and other related organizations to respond properly to school children with behavioral problems.

For education at home and in local communities, MEXT has been distributing “Pocketbooks for Home Education” since FY2004, in which tips for parenting (there is an especially large number of hints given for dealing with adolescents) are given. At the same time, MEXT is implementing projects to support youth with behavioral problems in making a recovery in cooperation with local youth organizations.

Following a murder case that took place in Sasebo City, Nagasaki Prefecture, in June 2004, in which an elementary school pupil murdered her classmate, MEXT formulated a program focusing on the problematic student behaviors with the following measures:

(1) Teaching children the importance of life
(2) Building an even better learning environment in which children can learn safely
(3) Better guidance on morals and manners in an information-oriented society
To ensure safety at schools, it is indispensable for local residents to support school-related people in their efforts to make schools safe. Many parents and guardians as well as local residents and organizations may want to do something to contribute to school safety. MEXT announced an urgent appeal for school safety in order to promote specific safety measures at schools and shows measures to be implemented based on cooperation among schools, households, local communities, and related organizations. In the appeal, MEXT requests local communities to do the following.

1. Organize volunteers who support schools in taking safety measures
MEXT expects PTAs as well as local youth organizations and residents’ associations to lead the organization of volunteers who will support schools in taking safety measures. The volunteer organization will conduct various activities both inside and outside schools to ensure children’s safety.

2. Build a network to share information about suspicious individuals
MEXT expects local communities to build a network to share information about suspicious individuals and to ensure the safety of school routes based on local characteristics. It is important that multilayered networks will be built for each school district, neighborhood, and municipality. The networks will organically interact with each other to function as a system to protect local children. MEXT wants local residents to participate in these activities.

3. Give more support to the “Children’s 110 House” project
The numbers of general households and merchants that support the “Children’s 110 House” project are increasing, and MEXT wants local communities as a whole to give more support to the project.

MEXT expects each local community to continue devising measures to ensure children’s safety at schools in view of the aforementioned matters.

It is important for schools to take safety control measures in cooperation with households and local-related organizations to enable children to receive education without worrying about safety.

MEXT has been fostering a “Safety and Security Project for Children” to improve safety at schools both in terms of hardware and software. Under the project, MEXT implemented a lot of measures, including the preparation of a risk control manual to prevent invaders from entering schools and a revision of the “School Facilities Improvement Guidelines” to make the crime prevention-related provisions of schools stricter.

In view of the unending stream of incidents threatening the safety of schoolchildren such as the case that took place at Uji Elementary School, MEXT announced an “Urgent Appeal on School Safety” in January 2004. This appeal, in order to promote specific safety measures at schools, summarizes important points for ensuring children’s safety at schools and shows measures to be implemented based on cooperation among schools, households, local communities, and related organizations.

The urgent appeal emphasizes that (1) each teacher and other school staff must be aware of the importance of risk control as the basis for ensuring school safety and should continuously verify and improve their own risk control.
manuals through practical crime prevention training and (2) must cooperate and work together with households, local communities, and related organizations to ensure children’s safety and that it is necessary to establish an organization of volunteers to support school safety measures such as patrolling inside and outside schools and a network to share information about suspicious individuals in local communities.

MEXT will continue to implement school safety measures systematically in cooperation with other related governmental agencies including the National Police Agency and encourage local communities to make concerted efforts to ensure children’s safety.

Filtering is a function that makes it impossible to view some harmful websites by allowing only data that meet predefined conditions or data that do not violate predefined conditions to pass through the filter. The function can be used by installing filtering software onto the PC or by applying to your Internet service provider for a filtering service.

Glossary
Filtering

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Through reading books, children can learn words, become inspired, enhance their own power of expression, foster their creativity, and make their lives more substantial. It is therefore essential for children to have a habit of reading books, and general households, local communities, and schools should work together to encourage children to read more books.

In December 2001, the Law on the Promotion of Children’s Reading Activities was promulgated and enforced. Based on the provisions of the law, a Basic Plan for the Promotion of Children’s Reading Activities was decided at a cabinet meeting in August 2002. Based on this basic plan, MEXT is taking the following measures:

1. Conducting a nationwide campaign to promote children’s reading activities
2. Giving subsidies to reading activities conducted by private organizations through the Children’s Dream Fund
3. Distributing Pocketbooks for Home Education, in which the importance of reading to children and children’s own reading activities is described
4. Increasing the number of books at school libraries, training teachers as librarians, and promoting reading activities based on cooperation among schools, households, and local communities
5. Conducting surveys and studies to enhance the service provided at public libraries, training librarians, and increasing the number of books at public libraries

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<th>Glossary</th>
<th>Children’s Reading Day</th>
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<td>The Law on the Promotion of Children’s Reading Activities (enacted in December 2001) designates April 23 as Children’s Reading Day for the purpose of helping citizens deepen their understanding and interest in children’s reading activities and encouraging children to actively read books. The national and local governments will implement diverse projects to promote reading activities for children, mainly on Children’s Reading Day. April 23 falls on the anniversary of the death of Shakespeare and Cervantes, and UNESCO declares April 23 as World Book and Copyright Day. Also, in Europe, notably in Spain, April 23 is St. Jordi’s Day, and people give books to one another on this day.</td>
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I hear that “toto” will change greatly, including higher odds.

Sales of the Sports Promotion Lottery “toto” have been used to subsidize projects to promote sports, supported by a lot of people. Unfortunately, however, sales have been decreasing year by year. According to the results of a survey, the extremely low odds, the difficulty of predicting the results, the troublesome purchasing method, and the lack of nearby stores selling the lottery tickets, have contributed to the decreasing sales.

To make “toto” more attractive, the lottery types will be more diversified by introducing a type with higher odds. Also, the method of selling tickets will be diversified by using IT on the condition that the age...
Anyone who raises a child has some things they are worried about. Whenever you are at a loss to know what to do about your child, just tell your problem to your family or friend; it might make you feel better. It is therefore important to build good relationships with family members or have good neighborhoods so that you can talk to them about any childrearing issues. As one of several possible solutions you can participate in parenting circles at community centers.

Also, if you are worried about your child’s growth and development and want to receive advice from experts, please feel free to use the consulting services on home education, language development, etc., provided by prefectures and municipalities.

It is also important to understand parenting before you have a serious problem. MEXT prepares Pocketbooks for Home Education, which contain tips for childrearing, including home education and discipline. These pocketbooks are printed in three volumes to match the development of children: Doki Doki Parenting for parents of babies and infants, Waku Waku Parenting for parents of lower elementary school to junior high school students, and Iki Iki Parenting for parents of upper elementary school to junior high school students.

The pocketbooks are utilized in daily childrearing at general households and widely used as text and reference materials at seminars on home education that are held throughout the country. The pocketbooks provide information on where to go for consulting services on parenting and where you can let your children have various experiences.

MEXT also distributes home education video programs for use by parents raising children, including a program introducing messages to new parents, a program showing childrearing by fathers, a program featuring Konishiki and a teddy bear, a program on the secrets of childrearing, and a program on adolescence, a wonderful time for both parents and children. These video programs are available at community centers across the country.

We will listen to the opinions of purchasers and make efforts to get “toto” to be enjoyed by more people.
Many people might give up enjoying sports partially because it is very troublesome for them to find sports facilities, instructors, and other people to enjoy sports with in their busy schedule.

MEXT believes it important to establish an environment in which anyone can enjoy playing sports locally throughout his/her life and is promoting the development of comprehensive community sports clubs, where (1) a wide age range, from children to adults, can participate in (2) a wide range of athletic events and activities according to (3) their own purpose (for making exchanges with comrades, for health, and for physical fitness).

These sports clubs are managed autonomously by local residents at nearby facilities, including school physical education facilities.

These comprehensive community sports clubs will enable anyone to enjoy sports whenever he/she wants to despite his/her busy schedule or even if he/she cannot privately find anyone to enjoy sports with.

As of July 2004, there are 1,117 comprehensive community sports clubs in 702 municipalities throughout Japan (according to a survey conducted by MEXT). You can ask your municipal government to introduce you to a nearby comprehensive community sports club. If there are no such clubs in your neighborhood, you can be introduced to a nearby sports circle, although the event and age group might be limited.

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According to the “Public Opinion Poll on Fitness and Sports” conducted by the Cabinet Office in February 2004, 41.2% of respondents answered that they were too busy working (housework, childrearing) when asked why they did not do any form of exercise or sports during the past year.

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At the Athens Olympic Games, Japan won a record-breaking 37 medals. What factors contributed to this marvelous performance?

At the Athens Olympic Games in August 2004, Japanese athletes showed wonderful performance and won a record-breaking 37 medals, including 16 gold medals. The whole country got excited at this prodigious feat.

In and after 1964, when the Tokyo Olympic Games was held, Japan’s international athletic competitiveness suffered a long, continuous decline compared with that of other countries.

In view of this, MEXT formulated the Basic Plan for the Promotion.
Sports satisfy our basic physical and mental needs by making us feel exhilarated and giving us a sense of achievement. Also, we can improve both our physical and mental health by doing sports continuously, improving our physical fitness, relieving mental stress, and preventing lifestyle-related diseases.

According to the results of the “Physical Strength and Motor Fitness Survey” conducted in 2003, adults who play sports at least once a week are superior to those who seldom play sports in terms of physical fitness in all age groups and for both sexes.

Also, in accordance with an increase in the percentage of adults who play sports at least once a week, the physical fitness of middle-aged and older people has improved compared with those five years ago. The number of those whose physical strength age is younger than their actual age is increasing.

Playing sports regularly is thus quite effective in keeping and promoting physical strength and health not only for growing children but also for adults, in particular middle-aged and older people. In the progress of an aging society, the importance of lifelong sports activities is highlighted also for preventing the elderly from needing long-term nursing care.

It is said that doing sports on a continuous basis is good for one’s health. What specific effects do lifelong sports activities bring about?

Chapter 2, Part 2

According to the plans of Sports in 2000, while the Japanese Olympic Committee (JOC) created the JOC Gold Plan.

According to these plans, competitive sports organizations implemented measures to strengthen the abilities of Japanese athletes. For example, they built consistent instruction systems to train junior athletes in Japan and turn them into top-level competitors in a systematic and planned manner.

The Japan Institute of Sports Sciences (JISS) was established in October 2001 to support sports organizations in the areas of sports medicine and science. For swimming, gymnastics, wrestling, synchronized swimming, etc., exclusive training facilities were established for intensive training.

In FY2003, the budget for projects to strengthen top-level competitors was greatly increased under the “Nippon Revival Project” with special attention to sports events for which the possibility of winning medals at international competitions was especially high.

Through these measures, Japanese athletes now have more opportunities to participate in first-class international competitions, thereby accumulating international experience and becoming able to fully display their abilities on a world stage.

The aforementioned efforts must have contributed to the excellent performance displayed by Japanese athletes at the Athens Olympic Games. Also, the athletes own strenuous efforts as well as the strong will of their instructors and other people involved contributed to their dramatic performance.

Chapter 2, Part 3
The doping issue attracted much attention at the Athens Olympic Games. A hammer thrower was deprived of his medal because of doping. What antidoping measures are being taken in Japan?

It is called “doping” if athletes use prohibited substances and methods to improve their athletic abilities, including stimulants, muscle relaxants, blood doping, and genetic doping.

Doping in sports is harmful in that (1) it is against the spirit of fair play in sports; (2) it impairs the competitors’ own health; and (3) it may lead to addiction and cause social damage. It is therefore important to promote antidoping activities.

Internationally, to boost antidoping activities in countries throughout the world, the World Anti-Doping Agency (WADA) was established, gaining worldwide support from those involved in sports as well as from officials and other related people in national governments. At WADA, Japan serves as executive director representing the Asian region and energetically contributes to the Agency’s activities.

Domestically, the Japanese Olympic Committee and the Japan Sports Association were engaged in antidoping activities in their capacities in cooperation with member organizations. In 2001, the Japan Anti-Doping Agency (JADA) was founded as an independent organization to conduct doping tests in Japan in a fair and neutral manner.

MEXT promotes antidoping activities in connection and cooperation with WADA and JADA. In Tokyo, in April 2004, MEXT hosted the first intergovernmental meeting in the Asian region to discuss antidoping problems in Asian countries. At the meeting, the participating governments decided to further improve the system to allow them to work in cooperation in the Asian region. In view of the importance of antidoping activities for clean sports activities, MEXT will make further efforts to prevent doping.

I hear that the national government is promoting a plan to establish a national training center to further improve Japan’s international athletic competitiveness. I would like to know the specific details of this plan.

To improve Japan’s international athletic competitiveness, it is necessary to provide top-level competitors with facilities where they can receive intense, continuous training. In view of international trends, top-level competitors need to be trained based on results obtained in the areas of sports medicine and science.

In foreign countries, national governments have established national training centers, where athletes can receive advanced training. Most of the countries that ranked high in the number of medals won at the Olympic Games have these national training centers, and Japan falls behind them.

MEXT launched a study survey on the establishment of a national training center, and the survey team, composed of experts in the field, examined how to establish a national training center and issued a report in July 2004. According to the report, MEXT started a project to establish a national training center.

The Japan Institute of Sports Sciences (JISS), established in 2004, have exclusive training facilities for gymnastics, swimming, wrestling, and some other events, and athletes receiving training for these events at JISS showed wonderful results at the Athens Olympic Games.

Japan’s national training center will be based in the Nishigaoka District in Kita-ku, Tokyo, where JISS is located, to fully utilize the functions and facilities of the Institute. The national center will be equipped with a 400-m track, indoor training facilities (to be used exclusively for indoor sports events), and lodging facilities. MEXT will complete the national training center in time for the Beijing Olympic Games in 2008, four years from now.

For winter sports, ocean sports and other water sports, and training at high altitudes, for which the national training center cannot provide enough training facilities, existing facilities will be utilized as training centers for each of these sports, and they will be networked with the national training center.