



# Youth Guidelines – Rules and Standards

## Youth Guidelines: Rules & Standards



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### ABOUT

Basketball is a great game that is played by millions of young people in the United States and around the world. Playing basketball fosters the development of peer relationships, self-esteem, leadership qualities, and physical health.

To date, however, the sport of basketball has lacked guidelines around health and wellness and consistent game play standards. To help foster player health, age- and stage-appropriate skill development, and a positive and enjoyable on-court experience for young people, the NBA and USA Basketball have developed a set of rules and standards to enhance the playing experience for young athletes.



These guidelines aim to combat the overemphasis on early competitive success and the lack of a clear development pathway through the sport – two issues that exist across youth sports, including basketball.

The NBA and USA Basketball are committed to helping shape a youth basketball environment that prioritizes the health and well-being of young athletes and promotes their enjoyment and development in the game.

- USA Basketball and the NBA announced a set of rules and standards for youth basketball competitions to enhance the developmen...

## RULES & STANDARDS

Basketball is played in countless settings and locations across the U.S. – and though the game remains fundamentally the same, there are many variables that can impact a young player’s experience. USA Basketball and the NBA want all players to enjoy the game and have a fun, developmentally appropriate experience.

Parents and coaches frequently ask certain questions, especially when their kids are young:

- How high should we set the basket?
- What size ball should we use?
- Should we play zone defense?

These are important questions, and we understand that playing with the correct equipment and establishing age-appropriate rules significantly impacts the experience for youth as they learn the game. Therefore, the NBA and USA Basketball have established detailed guidelines to help young players develop at a natural pace that is suitable to their age and physiological abilities.

### Rules and Standards Elements

USA Basketball and the NBA have worked closely with an expert working group on Playing Standards to develop age- and stage-appropriate rules and standards for youth basketball. Aligning with the Player Segmentation Model, these guidelines will help young players appropriately learn the fundamentals of the game, achieve and maintain early success, and provide enhanced long-term development.

### The rules and standards address four key areas:

- **Equipment & Court Specifications** (e.g., proper height of the basket, size of the ball, and court dimensions and lines).
- **Game Structure** (e.g., length of the game, scoring and timeouts).
- **Game Tactics** (e.g., equal playing time, player-to-player vs. zone defense, pressing vs. no pressing).
- **Game Play Rules** (e.g., use of a shot clock, substitutions, clock stoppage).

### Rules and Standards Charts

See below for detailed rules and standards information. Please keep in mind:

- The playing rules and standards below are to serve as guidelines and recommendations for those administering basketball competitions.

- USA Basketball and the NBA have adopted FIBA (International Basketball Federation) rules for the grades 9-12 age- segment and created progressive sets of rules and standards for younger age segments (ages 14 and under). Where a specific rule or standard is not explicitly indicated, the recommendation is to follow official FIBA rules.

- USA Basketball and the NBA will utilize these playing rules and standards in all events and competitions they may host.

*\*We understand that organizations and facilities may not always be able to accommodate all recommendations and that modifications will need to be made in certain instances due to practical limitations (e.g., inability to raise or lower the height of a basket, re-draw court lines, or not having a shot clock).*

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## EQUIPMENT AND COURT SPECIFICATIONS

Playing Segment	Size of Ball	Height of Basket	Size of Court	Distance of 3-Point Arc	Distance of Free-Throw Line
<b>Ages 7-8</b>	Boys and Girls size 5 (27.5")	8'	50'x42'	Not applicable	14'
<b>Ages 9-11</b>	Boys and Girls size 6 (28.5")	9'	74'x50'	Not applicable	14'
<b>Ages 12-14</b>	Girls size 6 (28.5") Boys size 7 (29.5")	10'	84'x50' or 94'x50'	19'9"	15'
<b>Grades 9-12</b>	Girls size 6 (28.5") Boys size 7 (29.5")	10'	94'x50'	22'2" or the next available line under 22'2"	15'

**Note:** 3-on-3 half-court play is also recommended for young players to foster enhanced participation and development.

### RATIONALE

**Distance of 3-Point Arc:** For 7-8 and 9-11 year-olds, although the 3-point arc may exist on the floor, all baskets made beyond this arc only count as two points. Therefore, the distance of the line is not applicable for these age segments. Eliminating the 3-point basket at these age segments will encourage players to shoot from within a developmentally-appropriate range. For 9th-12th graders, a 22'2" arc is preferred, but if this line is not on a court the next available line under 22'2" is recommended.

**Distance of Free-Throw Line:** 7-8 and 9-11 year-olds should take free throws 14 feet from the basket to develop proper form and increase success.

**Height of Basket:** Utilizing a lower basket height for 7-8 and 9-11 year-olds allows children to develop proper shooting form and increases the opportunity for shooting success.

**Scoring:** All field goals for 7-8 and 9-11 year-olds are worth two points to encourage children to shoot within a developmentally-appropriate range. This allows for proper mechanics and form. While these age segments may attempt a shot behind the 3-point arc, any field goal made behind the arc will only count as two points.

**Size of Ball:** A smaller basketball for the younger age segments is advised due to the size of a child's hand as well as their developing skill level. A smaller ball allows for better control and success.

**Size of Court:** For 7-8 year-olds, a 50'x 42' court is contemplated to be a cross-court game on a full-sized basketball court. This dimension is more appropriate for younger children based on their relative size in space.

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## GAME STRUCTURE

Playing Segment	Game Length	Time Between Periods	Extra Period(s)	Scoring	Timeouts	Start of Game Possession
<b>Ages 7-8</b>	Four 8-minute periods	1 minute	2 minutes	Free throw: 1 point  All field goals: 2 points  <b>No 3-point field goals</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Two 60-second timeouts permitted in the first half of play. Two 60-second timeouts permitted in the second half of play</li> <li>One 60-second timeout granted for each extra period</li> <li>Unused timeouts may not carry over to the next half or into extra periods</li> </ul>	Coin flip. Team awarded possession starts with throw-in at half court
<b>Ages 9-11</b>	Four 8-minute periods	1 minute	2 minutes	Free throw: 1 point  All field goals: 2 points  <b>No 3-point field goals</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Two 60-second timeouts permitted in the first half of play. Two 60-second timeouts permitted in the second half of play</li> <li>One 60-second timeout granted for each extra period</li> <li>Unused timeouts may not carry over to the next half or into extra periods</li> </ul>	Coin flip. Team awarded possession starts with throw-in at half court
<b>Ages 12-14</b>	Four 8-minute periods	1 minute	4 minutes	Free throw: 1 point  All field goals: 2 points  Field goal outside of 3-point arc: 3 points	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Two 60-second timeouts permitted in the first half of play. Three 60-second timeouts permitted in the second half of play</li> <li>Maximum of 2 timeouts permitted in the final 2 minutes of the fourth period</li> <li>One 60-second timeout granted for each extra period</li> <li>Unused timeouts may not carry over to the next half or into extra periods</li> </ul>	Jump ball
<b>Grades 9-12</b>	Four 10-minute periods	2 minutes	5 minutes	Free throw: 1 point  All field goals: 2 points  Field goal outside of 3-point arc: 3 points	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Two 60-second timeouts permitted in the first half of play. Three 60-second timeouts permitted in the second half of play</li> <li>Maximum of 2 timeouts permitted in the final 2 minutes of the fourth period</li> <li>One 60-second timeout granted for each extra period</li> <li>Unused timeouts may not carry over to the next half or into extra periods</li> </ul>	Jump ball

## RATIONALE

**Start of Game Possession:** For 7-8 and 9-11 year-olds, a coin flip will determine the team that will start with the ball to mitigate significant differences in height and coordination among children. Alternating possession rules will then ensue throughout the game.

**Timeouts:** Managing the way timeouts are called allows for better game flow and decision-making by the player(s).

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## GAME TACTICS

Playing Segment	Playing Time	Set Defense	Pressing Defense	Double-Team/Crowding	Stealing from the Dribbler
<b>Ages 7-8</b>	Equal playing time	Only player-to-player defense throughout the competition	Pressing is not allowed throughout the competition	Double-team/crowding is not allowed throughout the competition	Stealing from a dribbler is not allowed throughout the competition
<b>Ages 9-11</b>	Equal playing time in periods 1-3. Coaches discretion in the fourth period and each extra period	Only player-to-player defense throughout the competition	Player-to-player defense may be extended full court in the fourth period and each extra period  Leading team may not extend the defense over half court when leading by 25 points or more	Double-team/crowding is not allowed throughout the competition	Coaches discretion throughout the competition
<b>Ages 12-14</b>	Coaches discretion throughout the competition	All allowed throughout the competition at coaches discretion	Pressing allowed throughout the competition  Leading team may not press when leading by 25 points or more	Allowed throughout the competition at coaches discretion	Coaches discretion throughout the competition
<b>Grades 9-12</b>	Coaches discretion throughout the competition	All allowed throughout the competition at coaches discretion	Pressing allowed throughout the competition	Allowed throughout the competition at coaches discretion	Coaches discretion throughout the competition

### Definitions:

- Player-to-Player Defense –
  - Each player is responsible for guarding and moving with one offensive player. This requires the defensive player to move according to the offensive player’s movements with or without the ball.
  - The defensive player must stay on the same side of the court as the offensive player, divided by the rim line.
  - If an offensive player with the ball advances past their defensive player, another defender may rotate to guard that offensive player.

- Pressing Defense – Defensive guarding, either on or off the ball, within the backcourt.
- Double-Team/Crowding – Two or more defensive players guarding a single offensive player

## RATIONALE

**Double-Team/Crowding:** Crowding the ball with multiple players (referred to as “double-teaming”) is not allowed for 7-8 or 9-11 year-olds due to skill and size discrepancies among children at these ages. Crowding is allowed for 12-14 year-olds and older to remain consistent with pressing defense standards.

**Playing Time:** To ensure that all young children participating in the sport have an opportunity to experience the game, equal and fair playing time is recommended for 7-8 year-olds. For 9-11 year-olds, equal playing time is recommended for periods 1-3, while allowing coaches discretion in the fourth and extra periods. Equal and fair playing time is encouraged throughout all segments.

**Pressing Defense:** Pressing defense is prohibited for 7-8 year-olds to help children develop principles of movement with and without the ball in a half-court setting. For 9-11 year-olds, permitting player-to-player defense to extend full-court in the fourth and extra periods allows players to become accustomed to full-court defense while not having to understand sophisticated zone presses. It also allows for an introduction to competitive tactics.

**Set Defense:** The player-to-player requirement for 7-8 and 9-11 year-olds encourages physical activity and movement, and promotes the development of individual skill related to guarding a player both on and off the ball.

**Stealing from the Dribbler:** At ages 7-8, players are not allowed to steal the ball from an active dribbler. This allows ball-handlers to develop dribbling skills and confidence with the basketball.

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## HIGHLIGHTED GAME PLAY RULES

Playing Segment	Backcourt Timeline	Shot Clock	5 Seconds Closely Guarded	Clock Stoppage
<b>Ages 7-8</b>	Not applicable	Not applicable	Not applicable	On any dead ball
<b>Ages 9-11</b>	10 seconds	Not applicable	Only when the offensive player is holding the basketball	On any dead ball
<b>Ages 12-14</b>	10 seconds	30 seconds <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Full 30 second reset on offensive and defensive rebounds</li> <li>• Full 30 second reset on any foul</li> </ul>	Only when the offensive player is holding the basketball	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• On any dead ball</li> <li>• After a made field goal in the last 2 minutes of the fourth period and in each extra period</li> </ul>
<b>Grades 9-12</b>	8 seconds	24 seconds <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• 14 second reset for offensive rebound</li> <li>• Full 24 second reset for fouls committed in the backcourt</li> <li>• If a foul is committed in the frontcourt and the shot clock is above 14 seconds, there will be no reset and the clock will continue from the time it was stopped</li> <li>• If a foul is committed in the frontcourt and the shot clock is under 14 seconds, it shall be reset to 14 seconds</li> </ul>	Only when the offensive player is holding the basketball	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• On any dead ball</li> <li>• After a made field goal in the last 2 minutes of the fourth period and in each extra period</li> </ul>

## RATIONALE

**Backcourt Timeline:** Not having a timeline violation for 7-8 year-olds allows coaches to communicate to players before they reach half court. This assists coaches in teaching children, particularly for those first learning the game. The progression to 10 seconds for 9-11 and 12-14 year-olds, and later to eight seconds for Grades 9-12, allows the game to flow while developing skills such as ball-handling, passing and decision-making.

**Clock Stoppage:** Stopping the clock following a made basket within the last two minutes of the fourth period and any extra periods for 12-14 year-olds and 9th-12th graders allows for additional strategic decision-making. Fewer clock stoppages for 7-8 and 9-11 year-olds allows for a better game flow.

**Shot Clock:** The 30-second shot clock for 12-14 year-olds, along with the 24-second shot clock for 9th-12th graders, allows for more possessions for each team, better game flow and places decision-making elements in the hands of players.

## HIGHLIGHTED GAME PLAY RULES CONTINUED

Playing Segment	Length of Time for a Free Throw	Number of Players Permitted on Free-Throw Lane	Substitutions	Advancement of Ball after a Timeout
<b>Ages 7-8</b>	10 seconds	Offense may have 3 players on the lane, including the shooter  Defense may have 3 players on the lane	Either team may substitute when the clock is stopped	Not applicable
<b>Ages 9-11</b>	10 seconds	Offense may have 3 players on the lane, including the shooter  Defense may have 3 players on the lane	Either team may substitute when the clock is stopped	Not applicable
<b>Ages 12-14</b>	8 seconds	Offense may have 3 players on the lane, including the shooter  Defense may have 3 players on the lane	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Either team may substitute on any dead ball</li> <li>• Either team may substitute before the first free throw attempt or after the last free throw if made</li> <li>• A non-scoring team may substitute after any field goal scored in the last 2 minutes of the fourth period and each extra period. If the non-scoring team substitutes, the scoring team may also substitute</li> </ul>	In the last 2 minutes of the fourth period and each extra period following a timeout, the ball will be inbounded from the offensive team's frontcourt opposite the scorer's table
<b>Grades 9-12</b>	5 seconds	Offense may have 3 players on the lane, including the shooter	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Either team may substitute on any dead ball</li> <li>• Either team may substitute before the first free throw attempt or after the last free throw if made</li> </ul>	In the last 2 minutes of the fourth period and each extra period following a timeout, the ball will be inbounded from the offensive team's frontcourt opposite the scorer's table

Defense may have 3 players on the lane

- A non-scoring team may substitute after any field goal scored in the last 2 minutes of the fourth period and each extra period. If the non-scoring team substitutes, the scoring team may also substitute

## RATIONALE

**Advancement of the Ball after a Timeout:** For 7-8 year olds, the focus is on development over strategy. Therefore, there is no pressing defense at this level, and the ball will not automatically advance after a timeout. Similarly, the ball does not advance after a timeout for 9-11 year olds because the focus remains on development over strategy.

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To see the full recommendations by age segment, see the links below.

- [Ages 7-8 \(PDF document\)](#)
- [Ages 9-11 \(PDF document\)](#)
- [Ages 12-14 \(PDF document\)](#)
- [Grades 9-12 \(PDF document\)](#)

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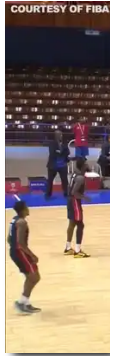
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