

Best Practices for Supporting and Accommodating Pregnant and Parenting Athletes

Adapt model contract provisions to individual athletes' needs. Each athlete will have different needs when it comes to pregnancy and growing a family. Some will continue to compete for a time and some will not. Some will recover from childbirth quickly and some will take longer to physically and mentally return safely to an elite level of performance. Given that individual needs vary and evolve over time the best practice is to take a flexible approach and work directly with the athlete to determine what needs a sponsor can fill to enable both parties to continue to benefit from their contract.

Focus on athletes' value to your brand. Athletes who step away from competition for a few months are still athletes with fan bases who remain valuable assets for your brand. Pregnancy and parenting can be an opportunity for athletes to expand their appeal and reach new audiences in new ways. Parents, particularly mothers, are a sought-after segment of the market, and they are likely to be drawn to athletes who are growing their families. The athletes can show how they combine pregnancy or parenting with sport – using your products. The focus of the contract can shift from the athletes' performance at competitions to the athletes' value as a spokesperson until they are ready to resume their regular activities.

Proactively offer contract provisions that address pregnancy and parenting. Rather than waiting for athletes to raise the issues of pregnancy and parenting, include pregnancy and parenting provisions in any new or renewed sponsorship contracts to indicate support for all athletes whether or not they plan to start or grow their family during their relationship with your brand. The [Model Sponsorship Contract Provisions for Pregnancy and Parental Leave](#) have a provision that applies to non-birth parents. Non-birth parents, regardless of gender, should be supported and encouraged to take parental leave.

Accommodation ideas:

- Offer to reduce travel for pregnant athletes. They may appreciate making local appearances or moving appearances online.
- Be open to extensions of the athletes' comeback periods, if needed. The Model Provisions suggest a 12-month waiver of competition obligations, but some athletes may need a few months longer of postpartum recovery to be able to return to competitive form without injury.
- Ensure that breastfeeding athletes who are traveling for appearances or competitions have access to clean, private locations where they can express breast milk.
- Offer to ship breast milk home if athletes' babies are not traveling with them. There are several services that sponsors can use to arrange pickup and delivery.

- Provide a travel stipend for a companion to care for an athlete's infant if the infant travels with the athlete to appearances or competitions and ensure they will have appropriate overnight accommodations.
- Provide options for childcare for training time, appearances, and competitions for athletes who have children younger than 10 years of age, regardless of the gender of the athlete. The options could include an additional stipend, a voucher for a childcare service, or onsite childcare.
- Provide stipends for physical therapy, pelvic floor therapy, and/or mental health support during postpartum recovery that is not covered by insurance.
- Consider automatically extending the contracts of athletes who take pregnancy or parental leave. Athletes whose contracts are expiring may feel that they need to rush back to competition to prove that they are worth re-signing, and may hamper their recovery or get injured as a result.