



Special Olympics

COACHING GUIDE

Basics of Special Olympics

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Special Olympics History

Special Olympics is an international program of year-round sports training and athletic competition for persons with intellectual disability.

Special Olympics began in 1968 when Eunice Kennedy Shriver organized the First International Summer Games at Soldier Field in Chicago, Illinois, USA. The concept was born in the early 1960s when Shriver started a day camp for people with intellectual disability. She saw that individuals with intellectual disability were far more capable in sports and physical activities than experts thought.

In December 1968, Special Olympics was established as a nonprofit charitable organization under the laws of the District of Columbia, USA. The National Association for Retarded Citizens, the Council for Exceptional Children and the American Association on Mental Deficiency pledged their support for this first systemic effort to provide sports training and athletic competition for individuals with intellectual disability based on the Olympic tradition and spirit. Since 1968, millions of children and adults with intellectual disability have participated in Special Olympics around the world.

The leaders of Special Olympics are Eunice Kennedy Shriver, Founder and Honorary Chairman; Timothy P. Shriver, Chairman and CEO; and Sargent Shriver, Chairman Emeritus.

Today, Special Olympics involves

- 1.2 million athletes with a goal to reach 2,000,000 by 2005
- More than 200 Special Olympics Programs
- Athletes in more than 150 countries
- 26 Olympics type sports
- 7 Regional offices: Brussels, Belgium; Cairo, Egypt; Harare, Zimbabwe; Bombay, India; Beijing, China; Ciudad de Panama, Panama; Washington, D.C., USA
- 750,000 volunteers around the world
- More than 140,000 coaches around the world
- Outreach to 170 million individuals with intellectual disability around the world
- More than 20,000 competitions around the world each year

Mission

The Special Olympics mission is to provide year-round sport training and athletic competition in a variety of Olympic-type sports for children and adults with intellectual disability by giving them continuing opportunities to develop physical fitness, demonstrate courage, experience joy and participate in a sharing of gifts, skills and friendship with their families, other Special Olympics athletes and the community.

Philosophy

- Special Olympics was founded on the belief that people with intellectual disability can, with proper instruction and encouragement, learn, enjoy and benefit from participation in individual and team sports.
- Believes that consistent training is essential to the development of sport skills, and that competition among those of equal abilities is the most appropriate means of testing these skills, measuring progress and providing incentives for personal growth.
- Through sport training and competition, people with intellectual disability benefit mentally, socially and spiritually.

Basics of Special Olympics

Special Olympics History

- Families are strengthened.
- The community-at-large, both through participation and observation, is united in understanding people with intellectual disability in an environment of equality, respect and acceptance.

Principles

- ♦ The goal of Special Olympics is to help bring all persons with intellectual disability into the larger society under conditions whereby they are accepted, respected and given a chance to become productive citizens.
- ♦ As a means of achieving this goal, Special Olympics encourages its more capable athletes to move from Special Olympics training and competition into school and community programs where they can compete in regular sports activities. The decision to leave or continue involvement in Special Olympics is the athlete's choice.
- ♦ All Special Olympics activities—at the local state, national, and international levels—reflect the values, standards, traditions, ceremonies and events embodied in the modern Olympics movement. These Olympic-type activities have been broadened and enriched to celebrate the moral and spiritual qualities of persons with intellectual disability so as to enhance their dignity and self-esteem.
- ♦ Participation in Special Olympics training programs and competitive events is open to all people with intellectual disability who are at least eight years old, regardless of the degree of their disability.
- ♦ Comprehensive, year-round training is available to every Special Olympics athlete, conducted by well-qualified coaches in accordance with the standardized Sports Rules formulated and adopted by Special Olympics, and every athlete who participates in a Special Olympics sport will be trained in that sport.
- ♦ Every Special Olympics Program includes sports events and activities that are appropriate to the age and ability level of each athlete, from motor activities to the most advanced competition.
- ♦ Provides full participation for every athlete regardless of economic circumstances and conducts training and competition under the most favorable conditions possible, including facilities, administration, training, coaching, officiating and events.
- ♦ At every awards ceremony, in addition to the traditional medals for first, second and third places, athletes finishing from fourth to last place are presented a suitable place ribbon with appropriate ceremony.
- ♦ To the greatest extent possible, Special Olympics activities will be run by and involve local volunteers, from school- and college-age individuals to senior citizens, in order to create greater opportunities for public understanding for people with intellectual disability.
- ♦ To offer athletes a full range of artistic, social and cultural experiences through activities such as dances, art exhibits, concerts, visits to historic sites, clinics, theatrical performances and similar activities.
- ♦ The “Spirit of Special Olympics”—skill, courage, sharing and joy—incorporates universal values which transcend all boundaries of geography, nationality, political philosophy, gender, age, race or religion.

Athlete's Oath

The Special Olympics oath is:

“Let me win. But if I cannot win, let be brave in the attempt.”

These words were spoken by Roman gladiators as they entered the arena, facing the greatest battle of their lives. Our athletes recite the oath at the Opening Ceremonies of each competition to remind everyone, themselves included, that they are part of a brave tradition and that the goal is to compete with their whole effort and to exhibit bravery by pushing themselves to ever greater heights.

Remind your athletes regularly that they must live by this oath if they are to grow and achieve all their goals.

Coach's Oath

“In the name of all coaches, we shall follow written and verbal instructions of Special Olympics officials at all times, have our athletes at the appropriate events and activities at the proper time and abide by the rules and policies, in the spirit of sportsmanship.”

Official's Oath

“In the name of all judges and officials, I promise that we shall officiate in these Special Olympics Games with complete impartiality, respecting and abiding by the rules which govern them, in the spirit of sportsmanship.”

Basics of Special Olympics Eligibility

Eligibility

To be eligible for participation in Special Olympics, a competitor must agree to observe and abide by the Official Special Olympics Sports Rules.

Special Olympics was created and developed to give individuals with intellectual disability the opportunity to train and compete in sports activities. No person shall, on the grounds of sex, race, religion, color, sexual orientation or national origin, be excluded from participation in, be denied the benefits of or otherwise subjected to discrimination under any program or activity of Special Olympics.

To be eligible to participate in Special Olympics, an athlete must be at least eight years old and:

1. have been identified by an agency or professional as having an intellectual disability; or
2. have a cognitive delay (learn slower than their peers) as determined by standardized measures; or
3. have significant learning or vocational problems** due to cognitive delays which require or have required specially-designed instruction***.

Some flexibility is left to Accredited Programs and sub-Programs for determining, in exceptional circumstances, individual eligibility of a participant because of the variety of situations, needs and definitions that exist in the many localities where Special Olympics has been and will be instituted.

- **Significant learning or vocational problems refer to those learning problems resulting from cognitive delays (intellectual impairment). These do not include physical disability, emotional or behavioral difficulties or specific disabilities such as dyslexia or speech or language impairment.
- ***Specially-designed instruction refers to time when a person is receiving supportive education or remedial instruction directed at the cognitive delay. In the case of adults, specially-designed instruction is usually replaced with specially-designed programs in the workplace, or in the support work place, or in supported work or at home.

Who is the Special Olympics Athlete

1. At least eight years of age
2. Male or female
3. Individuals with intellectual disability. According to the definition by the American Association on Mental Retardation (AAMR), an individual is considered to have intellectual disability if they experience the following three criteria:
 - Below average intellectual functioning level (two years or more behind peers)
 - Significant limitations exist in two or more adaptive skill areas.

Adaptive skill areas are those daily living skills needed to live, work and play in the community. The definition includes 10 adaptive skills: communication, self-care, home living, social skills, leisure, health and safety, self-direction, functional academics, community use and work.

Adaptive skills are assessed in the person's typical environment across all aspects of an individual's life. A person with limits in intellectual functioning who does not have limits in adaptive skill areas may not be diagnosed as having intellectual disability.

- The condition manifests itself before the age of 18. Children with intellectual disability grow into adults with intellectual disability; they do not remain "eternal children."

Participation by Individuals with Down Syndrome Who Have Atlantoaxial Instability

There is evidence from medical research that up to 15 percent of individuals with Down syndrome have a misalignment of the cervical vertebrae C-1 and in the neck. This condition exposes Down syndrome individuals to the possibility of injury if they participate in activities that hyperextend or radically flex the neck or upper spine.

Special Olympics requires temporary restriction of individuals with Down syndrome from participation in certain activities that pose potential risk. This restriction may be lifted once an X-ray is produced showing no evidence of instability on the C-1 vertebrae.

1. Accredited Programs may allow all individuals with Down syndrome to continue in most Special Olympics sport training and competition activities. However, such individuals shall not be permitted to participate in sport training and competition activities which, by their nature, result in hyperextension, radical flexion or direct pressure on the neck or upper spine, **until the requirements of 2 and 3 below are satisfied**. Such sports training and competition activities include:
 - butterfly stroke and diving starts in swimming
 - diving
 - pentathlon
 - high jump
 - equestrian sports
 - artistic gymnastics
 - football
 - alpine skiing, and
 - any warm-up exercise, placing undue stress on the head and neck.
2. Restriction from participation in the above-listed activities shall continue until an individual with Down syndrome has been examined (including x-ray views of full extension and flexion of neck) by a physician who has been briefed on the nature of the Atlantoaxial Instability condition and the results of such an examination demonstrate that the individual does not have Atlantoaxial Instability condition; or,
3. For any individual diagnosed as having the Atlantoaxial Instability condition, the examining physician shall notify the athlete's parents or guardians of the nature and extent of the individual's condition, and such athlete shall be allowed to participate in the activities listed in 1 above only if the athlete submits written certifications from two physicians, on forms prescribed by Special Olympics, combined with an acknowledgment of risks signed by the adult athlete or his/her parent or guardian if the athlete is a minor.

Participation by Persons that are Blood-Borne Contagious Infection Carriers

The International Special Olympics office has assumed the following position regarding Blood-Borne Contagious Infection Carriers:

It is neither necessary nor justifiable to discriminate against any individual having ordinary behavior on the basis that they are carriers of a blood-borne contagious infection.

Under casual social interaction, carriers of a blood-borne contagious infection pose no danger to those around them; therefore, it is neither necessary nor justifiable to exclude them from participation in Special Olympics activities, nor isolate them from other participants in dormitories or sports competition.

Participants may have a blood-borne contagious infection that is new and unknown, therefore, **universal precautions need to be used for every exposure to anyone's blood, saliva or other bodily fluid**.

Special Olympics recommends that blood and body fluid precautions be consistently used for all people regardless of their blood-borne infection status, known, unknown or speculated. The practice is referred to as "Universal Blood and Body Fluid Precautions" or "Universal Precautions."

Persons with Intellectual Disability

Individuals who demonstrate a slower rate of learning and a limited capacity to learn are identified as having intellectual disability. Intellectual Disability is seven times more prevalent than deafness, nine times more prevalent than cerebral palsy, 15 times more prevalent than total blindness and 35 times more prevalent than muscular dystrophy.

Ninety percent of all persons with an intellectual disability have a mild intellectual disability and generally are outwardly indistinguishable from their peers without an intellectual disability. However, because of their learning limitations, certain teaching and coaching strategies are more successful than others. Specifically, demonstration, physical prompt, and manipulation of body parts are preferred to verbal instruction. Tasks to be learned should be divided into small meaningful steps, presented sequentially and then practiced in total with as little change in the order as possible. Feedback about an athlete's performance should be immediate and specific. Comments such as "you kept your eyes on the ball" are more meaningful and helpful than saying "good shot."

Like most groups of people, athletes with intellectual disabilities will vary greatly in terms of their physical abilities and their sport skill proficiency. The degree of intellectual disability generally does not determine an athlete's performance level. However, athletes with severe intellectual disabilities will be more challenged by the tactical aspects of competition. These athletes will also experience a greater incidence of secondary impairments (such as cerebral palsy or other physical limitations) affecting motor skills. Yet, given proper coaching and sufficient practice time, most athletes with intellectual disabilities can successfully compete alongside or against many of their nondisabled peers.

This Coaches' Guide is written for coaches, teachers, family members, peer coaches and others who train or assist in training athletes with intellectual disabilities. The task analyzed approach enables skills to be taught incrementally and customized for each athlete. The array of Special Olympics sports and events within each sport are designed to ensure there is an appropriate opportunity for every Special Olympics athlete regardless of his/her learning or physical abilities and his/her sport skill proficiency.

Special Olympics Sports

Summer Sports	Winter Sports
Aquatics	Alpine Skiing
Athletics	Cross Country Skiing
Badminton	Figure Skating
Basketball	Floor Hockey
Bocce	Snowboarding
Bowling	Snowshoeing
Cycling	Speed Skating
Equestrian Sports	
Football	
Golf	
Gymnastics (Artistic and Rhythmic)	
Powerlifting	
Roller Skating	
Sailing	
Softball	
Table Tennis	
Team Handball	
Tennis	
Volleyball	

Special Olympics Initiatives

Special Olympics Healthy Athletes®

The Special Olympics Healthy Athletes initiative was developed to improve each athlete's ability to train and compete in Special Olympics. Healthy Athletes has five disciplines:

1. **Special Olympics Special Smiles®** and **Special Olympics-Lions Clubs International Opening Eyes®** have provided athletes health benefits through dental and vision examinations to tens of thousands of Special Olympics athletes.
2. **Special Olympics Healthy Hearing** screens athletes for hearing problems.
3. **Special Olympics FUNfitness** teaches athletes about injury prevention through demonstration of stretching exercises
4. **Special Olympics Health Promotion** teaches athletes the components of a healthy lifestyle: regular exercise and good nutrition choices. These screenings and exams are conducted at Special Olympics local, state, national and World Games and are provided at no cost to Special Olympics athletes.

Special Olympics Get Into It

Special Olympics Get Into It is a service learning curriculum for all grade levels that was developed to introduce Special Olympics and explain intellectual disability to students. The curriculum encourages youth to become involved in the movement and work to dispel the myths and stereotypes that surround people with intellectual disabilities. The goal is to increase the participation of children and youth without intellectual disabilities in Special Olympics by establishing school-based Special Olympics Programs and activities.

Special Olympics Athletic Leadership Programs (ALPs)

Special Olympics Athletes Leadership Programs offer athletes the opportunity to take active roles both on and off the playing field. ALPs allow athletes to enjoy Special Olympics through self-directed, meaningful participation in virtually every aspect of the Program. Athletes serve on Boards of Directors, officiate at competitions, coach other athletes and make decisions about the organization's future.

Family Leadership and Support

The Family Leadership and Support initiative gives families a support system within Special Olympics. Based on the Parent-to-Parent model, veteran Special Olympics families have an opportunity to mentor families who are new to Special Olympics, providing them with informational and emotional support.

Special Olympics families can play an important role in helping athletes' learn sport skills.

- The athlete's family members and friends are usually the most important influences in the athlete's life.
- Family members can lend tremendous support by giving love and encouragement to the Special Olympics athletes' efforts in reaching their personal goals.
- Research has shown that as families participate in Special Olympics activities with the athlete in their family, and, they develop an increased sense of pride and respect for athletes' abilities and potentials.

Coaches need to involve the families of Special Olympics athletes in their athletes' training for several reasons:

1. Encourage families to help their athlete perform the skill at home. Set aside time after the session to instruct the family member on how to assist the athlete in rehearsing the skill at home.
2. Have families help motivate their athlete in training. Establish small goals and reward the athlete when possible.
3. Help families understand their athlete's sport goals. With involvement and understanding of their athlete's goals, families will display more open and positive attitudes toward their athlete when he/she succeeds in realizing the goals as well as when he/she may fall short.

- Encourage family members to attend a Special Olympics Coaches Training School to better prepare themselves to help their athletes.
- Host a family orientation before the start of the season.
- Foster quality family participation through sports. Practice and play the game as a family.

Motor Activities Training Program (MATP)

Special Olympics Motor Activities Training Program is designed for persons with significant intellectual and/or physical limitations who do not yet possess the physical and/or behavioral skills necessary to participate in official Special Olympics sports. The program provides a comprehensive motor activity and recreation training curriculum for these participants. MATP can be administered by trainers with various backgrounds (physical educators and therapists), with assistance from peer trainers and other volunteers. In addition, direct-care workers, parents and volunteers will find MATP helpful in developing appropriate in-home motor programs for individuals with severe limitations.

MATP uses goals, short-term objectives, task-analyzed activities, assessments and teaching suggestions for individualizing motor activity instruction. However, MATP emphasizes training and participation rather than competition. In addition, MATP provides the means for persons with severe limitations to participate in appropriate recreational activities geared to their ability levels. These activities can be conducted in schools and large residential facilities as well as in community-based settings.

Individuals who participate in MATP activities work as hard as other Special Olympics athletes, and they deserve recognition for their efforts. Special Olympics has created a challenge medal and ribbon to recognize participants who have completed an eight-week MATP program and who have participated in a training day. MATP participants at local, area and state/national events should also receive T-shirts, hats, pins and/or any other forms of recognition that are provided to all Special Olympics athletes.

When the necessary readiness and skill levels are reached by MATP participants, each Special Olympics sport provides an appropriate transition into that sport. Specific events are identified in the Official Special Olympics Summer Sports Rules for athletes with basic ability levels. For example, in athletics, an appropriate choice for competition might be the 10M Assisted Walk.

Special Olympics Unified Sports®

Special Olympics Unified Sports is a program that brings together athletes with intellectual disabilities and their peers without intellectual disabilities on the same team for training and competition. A primary goal of Unified Sports is to equalize the ability level of Special Olympics athletes with their partners' and to promote inclusion through same team practice and competition. Special Athletes in this program need to have the necessary skill level to participate in the sport so they can be appropriately matched with their Special Partners.

Unified Sports is an important program because it expands sports opportunities for athletes seeking new challenges and dramatically increases their inclusion in the community by helping to break down the barriers that have historically kept people with and without intellectual disabilities apart. At the same time, Unified Sports provides a valuable sports opportunity to individuals with intellectual disabilities who are not presently involved with Special Olympics, especially those with mild disabilities and those in communities where there are not enough Special Olympics athletes to conduct team sports.

Unified Sports has become an important addition to the overall Special Olympics program and has helped further its mission. Teams are constructed in such a way as to provide training and competition opportunities that meaningfully challenge all athletes and often lead to improved self-esteem, equal status with peers and new friendships.

Refer to the Rules, Protocol and Etiquette section of your sport-specific guide for guidance pertaining to selection, training and competition of Unified Sports in your sport.

Basics of Special Olympics Special Olympics Athlete's Code of Conduct

Special Olympics Athlete's Code of Conduct

Special Olympics is committed to the highest ideals of sport and expects all athletes to honor sports and Special Olympics. All Special Olympics athletes and Unified Sports partners agree to the following code:

Sportsmanship

- I will practice good sportsmanship.
- I will act in ways that bring respect to me, my coaches, my team and Special Olympics.
- I will not use bad language.
- I will not swear or insult other persons.
- I will not fight with other athletes, coaches, volunteers or staff.

Training and Competition

- I will train regularly.
- I will learn and follow the rules of my sport.
- I will listen to my coaches and the officials and ask questions when I do not understand.
- I will always try my best during training, divisioning and competitions.
- I will not “hold back” in preliminaries just to get into an easier final heat.

Responsibility for My Actions

- I will not make inappropriate or unwanted physical, verbal or sexual advances on others.
- I will not drink alcohol, smoke or take illegal drugs while representing Special Olympics at training sessions, competition or during Games.
- I will not take drugs for the purpose of improving my performance.
- I will obey all laws and Special Olympics rules.

I understand that if I do not obey this Code of Conduct my Program or a Games Organizing Committee may not allow me to participate.

Special Olympics Coach's Code of Conduct

Special Olympics is committed to the highest ideals of sport and expects all coaches to honor Sport and Special Olympics. All Special Olympics coaches agree to observe the following code:

Respect for Others

- I will respect the rights, dignity and worth of athletes, coaches, other volunteers, friends and spectators in Special Olympics.
- I will treat everyone equally regardless of sex, ethnic origin, religion or ability.
- I will be a positive role model for the athletes I coach.

Ensure a Positive Experience

- I will ensure that for each athlete I coach, the time spent with Special Olympics is a positive experience.
- I will respect the talent, developmental stage and goals of each athlete.
- I will ensure each athlete competes in events that challenge that athlete's potential and are appropriate to that athlete's ability.
- I will be fair, considerate and honest with athletes and communicate with athletes using simple, clear language.
- I will ensure that accurate scores are provided for entry of an athlete into any event.
- I will instruct each athlete to perform to the best of the athlete's ability at all preliminaries and final heats in accordance with the Official Special Olympics Sports Rules.

Act Professionally and Take Responsibility for My Actions

- My language, manner, punctuality, preparation and presentation will demonstrate high standards.
- I will display control, respect, dignity and professionalism to all involved in the sport (athletes, coaches, opponents, officials, administrators, parents, spectators, media, etc.).
- I will encourage athletes to demonstrate the same qualities.
- I will not drink alcohol, smoke or take illegal drugs while representing Special Olympics at training sessions, competition or during Games.
- I will refrain from any form of personal abuse towards athletes and others, including inappropriate or unwanted sexual advances on others, verbal, physical and emotional abuse.
- I will be alert to any form of abuse from other sources directed toward athletes in my care.
- I will abide by the Special Olympics policy on the prohibition of coaches dating athletes.

Quality Service to the Athletes

- I will seek continual improvement through performance evaluation and ongoing coach education.
- I will be knowledgeable about the sports rules and skills of the sport(s) I coach.
- I will provide a plan for a regular training program.
- I will keep copies of the medical, training and competition records for each athlete I coach.

Basics of Special Olympics Special Olympics Coach's Code of Conduct

- I will follow the Special Olympics Sports Rules for my sport(s).

Health and Safety of the Athletes

- I will ensure that the equipment and facilities are safe to use.
- I will ensure that the equipment, rules, training and the environment are appropriate for the age and ability of the athletes.
- I will review each athlete's medical form and be aware of any limitations on that athlete's participation noted on that form.
- I will encourage athletes to seek medical advice when required.
- I will maintain the same interest and support toward sick and injured athletes.
- I will allow further participation in training and competition only when appropriate.

I understand that if I violate this Code of Conduct I will be subject to a range of consequences, up to and including being prohibited from coaching in Special Olympics.

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