

# GENERAL POLICIES

To provide the most enjoyable, beneficial and challenging activities for athletes with intellectual disabilities, Special Olympics operates in accordance with the following operating policies. The General Rules and the Sports Rules are specifically designed to enforce these policies.

1. Special Olympics training and competition is open to every person with intellectual disabilities who is at least eight (8) years of age and who registers to participate in Special Olympics as required by the General Rules. There is no maximum age limitation for participation in Special Olympics.

2. Special Olympics must offer full participation for every eligible athlete regardless of their economic circumstances. No Special Olympics program may require its athletes or their families to pay or promise to pay any type of admission, registration, training, participation, or competition fee, or any other fee or charge of any type as a condition for admission to any Special Olympics event or activity, or as a fee for the athletes' participation in any Special Olympics competition.

Programs may accept unsolicited contributions from persons who are the parents or guardians of Special Olympics athletes. However, Programs must avoid soliciting or accepting such contributions under circumstances which suggest that the contribution is required or expected in order to ensure or facilitate an athlete's admission or registration to participate in Special Olympics.

3. Special Olympics is an athlete-centered movement and believes that the athlete is all-important. Promoting athletes as the central focus of each training or competition program or event, developing the physical, social, psychological, intellectual and spiritual qualities of the participants, and providing meaningful opportunities to participate in additional activities that support Special Olympics programming must be the focus of every Accredited Program.

4. Special Olympics encourages coaches and family members of athletes to make every effort to encourage Special Olympics athletes to reach their highest level of athletic achievement in a particular sport and to provide opportunities for them to do so.

5. Each Accredited Program shall offer comprehensive year-round sports training, conducted by qualified coaches in accordance with the Sports Rules. Every Special Olympics athlete who competes in a Special Olympics sport at a Games or a Tournament must have been trained in that sport. Training shall include physical conditioning and nutrition education. Athletes who desire to compete in Regional Games, U.S. Multi-State Games or World Games must be trained for at least eight (8) consecutive weeks in the appropriate sport and must have several opportunities to compete (including scrimmages and practice sessions) during that period. Each Accredited Program should offer athletes who are preparing for competitions at other levels within Special Olympics, such as for National Games, U.S. Program Games or Sub-Program Games (e.g. local, area, community), the same training and competition opportunities as are offered by that Accredited Program to athletes who participate in Regional, U.S. Multi-State and/or World Games.

6. Every Accredited Program must offer a variety of sports events and activities that are appropriate to the age and ability of each athlete and consistent with the program's Accreditation Level and that foster full participation by each eligible athlete regardless of level of ability, degree of intellectual or physical disability, or economic circumstances.

7. Every program must strive to provide Special Olympics Unified Sports® training and competition in which individuals with and without intellectual disabilities participate together on teams, and the CHAMPs programming (formerly known as Motor Activities Training Program) for individuals with such severe intellectual disabilities that they cannot benefit from standard Special Olympics training and competition Programs.

8. Special Olympics encourages qualified athletes to participate in school, club and County Programs where they can train and compete in regular sports activities. The athletes may, at this point, wish to leave Special Olympics or continue to take part in Special Olympics activities as well. The decision rests with the athlete.

9. Special Olympics fully supports the concept of developing sports events for athletes with intellectual disabilities in conjunction with events conducted by sports organizations for individuals without intellectual disabilities. Accredited Programs should encourage other amateur and professional sports programs to include demonstrations by Special Olympics athletes as part of their major events. In addition, Accredited Programs should work with other sports organizations to develop sports events in which Special Olympics athletes may compete with individuals who do not have intellectual disabilities, under circumstances that offer Special Olympics athletes realistic opportunities to excel and compete successfully, whether by participating in the same heats as all athletes or in heats organized specifically for Special Olympics athletes. Special Olympics personnel should work to create a feasible format for these integrated activities.

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10. All Special Olympics sport training and competition activities and events shall be conducted in accordance with the General Rules, the Sports Rules, and the other Uniform Standards. Each Accredited Program shall offer sports training and competition programs that meet the highest possible standards in facilities and equipment, athletic attire, training, coaching, officiating, administration, and related events for athletes and their families. Special Olympics sports training and competitions must be held in a manner that protects the participating athletes, provides fair and equitable conditions of competition, and promotes uniformity in testing athletic skills, so that no competitor obtains an unfair advantage over another.

11. Special Olympics believes that every athlete deserves an equal chance to excel during competition. Thus, each competition division within a given event must be structured so that every athlete/team in the division has a reasonable chance to excel during competition. This must be done by placing athletes/teams in divisions according to accurate records of previous performance or trial heats and, when relevant, grouping by age and gender.

12. Special Olympics seeks to promote the spirit of sportsmanship and a love of participation for its own sake by stressing and celebrating the importance of, and personal achievement associated with, each athlete's participation and personal effort in Special Olympics, regardless of comparative ability. Special Olympics believes that every athlete should participate to their fullest potential. This means that in team sport the coach must ensure that each athlete has frequent opportunities to participate. This also means that each Games and Tournament should offer as many sports as possible, with events for athletes of all ability levels. Special Olympics promotes this philosophy in the training of its coaches and officials.

13. All Special Olympics Games and competitions — at the local, state, provincial, national and international levels — shall reflect the values, standards, traditions, ceremonies, and activities embodied in the ancient and modern Olympic movement, broadened and enriched to celebrate the physical and spiritual qualities of persons with intellectual disabilities, so as to enhance their dignity and self-esteem.

14. At National and U.S. program competitions, Regional Games, World Games, and other Special Olympics Games, official medals shall be presented to first, second, and third place winners. Athletes in fourth through eighth place shall receive ribbons with all appropriate ceremonies. Those who are disqualified (for reasons other than unsportsmanlike conduct or violations of the divisioning rules) or do not finish an event shall be given a participation ribbon. For competitions below the Accredited Program level (i.e. at the Area level), ribbons or a combination of medals and ribbons may be awarded.

15. Special Olympics training and competition activities must take place in public, with every effort made to attract spectators and generate coverage by the news media, in order to increase public awareness of and support for the needs and capabilities of persons with intellectual disabilities.

16. Special Olympics shall offer every athlete multiple opportunities annually to participate in locally based competitions in Official Sports and Nationally Popular Sports in which they are interested. These activities should include competitions with teams or individuals other than those with whom the athlete usually trains.

17. Special Olympics is not designed to train elite athletes exclusively, but does provide training and competition for highly skilled and elite athletes with intellectual disabilities. Fair and equitable methods shall be used to select athletes for participation in non-local competitions so that every athlete, regardless of skill level, has an equal opportunity to participate in each competition at their skill level.

## TRAINING AND COMPETITION SAFETY REQUIREMENTS

1. Programs must conduct all sports training and competition activities in a safe environment, taking all reasonable steps to protect the health and safety of athletes, coaches, volunteers and spectators, and must adhere to sport-specific medical and safety requirements as contained in the Sport Rules.

2. Programs shall provide for adequate supervision and coaching for all athletes. For all training and competition activities, a four-to-one (4:1) athlete-to-coach ratio shall be maintained.

3. In addition, Programs must comply with the following minimum standards for medical facilities and safety precautions at the sites of competitions (in addition to the sport-specific requirements of the Sports Rules).

A. Adequate precautions must be taken to avoid exposing athletes to sunburn, hypothermia, or other conditions or illnesses caused by exposure to the elements.

B. Ample water or other liquids must be provided for athletes throughout the competition, and athletes should be

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encouraged to take appropriate water breaks.

- C. Special precautions must be taken to insure that each participant receives any medications that have been prescribed for their use.

Competition organizers, officials and coaches must take into account the cardiovascular effect and level of strenuousness of a sport when setting the competition schedule for that sport, taking into account the length of competition, weather conditions, the physical ability of the participants, and the need for adequate rest periods. In general, athletes should be given adequate time between trials, finals and competitions, and teams should be given adequate time between the end of one competition and the next round of competition.

## 15-PASSENGER VAN POLICY

Special Olympics Programs are prohibited from using 15-passenger vans to transport athletes or other individuals to and from Special Olympics events, and Special Olympics strongly discourages other organizations from using 15-passenger vans to transport people to or from Special Olympics events.

Special Olympics recognizes that it is up to each non-Special Olympics organization to determine whether to use 15-passenger vans. By using 15-passenger vans, a non-Special Olympics organization understands that:

- Anyone operating a 15-passenger van owned by a non-Special Olympics organization for the purpose of transporting Special Olympics athletes or other persons to or from Special Olympics activities is acting as the employee or volunteer of the organization and not on behalf of Special Olympics.
- The driver's operation of the 15-passenger van will be considered to be in the course and scope of the driver's employment for or volunteer responsibilities for the non-Special Olympics organization, and not for or on behalf of Special Olympics.
- Therefore neither the driver nor the vehicle will not be covered by Special Olympics insurance.

## DATING POLICY

Special Olympics prohibits any Special Olympics staff member or volunteer (excluding spouses of athletes and athletes who are Class B volunteers) from dating or having a sexual relationship with any Special Olympics athlete. In the event that a Special Olympics organization learns of any dating or sexual relationship, the organization immediately shall require either:

- 1) that the staff member or volunteer end his or her association with Special Olympics; or
- 2) that the association between the staff member or volunteer and the Special Olympics athlete will be terminated.

In the case of a Special Olympics athlete who is also a staff member or volunteer, the Chief Executive Officer of the organization where the athlete competes must evaluate the circumstances on a case-by-case basis and determine if an authority relationship exists between the staff/volunteer athlete and the competing athlete, and if it is determined that there is such a relationship, then apply the above policy in the same manner as the policy is applied to non-athlete staff or volunteers.

Each Special Olympics program should determine whether it is required by its national or local laws to report certain relationships between Special Olympics staff or volunteers and Special Olympics athletes to the appropriate authorities under any "mandatory reporting" or other requirements in place for that program's jurisdiction and comply with those requirements.

Special Olympics respects the right of athletes to have the full range of human relationships available to other human beings. This policy shall not be interpreted as a limitation on the rights of athletes, but only as a restriction on Special Olympics staff and volunteers.

## CREATING OPPORTUNITIES FOR ATHLETES WITH PHYSICAL DISABILITIES

Each SOIN sport is played according to rules established by the respective National Governing Body (NGB). These NGB rules include strict guidelines for uniforms and equipment to provide for the safety of all competitors. For example, jewelry is prohibited in most sports because it can become a hazard to the person wearing it and other contestants.

When Special Olympics athletes or Unified Sports® partners require the use of wheelchairs or other mobility assistance devices, participation in team sports (basketball, softball, volleyball, and flag football) likely creates undue health and safety risks for that athlete and others in the game. The County Coordinator may apply to the State Office for special

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consideration for an athlete who requires such assistance. These requests will be considered on a case-by-case basis. Athletes in question should not compete at any level without State Office approval.

Special Olympics mission is to include people with a wide range of disabilities in year-round sports training and competition. To that end, a variety of sports are offered, each of which have modified competition levels to maximize opportunities for all abilities. The organization will work closely with Special Olympics local programs to ensure the safest, most inclusive program possible.

## **PARTICIPATION BY PERSONS WITH BLOOD-BORNE CONTAGIOUS DISEASE**

No program may exclude or isolate from participation in any Special Olympics training or competition any athlete who is known to be a carrier of a blood-borne contagious infection or virus, or otherwise discriminate against such athletes solely because of that medical condition. In view of the risk that one or more Special Olympics athletes may have a blood-borne contagious infection or virus, in conducting Special Olympics training and competition events, Programs shall follow so-called "Universal Precautions" for every exposure to any person's blood, saliva or other bodily fluid.

## **CONCUSSION AWARENESS AND SAFETY RECOGNITION POLICY**

### **OBJECTIVE**

It is Special Olympics' intent to take steps to help ensure the health and safety of all Special Olympics participants. All Special Olympics participants should remember that safety comes first and should take reasonable steps to help minimize the risks for concussion or other serious brain injuries.

### **DEFINING A CONCUSSION**

A concussion is defined by the Centers for Disease Control as a type of traumatic brain injury caused by a bump, blow, or jolt to the head as well as serial, cumulative hits to the head. Concussions can also occur from a blow to the body that causes the head and brain to move quickly back and forth causing the brain to bounce around or twist within the skull. Although concussions are usually not life-threatening, their effects can be serious, and therefore proper attention must be paid to individuals suspected of sustaining a concussion.

### **SUSPECTED OR CONFIRMED CONCUSSION**

A participant who is suspected of sustaining a concussion in a practice, game or competition shall be removed from practice, play or competition at that time. If a qualified medical professional is available on-site to render an evaluation, that person shall have final authority as to the removal or return to play of the participant. If applicable, the participant's parent or guardian should be made aware that the participant is suspected of sustaining a concussion.

### **RETURN TO PLAY**

A participant who has been removed from practice, play or competition due to a suspected concussion may not participate in Special Olympics sports activities until either of the following occurs (1) at least seven (7) consecutive days have passed since the participant was removed from play and a currently licensed, qualified medical professional provides written clearance for the participant to return to practice, play and competition or (2) a currently licensed, qualified medical professional determines that the participant did not suffer a concussion and provides written clearance for the participant to return to practice play immediately. Written clearance in either of the scenarios above shall become a permanent record.

### **REQUIRED TRAINING AND TIMELINE**

All coaches are required to complete concussion awareness training. This training is part of the Class A volunteer certification process which all coaches must complete. The SOI policy on "Return to Play" differs from the CDC's training because coaches do not see the Special Olympics athletes daily.

### **FREQUENCY OF TRAINING**

Concussion awareness training must be completed by all Coaches at least once every three (3) years.

### **COMMUNICATION WITH PARENT/GUARDIAN**

U.S. Programs are required to communicate in writing to all participants and/or parents/guardians, the concussion awareness and safety recognition program, as outlined in the "Suspected or Confirmed" Concussion and "Return to Play" sections of this policy.

The Centers for Disease Control website [www.cdc.gov/concussion](http://www.cdc.gov/concussion) provides additional resources relative to concussions that may be of interest to participants and their families.