

# COACHING

## Coaches Training and Certification

(Visit the web site at [www.specialolympicstexas.org](http://www.specialolympicstexas.org) often for updates.)

### How do you become certified?

The Coaches Certification Program is designed to train volunteers who wish to develop their coaching skills and become certified Special Olympics coaches. Listed below are the six steps one must take to become a certified coach with Special Olympics:

- Complete the General Orientation training either online or in person.
- Complete the Protective Behaviors training either online or in person.
- Attend a sports specific training or the Coaching Special Olympics Athletes training offered through SOTX.
- Work a minimum of 10 hours with SOTX athletes in the sport and capture the hours on the Practicum Form.
- Submit a copy of one's Practicum Form to their area office.
- Be a registered Class A volunteer with SOTX. (An applicant is only considered a registered Class A volunteer after submitting a Class A Volunteer Application, completing the General Orientation and Protective Behaviors trainings, and passing the criminal background check, not prior to those events.)

### Who should attend?

Coaches certification is recommended for anyone who plans to coach Special Olympics. It is required for the head coach of a team wishing to enter local, area, regional or chapter competitions.

Coaches who enter their teams in meets, tournaments or games at the local, area, regional or chapter level will have their certification status verified. Any team entered without a certified head coach will not be allowed to participate. The burden of proof will be on the individual, not on the chapter or area office, if a coach's status is questioned.

The head of delegation and head coach listed on the Delegation Entry Form must attend the event with the team. The head of delegation and/or the head coach may be required to present a valid form of identification during registration, which may include the SOTX coach card.

### How is certification maintained?

A coach must retain his/her certification by meeting the four criteria listed below:

- Annually, the coach must attend an area conference in person or online. This opportunity is offered to coaches from early January through the end of February. It is during the area conference that coaches will learn about rule changes, policies and procedures, new sports, the calendar of events, etc. Coaches who choose to attend the area conference in person should attend the conference in their area (or they may attend an area conference in another area with the prior approval of the appropriate area director).
- The coach must remain active in the Special Olympics program in the specific sport(s) selected (e.g., coach, official, sport committee member, etc.). An absence of more than 12 months will result in a lapse of certification and require the coach to attend another training school. Remaining active as a coach examples include, but are not limited to, practicing with a team in the sport; incorporating the sport activities into the job; being scholastically involved with the sport; conducting clinics in the sport; attending TAPHERD conferences or other organizations where sports are a main focus; being involved in the sports competitions; or serving as a training clinic sports clinician.
- The coach must attend all required coaches meetings for the sport(s) in which they are active.
- Every three years, the coach must attend Protective Behaviors and submit a new Class A Volunteer Application.





## Coaches Conduct

Certification may be revoked if a coach fails to meet these requirements, or if he or she behaves in a significantly negligent or incompetent manner. The program/area director and area training director/manager, along with the area management team, may petition the chapter office to revoke the certification of a coach within their area if they feel there is justification to do so, after providing intervention at the area level.

Special Olympics coaches are role models whose behavior serves as a positive example for their athletes. They must strive to provide the fairest and most positive competitive experience to every Special Olympics athlete in a competition.

A coach is expected to uphold the Olympic ideals and values. The coach must exhibit, above all, respect for the athletes, coaches, volunteers, families and officials (game and staff). They must have positive interpersonal relationships; uphold the highest of moral values; and be honest, trustworthy and courteous to all persons at all levels of the organization. Furthermore, the coach's principles of coaching must be compatible with the philosophy and objectives of Special Olympics. If a coach's philosophies are in conflict with those of Special Olympics, then he or she should not seek or accept a coaching position.

The coach's verbal and physical behavior is expected to reflect a positive and constructive attitude toward Special Olympics competition and toward those volunteers, coaches, officials and event coordinators whose time and efforts provide that competitive opportunity. This attitude should reflect a confidence in the decisions of the games committee and sports officials and a belief that their decisions are made with the best interests of a fair competitive experience in mind and are in keeping with the goals and philosophies of Special Olympics.

The coach accepts the responsibility for the behavior of his or her athletes, parents and spectators both in and out of the competitive arena, while attending a Special Olympics event. Coaches should be recognized by their athletes, parents and spectators as the sole representative in dealing with the games committee and sports officials.

The Special Olympics coach is one who has succeeded in tempering his or her own competitive urges and desires for success in order to assure that the fairest and most positive competitive experience is realized by all persons involved in the event.

A good coach realizes that the Special Olympics experience is not limited to competition. Athletes benefit in every facet of their lives. They become more productive at home, in the workplace and in society as a whole. The most successful coach is one who focuses on the lifelong benefits the athlete receives, not on competition.

## Athlete Recruitment

In keeping with the Special Olympics coaching philosophy of athletes first, winning second, Special Olympics coaches shall not actively recruit athletes from other teams/delegations for the sole purpose of persuading that athlete to leave his/her affiliated delegation with promises of better conditions or other valuable considerations. Coaches who engage in the practice shall be considered to be in violation of the Coaches Code of Conduct and subject to review.

# Coaches Code of Conduct Agreement

The Coaches Code of Conduct Agreement is designed to assist the coach in abiding by the mission and philosophy of Special Olympics. In return, coaches are treated with respect and openness and have access to self-improvement training opportunities.

The area management team or area training team will review any coach who does not follow the Code of Conduct Agreement. Refer to the Appeals Process in the SIG for further clarification. The Code of Conduct Agreement will be valid as long as the coach remains certified.

1. Respect the rights, dignity and worth of every human being in Special Olympics.
  - Within the context of the activity, treat everyone equally regardless of sex, ethnic origin, religion or ability.
2. Ensure the athlete's time spent with Special Olympics is a positive experience.
3. Treat each athlete as an individual.
  - Respect the skills, developmental stage and goals of each athlete.
  - Ensure all athletes are provided appropriate training opportunities.
  - Be fair, considerate and honest with athletes.
  - Ensure that accurate scores are provided for entry of an athlete into an event at all times.
  - Instruct all athletes to perform to the best of their ability at all preliminaries/heats and finals in accordance with the Official Special Olympics Sports Rules and National Governing Body Rules.
4. Be professional in and accept responsibility for your actions.
  - Language, manner, punctuality, preparation and presentation should display high standards.
  - Display control, respect, dignity and professionalism to all involved in the sport (athletes, coaches, opponents, officials, administrators, parents, spectators, media, volunteers, etc.).
  - Encourage athletes to demonstrate the same qualities.
  - No consumption of alcohol or illegal drugs while representing Special Olympics at training, competition or while supervising athletes. Use of tobacco products is permitted only in designated areas away from the field of play.
5. Provide a quality service to your athletes.
  - Seek continual improvement through performance evaluation and ongoing coach's education.
  - Provide a planned training program.
  - Maintain medical, training and competition records for each athlete.
6. Operate within the rules and spirit of Special Olympics.
  - Special Olympics Sports Rules, National Governing Body Rules and the policies and procedures of the Sports Information Guide should be followed.
7. Refrain from any form of abuse toward athletes and others.
  - This includes verbal, physical and emotional abuse.
  - Be alert to any form of abuse from other sources directed toward your athletes while in your care.
8. Provide a safe environment for training and competition.
  - Ensure that the equipment and facilities are safe to use.
  - Equipment, rules, training and the environment need to be appropriate for the age and ability of the athletes.
  - First aid is available or accessible during all trainings and competitions.
9. Know each athlete's medical background.
  - Encourage athletes to seek medical advice when required.
  - Athletes' safety, health and welfare should always take precedence over competition.
  - Allow further participation in training and competition only when appropriate.
10. Be a positive role model for your athletes and your sport.
  - I agree to abide by the Coaches Code of Conduct Agreement.

Print Name: \_\_\_\_\_ Signature: \_\_\_\_\_

Date: \_\_\_\_\_ Area: \_\_\_\_\_



## Disciplinary Measures

Should the behavior or attitudes of any coach or other faction of the member organization be contrary to these principles or to the goals and philosophies of Special Olympics, the following steps may be taken by the games committee, sports officials and/or Special Olympics Texas in an effort to alleviate the situation without further affecting Special Olympics athletes:

- The coach may be notified of the undesirable behavior and be requested to remedy the situation in order to continue participation.
- The coach may be requested to withdraw personally, or the entire team may be asked to withdraw, from the remainder of the event or tournament.
- In the event of extreme or repeated behavior contrary to the best interests of Special Olympics athletes, Special Olympics representatives may:
  - Prevent the coach or organization from participating in any or all Special Olympics events for a specified period of time.
  - Prevent the coach or organization from participating in Special Olympics Texas indefinitely.

Complaints against a coach or other member of an organization must be filed with the appropriate area director, in writing, within two weeks of the occurrence. The written complaint must be signed by the person filing the complaint and cite the specific behavior inconsistent with the rules, regulations, policies and procedures of Special Olympics Texas and Special Olympics, Inc. The program/area director, in consultation with the area planning committee, the area management team or the training team will take one of the following actions:

- The offending person may be notified of the undesirable behavior and be requested to remedy the situation for continued participation.
- The situation will be discussed with the involved parties with no further action.
- The person or organization will be prevented from participating in Special Olympics for a defined period of time.

The area staff and volunteers will assist the person and/or organization in every reasonable manner to see that compliance to the rules, regulations, policies, procedures and philosophies of Special Olympics is achieved.

The appeal process for the coach is found on page G-6.

Offenses occurring at chapter games will be handled by the Vice President of Field Services and the rules committee. Further disciplinary action will be referred to the area management team, if necessary.

## Head of Delegation

### Requirements

- Must be a registered SOTX volunteer [must have a current Class A Volunteer Application on file, must have attended General Orientation and Protective Behaviors (in person or online), and must have passed the criminal background check].
- Must hold a current coaching certification for any sport. A coaching certification must be attained through attendance at a Special Olympics sponsored training school.
- Must attend the area conference annually.
- Must be 18 years of age or older.
- Must be a mature, reliable individual who is capable of supervising his or her athletes.
- Must uphold the idea that competing and winning are secondary to experiencing and participating.
- Must be a role model exhibiting positive interpersonal relationships, moral values, respect, honesty, trust, fairness and courtesy toward the athletes, coaching staff, volunteers, families, officials and SOTX staff.
- Will be responsible for the conduct and well-being of his or her athletes and of the coaching staff and registered chaperones.
- Be present with delegation at all competitions.
- Must complete Protective Behaviors and submit a new Class A Volunteer Application every three years.



## Responsibilities

- Set a budget for the delegation and oversee fund raisers.
- Develop the budget for each sport and for the year.
- Oversee the head coaches and ensure that coaches' certifications are up to date. A roster of all SOTX certified coaches will be posted on the SOTX web site, and this roster will be updated quarterly for your reference.
- Delegate coaching assignments.
- Keep medical forms up to date. Prior to submittal, the head of delegation should proofread the forms to make sure that all of the information on the front and back of the application is completely filled out and legible. He or she should also make sure that all of the needed signatures are present. Once all information is checked, a copy should be made for the delegation file and the original should be mailed to the area office.
- Notify the area and chapter offices of any changes in leadership (head coach) or contact people for the delegation. Address information is vitally important to communication between the area/chapter office and the head coach.
- Be responsible for the completion and correctness of all entries submitted for local, area and chapter events by the established deadlines. This duty includes, but is not limited to, verifying that the head coaches listed on the delegation entries are registered Class A volunteers with SOTX and hold the correct sport certification.
- Make sure that all delegation volunteers (all chaperones, head coaches, coaching staff, Unified Sports® partners, any volunteer bus drivers as well as yourself) have completed all four steps for Class A registration (Class A Form, General Orientation, Protective Behaviors, and criminal background check). No one is considered a volunteer without completing these four steps.
- Assist the head coaches with the paperwork for all events.
- Keep up with area and chapter news through meetings, training programs, conferences and online information at [www.specialolympicstexas.org](http://www.specialolympicstexas.org).
- Communicate with parents, guardians and caregivers regarding training and competition information keeping them abreast of the details pertaining to the delegation. Examples of the type of information which should be provided are: times, dates and location of competition or training, housing information, who is in charge, phone numbers in case of emergencies, sleeping arrangements, how to dress or what to pack, etc. Be specific. Encourage parents to get involved.
- Follow Special Olympics Texas guidelines when conducting fund raising activities and reporting all income and expenditures in conducting such activities to the program/area director or development director.
- Execute the legal duties of a coach by:
  - Providing a safe environment.
  - Properly planning the activity.
  - Evaluating athletes for injury or incapacity.
  - Matching athletes or making sure that athletes who compete against each other are of similar abilities.
  - Providing adequate and proper equipment.
  - Ensuring that training is held in a physically safe environment (having a lifeguard present, etc.).
  - Supervising all activities closely.
  - Knowing emergency procedures and first aid.
  - Keeping adequate records.
  - Being present with the team during all competitions.
  - Ensuring there must be one certified coach for each delegation in individual sports and one certified coach per team for team sports. There should be at least one other certified coach present to fill in for the head coach if he/she becomes unable to complete his/her duties.
  - Following the official ratio for Special Olympics Texas of 4 athletes to 1 adult, and for



the purpose of supervision, all minor Unified Sports™ partners (17 years old or younger) are included in the athlete count. For an event with no overnight stay, the 4 to 1 ratio is required, but the gender specific ratio is not; it is advised that delegations have at least one chaperone of both genders to handle certain situations. For an event with an overnight stay, the 4 to 1 ratio of four athletes/minors to one adult is required by gender, meaning every four athletes/minors need one male chaperone and every four female athletes/minors need one female chaperone. However, we urge all delegations to strive to maintain the 4 to 1 by gender ratio at all times.

## Head Coach

### Requirements

- Must be a registered SOTX volunteer [must have a current Class A Volunteer Application on file, must have attended General Orientation and Protective Behaviors (in person or online) and must have passed the criminal background check].
- Must hold a current coaching certification for the sport in which he or she is coaching. A coaching certification must be attained through attendance at a Special Olympics Texas sponsored training school.
- Must attend the area conference annually.
- Must be 18 years of age or older.
- Must be a mature, reliable individual who is capable of supervising his or her athletes.
- Must uphold the idea that competing and winning are secondary to experiencing and participating.
- Must be a role model exhibiting positive interpersonal relationships, moral values, respect, honesty, trust, fairness and courtesy toward the athletes, coaching staff, volunteers, families, officials and SOTX staff.
- Will be responsible for the conduct and well-being of his or her athletes and of the other coaching staff and registered chaperones.
- Must complete Protective Behaviors and submit a new Class A Volunteer Application every three years.

### Responsibilities

- Train Special Olympics athletes.
- Promote fair competition at local, area, regional and chapter games.
- Adhere to the policies and procedures of Special Olympics, Inc. and Special Olympics Texas, Inc.
- Notify athletes or guardians of physical obligations and deadlines.
- Comply with registration procedures.
- Organize and conduct a training program which develops the necessary physical, mental and social skills for Special Olympics competition and ensures each participant a positive experience geared toward enriched personal growth.
- Schedule eight weeks of training prior to competition and provide as many opportunities for competition as possible, including a minimum of one local competition or two scrimmages prior to the area event.
- Teach all coaching staff and athletes the rules of the sport.
- Obtain and read all the necessary rules, forms and materials needed to conduct training.
- Complete all forms and meet all deadlines assigned by the program/area director and Special Olympics Texas for registering athletes including:
  - Sending the Athlete Enrollment/Medical Release Form to the area office.
  - Correcting and completing all entry forms for each competition.
- Attend area and/or chapter coaches meetings and training clinics.
- Provide periodic and final reports to the area director as requested.
- Complete event evaluations and recommendations for rule revisions.



- Keep accurate records on all athletes and activities including:
  - Registration for local, area and chapter games.
  - Training assessments, evaluations and skill assessment test results.
- Be present with the team during all competitions.
- Exercise exemplary actions, attitudes and values becoming of a person in a leadership role.
- Be responsible for the team practice schedule and all written or verbal communications with team athletes, parents and assistant coaches.
- Execute the legal duties of a coach by:
  - Providing a safe environment.
  - Properly planning the activity.
  - Evaluating athletes for injury or incapacity.
  - Matching athletes or making sure that athletes who compete against each other are of similar abilities.
  - Providing adequate and proper equipment.
  - Ensuring that training is held in a physically safe environment (having a lifeguard present, etc.).
  - Supervising all activities closely.
  - Knowing emergency procedures and first aid.
  - Keeping adequate records.

## Coaching Staff (Formerly Assistant Coach)

### Requirements

- Must be a registered SOTX volunteer [must have a current Class A Volunteer Application on file, must have attended General Orientation and Protective Behaviors (in person or online) and must have passed the criminal background check].
- Must be at least 15 years of age with parent signature if under 18 years of age.
- Must be a mature, reliable individual who is capable of supervising his or her athletes under the direction of the head coach.
- Must uphold the idea that competing and winning are secondary to experiencing and participating.
- Must be a role model exhibiting positive interpersonal relationships, moral values, respect, honesty, trust, fairness and courtesy toward the athletes, coaching staff, volunteers, families, officials and SOTX staff.
- Must answer directly to the head coach.
- Will need to become certified within four years of entering the coaching program.

### Responsibilities

- Provide athletes with comprehensive sports training and preparation for local, area, regional and chapter competitions.
- Assist with selecting, assessing and training Special Olympics athletes.
  - Selecting – The coaching staff will recruit athletes and properly complete and submit all the required medical and registration materials by the established deadlines.
  - Assessing – The coaching staff will assess each athlete to determine the individual and/or team skill level for training and competition in his or her selected sports.
  - Training – The coaching staff will develop individualized training programs for each athlete. The programs shall include fundamental skill instruction, conditioning and instruction on competition and rules. The training program should be a minimum of eight weeks in duration.
- Know, understand and abide by the official Special Olympics Sports Rules.
- Know and understand the sport being coached.



- Execute the legal duties of a coach by:
  - Providing a safe environment.
  - Properly planning the activity.
  - Evaluating athletes for injury or incapacity.
  - Matching athletes or making sure that athletes who compete against each other are of similar abilities.
  - Providing adequate and proper equipment.
  - Ensuring that training is held in a physically safe environment (having a lifeguard present, etc.).
  - Supervising all activities closely.
  - Know emergency procedures and first aid.
  - Keep adequate records.

## Special Responsibilities for Head Coaches/Coaching Staff

Because most chapter and some area events last an entire weekend, it is very important that coaches are adequately prepared to deal with the athletes for an extended period of time. Listed below are some of the necessary and helpful procedures that should simplify the job.

- The coach is responsible for the athlete 24 hours a day. It is up to the coach to ensure that the physical and emotional needs of the athletes are met during any event or games competition. This responsibility includes, but is not limited to:
  - Ensuring that athletes are properly warmed-up prior to any competition.
  - Taking precautions to prevent any athlete from suffering sunburn and heat exhaustion by using sunscreen, drinking plenty of fluids and taking advantage of shaded areas whenever possible.
  - Bringing a first aid kit and knowing how to administer first aid.
  - Ensuring athletes get adequate rest away from the competition.
  - Ensuring that athletes display appropriate behavior.
  - Ensuring that the athletes eat properly and avoid overeating or missing meals.  
Note: If an athlete requires a special diet, it is the responsibility of the coach to provide for the athlete's needs. For special diets, bring a cooler with all the proper foods.
- The coach should be aware of the athlete's possessions.
- The coach is expected to be totally familiar with the medical condition, precautions and medication requirements of each athlete. It is the coach's responsibility to ensure that medication is administered. Knowledge of the medication regimen (what, how much and when) is essential.
- The coach is expected to carry a copy of the valid Athlete Enrollment/Medical Release Form for each athlete at all times.
- The coach must ensure that armbands or name tags are worn by athletes and coaching staff at all times.
- The coach must ensure that the athlete is on time for all sports competitions but also has the opportunity to participate in special activities.
- The coach is expected to be familiar with Special Olympics Sports Rules. Questions or concerns about sporting events should be addressed to the sport director. Concerns or suggestions about other aspects of the games should be made on the evaluation form provided in the registration packet.
- No alcoholic beverages are allowed at Special Olympics practices and competitions. Smoking is also prohibited except in designated areas.
- The head coach is responsible for making sure that the athletes are dressed appropriately for all competitions, including appropriate sports specific undergarments.

# Athlete Coach

## Requirements

- See Athletes as Coaches information in Section J.
- Athlete coaches may perform all of the functions of a coach on the playing field under the supervision of a head coach or head of delegation. Athlete coaches must have an individual without intellectual disabilities present at all practices, competitions and events. This presence is required for all practices and games events.
- Athlete coaches cannot serve as the head coach, head of delegation or be counted in the chaperone to athlete ratio on the Delegation Entry Form.

## Additional Duties Required of All Delegations

Qualified volunteers, parents and family members can and should help the head of the delegation and all coaches by assisting with some of the additional administrative duties described below.

- Establish and maintain, in one accessible location known to all assistants and coaching staff:
  - A current list of all athlete names, parent names, phone numbers, e-mails and addresses. (This information can be found on the Athlete Enrollment/Medical Release Form. This form must be with the coach who is conducting a practice or traveling and attending a Special Olympics Texas sponsored meet or event.)
  - An accurate inventory and condition description of all equipment, including uniforms (athletes' and coaches'), specifying sizes and how many of each size.
- Set up procedures at each location, event or activity designed to:
  - Return equipment to storage (preferably locked, with more than one person knowing where the key(s) are kept).
  - Return rule books, Sports Skills Guides, Sports Information Guides and any other SOTX area or chapter-specific information such as the names and phone numbers of key volunteers or mentor coaches.
  - Return and clean uniforms after meets.
  - Set up and maintain the team's centralized account through the SOTX finance department.
  - Receive donations from SOTX-approved fund raisers, businesses and individuals.
  - Deposit all cash and/or checks into a SOTX approved account so that receipts are always trackable.
  - Agree on fund raisers, fill out all applications and get approval from the Vice President of Resource Development (vp\_dev.chp@sotx.org).
- Keep the safety of all athletes at the forefront of your mind to prevent all types of abuse. See Section I – Health and Safety for guidelines on preventing athletes from ever having to experience physical abuse, emotional abuse and sexual abuse, as well as tips on identifying signs of abuse and reporting abuse.
- Parents and guardians of athletes traveling and competing at area and local events should be made aware of the following information prior to departure for the games:
  - Who are the chaperones going to the event.
  - How they can reach the HoD and coaches.
  - Departure and return information.
  - Where the delegation will be housed.
  - What the sleeping arrangements will be if staying overnight in a hotel or in the dorms.
  - Any additional detail that is relevant to the event.





- When housing athletes in hotel rooms and in the dorms, it is up to the delegation and its policy to determine the sleeping arrangements while in housing. However, parents must be informed, and the following needs to be taken into consideration:
  - When Special Olympics events require athletes to stay overnight, the gender, age and developmental levels of the athletes should be taken into consideration when making room assignments. Athletes should also be assigned sleeping rooms with athletes of similar size and intellectual functioning. In addition, male and female athletes require separate accommodations as well as need chaperones of their own gender.
  - Parents may act as chaperones for their own children and sleep in the same room as their child, even if the gender is mixed. However, if there is a gender disparity, there may not be any other athletes housed in the same room. Parents acting as chaperones must complete all of the volunteer Class A registration requirements.

## Safety Guidelines for All Coaches and Delegation Heads

When you become a coach, whether you are paid or a volunteer, you assume some legal responsibilities. While we do not want you to become alarmed about the possibility of being named in a lawsuit, we want you to be aware that there are things you need to do to lessen the risk. When coaches are sued, it is most often for negligence.

Negligence – “occurs when you fail to perform a legally owed duty, as would a reasonable and prudent coach, with this failure resulting in actual damage that is a consequence of your breach of duty and that should have been foreseen.”

In many instances, delegations stay in dormitory-style housing while attending Summer Games. Under no circumstances will delegations be allowed to mix genders of athletes while staying in the dorms. Male athletes must stay on one floor while the female athletes stay on another floor. Failure to follow this rule can result in disciplinary measures against the HoD and head coach.

### A coach has at least nine important duties:

- To provide a safe environment.
- To properly plan the activity.
- To evaluate athletes for injury or incapacity.
- To match athletes of similar abilities to ensure fair competition.
- To provide adequate and proper equipment.
- To educate on how to safely participate in sports training (no diving into the shallow end of the pool, etc.).
- To supervise the activity closely.
- To know emergency procedures and first aid.
- To keep adequate records.

### The following safety guidelines are recommended to help implement legal duties of a coach.

- Establish procedures for accidents and emergencies, including appropriate report forms. Safety rules and regulations should be included and enforced.
- Establish an adequate plan of supervision and make sure that those assisting are competent to do so.
- Regularly and thoroughly inspect any facilities, apparatus and equipment. This step is a good form of preventative maintenance.
- Teach skills in their proper progression and take into account individual variance.
- Do not force first aid on an athlete if he or she resists. Notify the appropriate personnel if an injury is of a more serious nature (broken bone, severe cut, etc.).
- Complete a First Report of Accident/Incident Form as soon as possible (see page H-24). Document all injuries.
- Ensure that your athletes have proper transportation to and from events and practices.
- Note that waivers often cause coaches to be less diligent in their duties to provide a safe environment, even though the waiver on the athlete medical form provides little, if any, release of liability to coaches.

# Coaching Athletes

## The Special Olympics Coaching Philosophy – Athletes First, Winning Second

As a coach, your attitude toward sports and competition will directly affect your athletes. Special Olympics believes that the athletic experience and the camaraderie shared by teammates is what benefits an athlete the most. Coaches should be aware of how they influence their athletes, and should follow these guidelines in all aspects of their interactions with athletes.

- Successful coaches help athletes master new skills, enjoy competition with others and feel good about themselves.
- Successful coaches are not only well-versed in techniques and skills, they know how to teach these skills to people.
- Successful coaches not only teach athletes the skills of the sport, they also teach and model the skills needed for successful living in society.
- Successful coaches are those who can learn new skills, who are flexible enough to change old ways when change is needed, who can accept constructive criticism and who are able to critically evaluate themselves.

### Coaching Objectives

- To have fun – both the coaches and the athletes.
- To help athletes develop:
  - Physically, by learning sports skills and rules, improving physical conditioning, developing good health habits and avoiding injuries.
  - Psychologically, by learning how to control their emotions and develop feelings of self-worth.
  - Socially, by learning how to cooperate in a competitive context and by learning appropriate standards of behavior, including sportsmanship.
- To cooperate and exercise sound judgment in every decision that affects athletes, coaching staff, volunteers, family members, officials (volunteers and staff) and the organization.
- To be a positive role model exhibiting good interpersonal relations, moral values, respect, honesty, trust, fairness and courtesy towards the athletes, coaches, volunteers, family members and officials.

With proper leadership, sports programs produce athletes who accept responsibilities, who accept others and, most of all, who accept themselves.

### What Makes a Successful Coach?

- Knowledge of the sport – The more knowledge you have of the basic skills of a sport, and the more you know about teaching these basics in the proper sequence, the more fun you and your athletes will have.
- Motivation to be a good coach – You can have all the skills and knowledge in the world, but without motivation you will not be a successful coach.
- Empathy – The ability to readily understand the thoughts, feelings and emotions of your athletes and convey this to them. Successful coaches possess empathy. They are able to understand athletes' emotions of joy, frustration, anger and anxiety.
- Communication – The coach must be able to communicate with athletes, parents and assistant coaches. Everyone works together better when goals and objectives are clear.

### Coaching Tips

- Keep the athletes active.
- Keep verbal communication brief.
- Praise the athlete; be specific about what skills you are praising.
- New skills should be taught at the beginning of the lesson. Do not over-coach; teach just one thing at a time.
- Be patient. Respect and accept the athlete as an individual.





- Review for reinforcement.
- Know your athlete – his or her abilities, interests and goals.
- Keep all practices short and fun.
- Choose activities that challenge the individual.
- Be firm, understanding, organized and imaginative.
- Set up special awards, such as hardest worker, most improved, etc.
- Set realistic goals that are meaningful, challenging and attainable.
- Set a goal at the beginning of each lesson or practice and then evaluate at the end of the orientation as to whether it was achieved. Be positive; there is no room for negative expectations.
- Plan a fitness program.
- Be flexible. Have the courage to change methods to better the program.
- Give the athlete confidence. Use your voice and face to express yourself.
- Focus on ability, not disability. Emphasize potential, not deficiency. Encourage, don't discourage.
- Before you act, remember that you are a focal point on and off the field of play and that your actions, attitudes and words could have a profound influence on the lives of your players and the individuals around you.
- You set an example. Be a positive role model by exhibiting positive interpersonal relations, high moral values, respect, honesty, trust, fairness and courtesy toward others.

## Working with People with Intellectual Disabilities

As a Special Olympics coach you will be looked up to and held in esteem by the Special Olympics athletes. The Special Olympics athletes will look to you for friendship as well as for coaching guidance. Therefore, we have developed some basic guidelines for working with Special Olympics athletes which may help you in establishing discipline, coaching routines and interpersonal relationships.

The method and manner by which you conduct your program will, in large part, determine your success as a coach. While coaching, approach your athletes enthusiastically. Present the day's lesson in an enjoyable manner. Remember, Special Olympics athletes return the excitement and enthusiasm transmitted to them by you. There are a variety of things you can do as a planner and instructor to create a positive, acceptable human environment to support learning in a group.

### Goals

It is very important that you, as a coach, have certain objectives or goals for the athletes on a daily and weekly basis. On a daily basis, physical conditioning should be stressed. On a seasonal basis, preparation for Special Olympics events might be in order. Specific rewards which motivate productivity are necessary on a year-round basis so that athletes progress and move on to different sports events and activities.

All short-range goals should lead up to the sound development of each athlete. Physically, mentally, socially and emotionally, the long-range goal is the enhancement of each athlete's self image.

### Discipline

In general, a "firm, but fair" approach is best; the athlete should realize that you are there to impart information as well as to offer guidance. You, therefore, should remain flexible and open-minded in your expectations and demands. This "open-ended" approach helps create a cooperative spirit and a greater desire to perform. Above all, consistency in your expectations for discipline is a key to success.

### Physical Conditioning

It is important that you become familiar with the physical abilities of each participant. Then you can carefully plan your training orientations, aiming to help each athlete achieve maximum physical potential. The best way to encourage your athletes to perform is through your demonstration and participation in the activities.



## Competition

Special Olympics athletes should be encouraged to compete, above all, with themselves. The key lies in the motivation; therefore, it is up to you to encourage interest by changing activities frequently. This is achieved by not making formal practice orientations too long, and by varying your approaches to the fundamentals and skills you are coaching.

It is important for you to help your athletes keep and review accurate records of their progress. As the athletes gain more and more control over their bodies, records will help them achieve awareness of their progress, which in turn stimulates further interest in competing against themselves.

## Reinforcement

Rewards are a good motivation for achievement. Some athletes may respond best to verbal praise and encouragement; others may require more tangible rewards such as stars, ribbons, patches, certificates or medals. The most important tool you can have is knowledge of each athlete's needs. The spirit of achievement is a fine inducement for continued improvement. Acknowledgment of the efforts of your Special Olympics athletes in the form of rewards or reinforcements helps to bolster their self-image.

Finally, the following teaching suggestions may be helpful to you as you are learning to coach.

### Before the Lesson

- Always plan and understand the lesson thoroughly.
- Set realistic goals for each athlete.
- Minimal time should be spent standing or waiting around. Maximize participation of all Special Olympics athletes and available equipment.
- Always allow for warm-up.

### During the Lesson

- Closely analyze the athlete's attempts and always provide feedback.
- RELAX! Attempt to learn the rhythm and style of your team the first day.
- Be flexible. Adapt instruction to meet the needs of a particular athlete or group.
- Use confidence builders and motivation. Always attempt to prevent an athlete from encountering repeated failures.
- Stand and face athletes during instruction (mirroring reverse instruction of left and right).
- Provide brief and clear instructions.
- Teach by indirection as well as direction. Athletes are great imitators; be a good model.
- Allow the athlete plenty of time to become familiar with one skill before teaching another skill. Introduce one or two skills per practice orientation.
- Always point out the positive before correcting, "Bill, you did well clearing the bar, but if you approach the bar at this angle . . ."
- Be firm.
- Be consistent.
- Be quick to praise. Praise in public; discipline in private.
- Follow through with any warnings you may give.
- Devote a part of each training period to vigorous activity.
- Participate in the activity with the athletes. Stay active.
- Individualize your instruction.
- Repetition and practice is the key to success. Overlearn.
- Passive manipulation. Physical assistance is often needed to ensure proper learning.
- Don't expect immediate results as far as skill learning – practice patience, patience and more patience.

**Visit our Web site at [www.specialolympicstexas.org](http://www.specialolympicstexas.org)  
for additional coaching tips as well as a coach training calendar.**



# Sample 8-Session Training Plan

Each individual entering a Special Olympics Texas competition shall participate in at least eight sessions of training and preliminary competition before the culminating event. This plan must include at least one local competition or two scrimmages. The suggested guidelines listed below follow 90-minute training sessions. These are minimum standards. Athletes will benefit from more frequent training and/or additional competition opportunities when possible.

Preseason, you will need to recruit athletes, complete the Athlete Enrollment/Medical Release Forms, plan and complete coaching staff and family meetings, as well as plan uniform and equipment purchases.

## Session 1

Orientation (10 minutes)  
Warm Up (15 minutes)  
Skill Development (30 minutes)  
Scrimmage/Trial (15 minutes)  
Conditioning (15 minutes)  
Closing/Cool Down (5 minutes)

## Session 2

Welcome (5 minutes)  
Warm Up (10 minutes)  
Skills Test/Preliminary Scores (60 minutes)  
Conditioning (10 minutes)  
Closing/Cool Down (5 minutes)

## Session 3

Welcome (5 minutes)  
Warm Up (10 minutes)  
New Skills (15 minutes)  
Skill Development (30 minutes)  
Scrimmage/Trial (15 minutes)  
Conditioning (10 minutes)  
Closing/Cool Down (5 minutes)

## Session 4

Welcome (5 minutes)  
Warm Up (10 minutes)  
New Skills (15 minutes)  
Skill Development (15 minutes)  
Scrimmage/Trial (30 minutes)  
Conditioning (10 minutes)  
Closing/Cool Down (5 minutes)

## Session 5

Welcome (5 minutes)  
Warm Up (10 minutes)  
Competition (70 minutes)  
Closing/Cool Down (5 minutes)

## Session 6

Welcome (5 minutes)  
Warm Up (10 minutes)  
New Skills (15 minutes)  
Skill Development (15 minutes)  
Scrimmage/Trial (30 minutes)  
Conditioning (10 minutes)  
Closing/Cool Down (5 minutes)

## Session 7

Welcome (5 minutes)  
Warm Up (10 minutes)  
Competition (70 minutes)  
Closing/Cool Down (5 minutes)

## Session 8

Welcome (5 minutes)  
Warm Up (10 minutes)  
Skills (15 minutes)  
Scrimmage/Trial (30 minutes)  
Closing/Cool Down (30 minutes)