



Special Olympics

Transitioning from Young Athletes to Sports

OVERVIEW

Introduction

Special Olympics Young Athletes provides children with a general introduction to the fundamental gross motor movements that will help them become more successful in sport. While children can participate in Young Athletes through age seven, as children get older, they are often ready for more sport-specific coaching and instruction.

Developmental sports activities can provide an age-appropriate introduction to sports for children with and without intellectual disabilities, ages 6-12 years old. Sport participation helps children develop physically, mentally and socially and contributes to the development of long-term healthy lifestyles. The fundamental skills and training opportunities gained through developmental sports activities can support children in their growth as Special Olympics athletes and unified partners.

Through partnerships with sport federations, this resource includes a variety of sport-specific curricula that focus on skill development and can be used to start developmental sports activities.

Sport-specific resources are currently available in the following sports:



Swimming



Basketball



Badminton



Cycling



Football



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Transition is Important

There is a known gap of participation between Young Athletes (sport and play program for children with and without intellectual disabilities, ages 2 to 7 years old), and Special Olympics sports. By emphasizing sport skill development in a structured sport environment, Special Olympics can focus on retention of participants and development of athlete skills, while also creating a more robust opportunity for participation.

Below are some of the reasons developmental sports activities are necessary to support existing Young Athletes moving to traditional or unified Special Olympics activities:

- A child under age 8 has advanced beyond the skills in their Young Athletes activities, but is not yet old enough to participate in Special Olympics;
- A child is 8 or older and is not ready or not yet comfortable with participating in 8+ weeks of practice and competition in one sport;
- A community program or team is primarily made up of adults and it is not developmentally appropriate for an 8 year old child to join the team;
- An elementary or primary school wants to provide inclusive sports activities through Special Olympics, but does not have the structure to support team sports and competition.

By focusing on athletes who are 6 to 12 years of age, an overlap of opportunities is created to meet the needs of children at the end of their Young Athletes experience and the beginning of their Special Olympics career.

It is important to remember that this opportunity may not be appropriate for all children. Participants should be identified not just by their age, but also by their developmental and social readiness to participate in more advanced sport-specific skills. During the fundamental stage of the Athlete Development Model, Young Athletes focuses on basic motor development skills. When athletes have mastered the fundamentals, they are ready to learn how to train in a sport. Use the Special Olympics' Athlete Development Model to better understand athlete progression.

Special Olympics Athlete Development Model



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Structure and Implementation

Each of the sport-specific resources provided are designed as a curriculum with a unique structure that can be followed for implementation. Developmental sports activities can be integrated into inclusive sport offerings already being provided, or can be used to create new opportunities in the school or community.

Although there is room for flexibility, activities should take place in stand-alone or multi-sport experiences.

Multi-Sport Experiences

- **Typical Setting:** School
- **Structure:** Takes place during physical education time at school or as an after-school program
- **Structure:** Multiple sports taught with at least 6-8 weeks spent on each sport

Single-Sport Experiences

- **Typical Setting:** Community
- **Structure:** Integrated into other community-based Special Olympics practices or sport club activities
- **Structure:** Single sport taught for at least 6-8 weeks

Single-Sport Experience

Activities can take place at practice for the Special Olympics sports team or can be scheduled separately, but should be connected to a local community program. This model can be implemented in the school setting with a focus on only one sport. If an elementary school has a basketball team for upper grade level students, offering basketball as a developmental sport would help the younger students to prepare to join the team.

In the community setting, the curriculum can be adapted for a stand-alone sport or sport club structure.



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Multi-Sport Experience

Multi-sport opportunities will typically occur where there is a built in structure for long-term programming. Through this structure, athletes have the opportunity to develop skills for training in a variety of sports, which is valuable in helping children understand what they are good at and what they enjoy doing.

The structure in schools provides a unique opportunity to develop the sport skills of children over a longer period of time. For this reason, activities should be conducted over a semester or full school year, with at least six to eight weeks being spent on each sport.

In a school, sessions should be conducted at least one time per week as part of an inclusive physical education class time or built into on-campus, after-school programs. The activities should be run by a sport-specific Special Olympics coach.

When looking to identify participants for inclusive opportunities in schools, consider the following options for implementation:

- For integrated schools with specialized classrooms for children with intellectual disabilities, pair the specialized class with a class of general education students of the same age, grade or development level.
- In inclusive classrooms, offer developmental sports activities during a designated physical education class time. Or, these activities can occur in a non-inclusive setting as part of a designated adapted physical education or motor development class period.

Registration and Requirements

Registration

Athletes and partners should be registered as “training but not competing” in GMS and must complete an athlete release and medical form. If your Special Olympics Program has a policy about specific registration and medical requirements for participation in schools, please default to the SO Program’s policy and requirements.

Coach Requirements

All coaches (including school-based coaches) should be certified through Special Olympics in the specific sport they are coaching. This ensures they can provide the athletes with high quality, developmentally appropriate instruction and challenges. Additionally, the SO Program’s policy and requirements for coaches should be met.



SPORT SPECIFIC RESOURCES

SWIMMING



Overview

As the Official Swimming Training Program for Special Olympics, Michael and the Foundation provide a year-round swimming program for children and adults with intellectual disabilities, giving them continuing opportunities to develop physical fitness, demonstrate courage, and experience joy.

The *Young Athletes* **im** program is about the child's initial introduction to the swimming experience.

Structure

There are 16 songs and two activities in the full Young Athletes im Program. im safe has three levels: Get Comfortable, Get Moving and Get Strong. Most participants will start in either Get Comfortable or Get Moving. You should start with less songs and add as the participants become more comfortable with activities.

Equipment Needed

- Warm water – 90 Fahrenheit/32 Celsius
- Depth no more than 4 feet/1.2 meters
- Easy entrance into pool
- Clean and safe location

Resources for Implementation

The im safe training video and accompanying guide can be accessed for free on the [Special Olympics website](#) in 6 different languages.

Click on the guide or video below to access the free resources.



BADMINTON



The BWF logo, consisting of the letters 'BWF' in a bold, white, sans-serif font, set against a red, curved background element.

Overview

Badminton is a great school sport for both girls and boys. It is suitable for children of all ages and levels of ability, and is a safe, fun and low impact sport.

Shuttle Time is the Badminton World Federation's (BWF) school badminton program, targeting students 5 to 15 years of age. BWF requires specific training to become certified as a Shuttle Time coach, but their resources are available to Special Olympics coaches to use in schools and communities.

Structure

Shuttle Time is a full curriculum-based program that consists of 10 modules and 22 badminton lesson plans. All lessons are designed for 60 minutes, however, the timing of the exercises can be adjusted to suit a shorter lesson period.

All lessons follow the same structure and contain detailed graphics and instruction for coaching: Introduction, Physical Development, Technical, Review Lesson Focus.

Equipment Needed

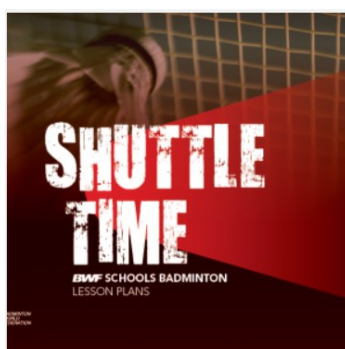
An ideal badminton kit consist of:

- 24 rackets
- 3 dozen plastic shuttles
- 4 nets (or a 20 meter long rope that can be used as a net)

Resources for Implementation

The resources for Shuttle Time can be accessed for free by registering on the [Shuttle Time website](#). To register you will enter your name, country, gender and email address and you will then gain access to the Teachers' Manual, 22 Lesson Plans and 92 video clips, all free of charge.

Click on the Teacher Manual or Lesson Plans book below to register.



CYCLING



Overview

Cycling is a fun sport for children that requires good physical condition, balance, endurance and tactics.

Transition to Competitive Cycling is a resource from Strider Sports to supports children in learning to ride on a balance bike and transition to a pedal bike.

Structure

The *Transition to Competitive Cycling* Guide consists of 9 lessons, with a variety of activities for each lesson. All lessons are designed for 60 minutes, however, the timing of the activities can be adjusted to suit a shorter lesson period.

All lessons contain an introduction to a new skill, activities that apply the new skill learned and a conclusion.

Equipment Needed

An ideal badminton kit consist of:

- Strider Bikes
- Helmets
- A ball of yarn
- Cones
- Foot rests

Resources for Implementation

The *Transition to Competitive Cycling* Guide can be accessed for free on the [Special Olympics website](#).

Click on the guide below to access the free resources.



BASKETBALL



FOOTBALL

