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The Mission of Special Olympics:

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

The Special Olympics Oaths

Athlete's Oath

"Let me win. But if I cannot win, let me 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."



Facts about Special Olympics

- ◆ It is a year-round sports training and competition program.
- ◆ There are 27 sports offered globally. Check with your local Program to see which sports are offered in your area.
- ◆ There are team and individual sports.
- ◆ You must be 8 years old to compete; 5 years old to train; no upper age limit.
- ◆ Special Olympics is for people with intellectual disabilities.
- ◆ Participation in Special Olympics is free of charge.
- ◆ Special Olympics is an international/ worldwide organization.



Divisioning

What is divisioning?

Divisioning is the practice that makes Special Olympics unique in the sports world:

Special Olympics believes that every athlete deserves an equal chance to excel during competition. Thus, each competition event must be divided into divisions such that every athlete/team has a reasonable chance to excel during competition by competing with athletes of similar ability. 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.

How are athletes divisioned?

The Official Special Olympics Sports Rules puts forth the procedures for divisioning. In essence, an athlete's ability is the primary factor in divisioning Special Olympics competition. The ability of an athlete or team is determined by an entry score from a prior competition or is the result of a seeding round or preliminary event (qualifier). Although not perfect, these are the best indicators of an athlete's/team's ability. Other factors used in establishing competitive divisions are age and gender.

Ideally, competition is enhanced when each division accommodates at least three and no more than eight competitors or teams of similar ability (utilizing a 15% between qualifying scores of the top and bottom of a given division as a guideline to ability group such individuals/teams). In some cases, however, the number of athletes or teams within a competition will be insufficient to achieve this goal. Specific divisioning rules are at the end of this section.

If each division should have between 3 and 8 athletes/teams, then why are there single person divisions sometimes?

Single person/team divisions are not desirable, since they offer no competition. However, sometimes an athlete's/team's ability is so far to the upper or lower extreme (greatly exceeds the 15% guideline) of all other athletes/teams' abilities that it is unfair and possibly unsafe to include them in a division. Doing so would also violate the Special Olympics Principle of every athlete/team in a division having the chance to excel.

So why can't all divisions have only three athletes/teams thereby ensuring everyone gets a medal?

Manipulating divisions to ensure everyone receives a medal is contrary to the Special Olympics Principles: Special Olympics celebrates and strives to promote the spirit of sportsmanship and a love of participation in sports for its own 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. The Founding Principle does not say that we strive for an athlete's self-esteem to be dependent on their place of finish.

There are three reasons why this can't/shouldn't be done.

- ♦ First, it violates the rules of the International Olympic Committee who grant us permission to use the word "Olympics" in our name. In granting this permission, Special Olympics is required to follow certain Olympic standards. Awarding medals to only the top three finishers in each division is one of those standards.
- ♦ Second, and more importantly, by "fixing" divisions or giving medals indiscriminately, you diminish a medal's value and effectiveness as a tool in teaching athletes how to compete. Special Olympics believes that challenging oneself on the field of play makes one a winner, regardless of place of finish. Hence, all athletes who start a competition are to be rewarded and acknowledged for their efforts. Each athlete receives an award from first through eighth places when they successfully complete a competition. Participation ribbons are awarded all who start a competition but for any number of reasons, don't complete the competition.



- ♦ Third, and most importantly, the ultimate goal of Special Olympics sports training and competition is to develop the love of participation in sports and the desire to always do your best. Hence the athlete's oath, "Let me win; But if I cannot win; Let me be brave in the attempt". This is a personal growth process that develops over numerous competitive experiences; it is vital to the athlete's ultimate sense of self.

But my athlete(s) is so disappointed when he/she doesn't get a medal; why can't athletes receive medals instead of ribbons for 4th –8th places?

Currently, the Special Olympics rule governing awards states, all Program-level Games, National Games, Regional Games, World Games and any other Games or events sanctioned by SOI medals shall be presented to the first, second, and third-place winners in each event, and ribbons shall be presented to athletes who finish in fourth through eighth place. Medals shall not be awarded to athletes placing fourth through eighth within a division

Special Olympics rules for divisioning competitions may be found in their entirety in Article I of the Special Olympics Sports Rules. Below is a summary of those rules:

Individual Sports:

- a) Step one: Divide athletes/teams by gender, unless the sport specifically allows co-ed events (equestrian, bocce).
- b) Step Two: Divide male and female athletes into the following age groups: ages 8-11; 12-15; 16-21; 22-29; and 30 years and over.
- c) Step Three: Divide athletes by ability.
 - 1) In events that are measured in time, distance or points, and in events that are judged and when preliminary events will be conducted during the competition: use those times/results.
 - 2) In events that are judged and when preliminary events will not be conducted during the competition: performance level remains as the only criterion of athlete ability. If more than eight athletes are in the same gender and age group of a performance level, group athletes into divisions of no less than three and no more than eight competitors.

Team Sports:

- a) Team sports are first divided by gender and then age. Mixed gender teams shall compete against other mixed gender teams or, if there are not enough mixed gender teams, against male teams.
 - 1) If there is only one male or one female team within the competition, that team shall be divisioned with teams of the opposite gender who are of similar age and ability.
 - 2) The age group of a team is determined by the age of the oldest athlete on that team on the opening date of the competition.
 - 3) Divide male and female teams into the following age groups: ages 15 and under; 16-21; and 22 and over.
- b) Divide Teams by ability.



Athlete Leadership Programs

Athletes choose their sports	Athletes can be Team Captains	Athletes can be Volunteers
Athletes can be Officials	Athletes can be Coaches	Athletes can be on Boards or Committees
Athletes can be Global Messengers	Athletes can be Assistant Coaches	Athletes can be on Input Councils

Does your team have a captain? If not, elect one!



Principles of Coaching

As Special Olympics has expanded and evolved over the years, it has become clearly evident that the key to offering quality training for Special Olympics athletes is the local coach. If coaches are educated in coaching methods and techniques, then the mission of Special Olympics in offering quality sports training and athletic competition is enhanced.

The objectives of the Principles of Coaching course are:

- ♦ To provide a safe environment for Special Olympics athletes during training and competition
- ♦ To apply the principles of strength, endurance and flexibility training and nutrition as they apply to Special Olympics athletes
- ♦ To develop an understanding of Special Olympics
- ♦ To apply the sport management team approach in recruiting athletes, volunteers and family members and develop training plans for conducting sport-specific training programs for Special Olympics athletes
- ♦ To develop athletes' sport confidence through effective coaching techniques

This information is an abstract of The Principles of Coaching Course that is offered by Special Olympics. Contact your local Program to learn more. The Principles of Coaching Course is not sport specific. It addresses the basic principles of coaching, coaching philosophy, planning and coaching administration, fitness and conditioning, and safety and risk management.

More information and additional resources are available online at <http://www.specialolympics.org>

Coaching Special Olympics Athletes

Special Olympics is committed to coaching excellence. The most important thing to know as a coach in Special Olympics is that your athletes are individuals, and coaching them is just like coaching any other youth or community sports team. The skills that make successful coaches are the same whether you are coaching national Olympic teams, high school or university teams, community sports clubs or youth teams or Special Olympics teams. But we recognize there are some situations that make Special Olympics coaching unique (and more enjoyable).

More information is available on-line at <http://www.specialolympics.org>

Coaching Guides

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Principles of Coaching

Coaching Special Olympics Athletes

The Coaching Team

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Sport Safety and Risk Management

Basics of Special Olympics

Sport-Specific Sections Available for all Sports

More information is available online at <http://www.specialolympics.org>



Special Olympics Coach Definition

A Special Olympics coach is a person who selects, assesses and provides Special Olympics athletes with comprehensive sports training and preparation for competitions and who knows, understands and abides by the rules of the sport being coached and the Special Olympics Official Sports Rules. The following coach description outlines the expectations from a Special Olympics coach.

Special Olympics Coach Description

Position:	Coach
Description:	The Special Olympics coach is responsible for providing athletes with comprehensive sport training and preparation for multilevel sport competition.
Responsibilities:	<i>See below</i>

1. To select, assess and train Special Olympics athletes for sport competition.
 - ◆ **Athlete Selection:** The Special Olympics coach will recruit athletes and properly complete and submit all required medical and registration materials by established deadlines.
 - ◆ **Assessment:** The Special Olympics coach will assess each athlete to determine the individual and/or team skill level for training and competition in selected sports.
 - ◆ **Training:** The Special Olympics coach will develop an individualized training program for each athlete. The program shall include instruction in fundamental skills, conditioning and competition rules. The training and competition program will be a minimum of eight weeks.
2. To know, understand and abide by the Special Olympics Official Sports Rules.
3. To know and understand the sport being coached.
4. To execute the moral and ethical responsibilities and duties of a coach.
 - ◆ Provide proper planning for each step of training and competition
 - ◆ Provide and maintain a safe and secure physical environment
 - ◆ Use acceptable and safe equipment
 - ◆ Ensure appropriate sport skills instruction and safe competition
 - ◆ Match athletes according to ability, size and strength
 - ◆ Continually assess each athlete for participation in appropriate activities within, not challenged beyond, his/her capabilities
 - ◆ Inform athletes of inherent risks associated with a specific sport
 - ◆ Ensure acceptable supervision and maintain an adequate assistant coach-to-athlete ratio
 - ◆ Provide appropriate medical support at all times
 - ◆ Maintain accurate records



Part I: Developing Your Coaching Philosophy

Objective

- ♦ Define, identify and develop a coaching philosophy

Exercise #1—Coaching Assets Self Evaluation

There are many factors that may define your philosophy. Your success as a coach will depend more on your coaching philosophy than on any other factor.

Rate yourself and select three Areas of Improvement

Coaching Assets	Low	Average	High	Areas of Improvement
Knowledge of Your Sport	1	2	3	<input type="checkbox"/>
Well Organized	1	2	3	<input type="checkbox"/>
Honest	1	2	3	<input type="checkbox"/>
Professional Appearance	1	2	3	<input type="checkbox"/>
Qualified	1	2	3	<input type="checkbox"/>
Enthusiastic	1	2	3	<input type="checkbox"/>
Hard Worker	1	2	3	<input type="checkbox"/>
Punctual	1	2	3	<input type="checkbox"/>
Consistent	1	2	3	<input type="checkbox"/>
Understanding	1	2	3	<input type="checkbox"/>
Good Listener	1	2	3	<input type="checkbox"/>
Provides Individual Help	1	2	3	<input type="checkbox"/>
Builds Athletes' Confidence	1	2	3	<input type="checkbox"/>
Motivates	1	2	3	<input type="checkbox"/>
Good Teacher	1	2	3	<input type="checkbox"/>
Encourages	1	2	3	<input type="checkbox"/>
Praises Effort	1	2	3	<input type="checkbox"/>
Respects Athletes	1	2	3	<input type="checkbox"/>
Patient with Athletes	1	2	3	<input type="checkbox"/>
Sense of Humor	1	2	3	<input type="checkbox"/>

(IAAF, Introduction to Coaching Theory, 1991)



Exercise #2—Assessing Your Objectives

The objective of this exercise is to help you better understand why you coach and identify the areas that are most important to you in coaching. Do you focus more on fun, athlete development or winning in your sport program?

The highest total is the area that is most important to you in coaching and will be the foundation of your coaching philosophy and objectives. Let's see below.

Instructions

In the first group, read all of the statements (A, B and C).

Place a "3" by the statement that you feel is most important to you.

Place a "1" by the statement that you feel is least important to you.

Place a "2" by the remaining statement.

Repeat the process for the following five groups.

Add the scores for each letter (A, B or C) at the bottom.

A answers	=	Priority for athlete development
B answers	=	Priority for having fun
C answers	=	Priority for winning



Exercise #2—Assessing Your Objectives

Assessment Statement	1	2	3
The best coaches are those who			
A. Encourage team spirit, cooperation and sportsmanship	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
B. Make practices fun	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
C. Have excellent competition tactics and skills to win	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
A good coach			
A. Gives individual help and is interested in athlete development	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
B. Practices enthusiasm and FUNdamentals everyday	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
C. Teaches athletes the skills needed to win	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
I would like people to say that I			
A. Brought out the best in my athletes	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
B. Looked for the positives in my athletes	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
C. Was a winning coach	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
I would like a news story about me to highlight that I			
A. Contributed to the athletic development of athletes	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
B. Coached a sports program which athletes enjoyed playing	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
C. Coached to win	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
As a coach, I emphasize			
A. Teaching skills that athletes can use throughout life	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
B. Playing games and making sure athletes enjoy themselves	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
C. Setting individual and team goals to produce winners	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
As a coach, I promote			
A. Physical fitness	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
B. Having fun	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
C. Winning	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
A Totals			
B Totals			
C Totals			



Winning

Be honest with yourself about winning. Ask yourself these questions:

Do you at times overemphasize winning?

Do you sometimes make decisions that reflect more about winning the game than developing the athletes?

Exercise #3— Personal Reasons for Coaching

Reasons for Coaching	Not Important	Somewhat Important	Very Important
To be involved in a sport I like	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
To have power	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
To be in charge	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
To be with people I like	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
To give something back to sport	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
To gain public recognition	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
To enjoy myself	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
To demonstrate my knowledge and skill in sport	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
To travel	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
To help athletes develop physically	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
To help athletes develop psychologically	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
To help athletes develop socially	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>

(ASEP, Successful Coaching, Updated 2nd Edition 1990)



Coaching Styles

The second most important decision as a coach is your coaching style. Your coaching style will determine:

- ♦ How you communicate with athletes and family members
- ♦ How you decide to teach skills and strategies
- ♦ How you organize your practice and competition methods
- ♦ How you discipline athletes
- ♦ What role you give athletes in making decisions

Coaching (Leadership) Style			
	Authoritarian	Cooperative	Casual
Philosophy	Win centered	Athlete centered	No emphasis
Objectives	Task objectives	Social & task objectives	No objectives
Decision Making	Coach makes all decisions	Decisions are guided by coach, but shared	Athletes make decisions
Communication Style	Telling	Telling, asking, listening	Listening
Communication Development	Little or none	High	None
What is Winning	Judged by coach	Judged by athlete and coach	Not defined
Athlete Development	Little or no trust in the athlete	Trust in the athlete	Trust not shown
Motivation	Sometimes motivates	Motivates all	No motivation
Training Structures	Inflexible	Flexible	None

Ask yourself, “What kind of coach do I want to be?”



Developing a Picture of Your Coaching Style

What are three of the most important characteristics in developing a coaching style?

Knowledge of the Sport

Motivation

Empathy

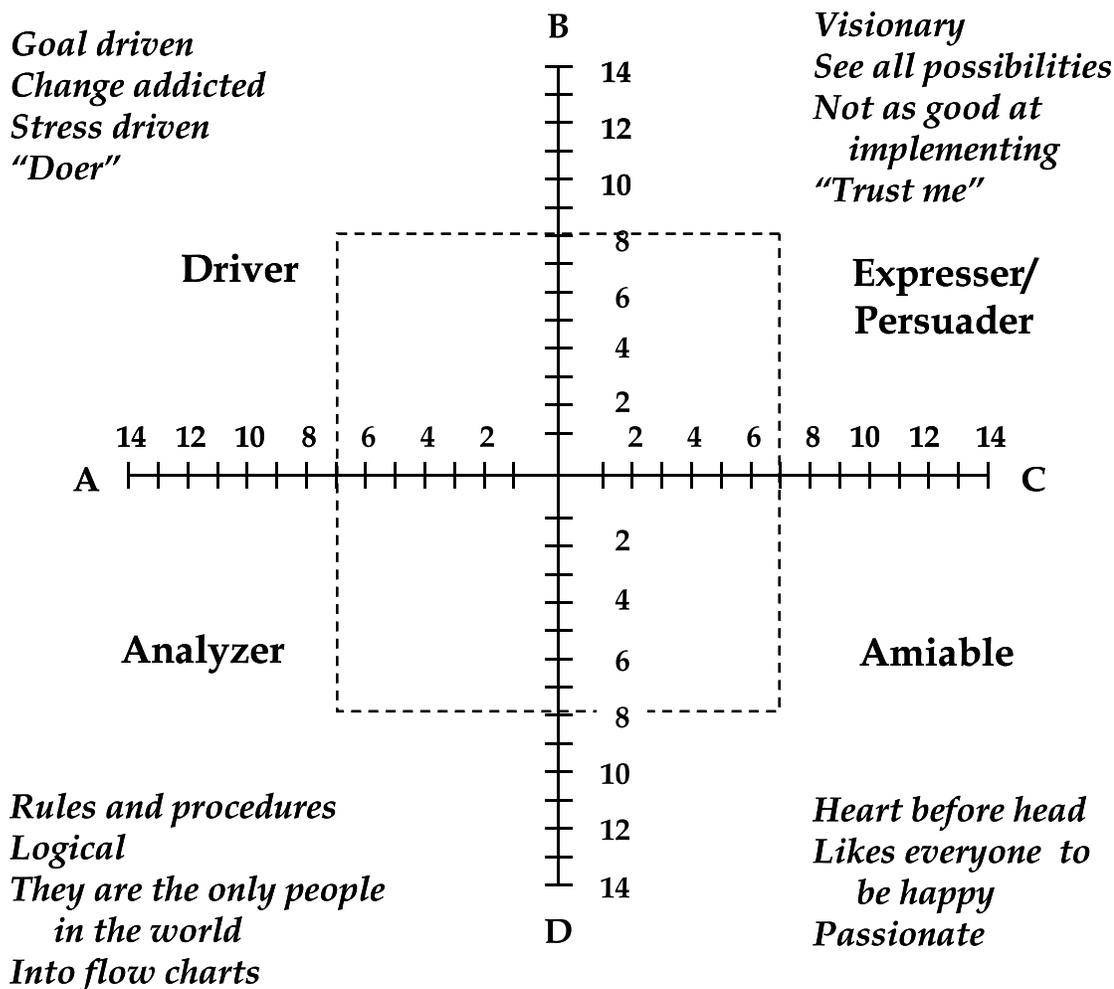
There is no substitute for knowing the rules, techniques and strategies in coaching your sport. Lack of knowledge in teaching skills risks injury and frustrates your athletes. Your ability to properly teach and coach the skills of your sport will earn great respect from the athletes. They will value you and the experience. This respect also gives you credibility that you can use in teaching athletes how to behave off the playing field.



Exercise #4—Developing a Picture of Your Coaching Style - Part 1

Below are 15 rows of four words (across). From each row (across), select two words out of the four that best describe the way you see yourself. If all four words sound like you, select the two that are most like you. If none of the four sounds like you, select the two that are closest to the way you are. When you finish, count the number of words selected in each column, then move to the next page (Part 2).

A	B	C	D
All Business	Bold	Personable	Deliberate
Organized listening	Telling	Courteous	Listening
Industrious	Independent	Companionable	Cooperative
No-nonsense	Decisive	Talkative	Reflective
Serious	Determined	Warm	Careful
To-the-point	Risk Taker	Amiable	Moderate
Practical	Aggressive	Empathetic	Nonassertive
Self-controlled	Authoritative	Show Emotions	Thorough
Goal Directed	Assertive	Friendly	Patient
Methodical	Unhesitating	Sincere	Prudent
Businesslike	Definite	Sociable	Precise
Diligent	Firm	Demonstrative	Particular
Systematic	Strong-minded	Sense of Humor	Thinking
Formal	Confident	Expressive	Hesitative
Persevering	Forceful	Trusting	Restrained
_____	_____	_____	_____



Exercise #4—Developing a Picture of Your Coaching Style - Part 2

On the previous page, total the number of words circled under each respective column. Plot those numbers on their respective axes of the grid above. For example, if you circled six words in column A, mark the A axis next to the 6. Complete the same procedures for columns B, C and D. Then extend the marks into each respective quadrant to create a rectangle.



Positive Reinforcement and Rewards

When used appropriately, reinforcement is one of the primary communication tools of a successful coach. Reinforcement is used to praise an athlete when he/she does well or to get an athlete to stop undesirable behavior. Reinforcement is relative and not absolute. For reinforcement to work, a coach must be consistent and systematic in its use. If you are not consistent, your athletes will behave erratically, like the coach. If you are not systematic, you will send confusing messages to your athletes.

Communicating and Correcting Errors

1. One skill at a time—Correct only one behavior or movement at a time.
2. Ask before giving correction—Allow the chance to explain what they believe they did. Don't ask, "Why did you do that?" This lets them feel they are a part of the process; for example, ask, "What happened just then?" or "What do you think you should do differently next time?"
3. Find the cause—The cause of an error could be something you may not see. Again, ask the athlete what they believe they are doing.
4. Provide constructive instruction—Avoid too much of "what's not right" by focusing on "how to do it right." Always build up the athlete; do not tear them down.
5. Praise before correction—Begin with a positive comment about something that the athlete is doing well. Now they are attuned to you. You have gained their attention and trust. Follow up with constructive instruction. Be concise and to the point. Remember to send another message of praise and encouragement.

Using Rewards

Rewarding athletes is not always as easy as it sounds. Below are a few tips on rewarding your athletes.

- ♦ Reward athletes just as much for their effort as you do for the desired outcome.
- ♦ Reward little accomplishments on the way to learning an entire skill.
- ♦ Reward the learning and performance of desired emotional and social skills too.
- ♦ Reward frequently, especially when new skills are being learned.
- ♦ Reward as soon as possible when new skills are learned.
- ♦ Reward an athlete when they have earned it.

Misbehavior

It is only natural for athletes to misbehave. As a coach, you can respond to an athlete's misbehavior with a positive or negative approach. One positive approach is to ignore the bad behavior. This approach can prove successful in certain situations because punishing the athlete's misbehavior encourages them to act out more. Ignoring misbehavior does not work when the athlete causes danger to himself/herself or other teammates and coaches. In that case, immediate action is necessary. Ignoring misbehavior is also not successful when the misbehavior is self-rewarding to the athlete.

Punishment is also a means to correcting an athlete's misbehavior. Below are a few suggestions for appropriate use of punishment.

- ♦ Use punishment when team rules are violated.
- ♦ When possible, give a warning before using punishment.
- ♦ Be consistent when administering punishment.
- ♦ Do not choose a punishment that causes you to feel guilty or upset.
- ♦ Once a punishment has been given, do not make the athlete feel like he/she is still in trouble.
- ♦ Punish sparingly; punish only when absolutely necessary.



Goal Setting and Motivation

Developing Self-Confidence through Goal Setting

Realistic yet challenging goals for each athlete are important to the motivation of the athlete both at training and during competition. Accomplishing goals at practice through repetition in settings similar to the competition environment will instill confidence. Sport confidence in athletes helps make participation fun and is critical to the athlete's motivation. Setting goals is a joint effort between athletes and coaches. The main features of goal setting are:

- ◆ Goals need to be structured as short-term, intermediate and long-term.
- ◆ Goals need to be viewed as stepping stones to success.
- ◆ Goals must be understood by the athlete.
- ◆ Goals need to vary in difficulty— from easily attainable to challenging.
- ◆ Goals must be measurable.
- ◆ Goals need to be used to establish the athlete's training and competition plan.

Performance Goals versus Outcome Goals

Effective goals focus on performance, not outcome. Performance is what the athlete controls. Outcomes are frequently controlled by others. An athlete may have an outstanding performance and not win a contest because other athletes have performed even better. Conversely, an athlete may perform poorly and still win if all other athletes perform at a lower level. If an athlete's goal is to run 12.10 seconds in the 100 meter, the athlete has greater control in achieving this goal than winning. However, the athlete has even greater control of achieving a goal if the goal is to run using the correct form, driving the knees through the entire race. This performance goal ultimately gives the athlete more control over his/her performance.

Performance Goal	Outcome Goal
Athletics Run in lane the entire race, completing event	Run race, hitting split goals
Basketball Make contact with opponent and block out after the shot	Get the rebound
Football Sprint after balls coming into play	Get to the ball first and control it



Coaching and Teaching Basic Sport Skills

Objectives

- ♦ Move athletes from being coach dependent to being independent and self-monitoring.
- ♦ Teach athletes sport skills and when and how to use them.

One of the primary roles of the coach is teaching. Teaching means helping athletes learn physical skills and improve their athletic performance. The coach has the responsibility to develop athletes from the beginning stage of learning to becoming skilled athletes. Like all training, the process of learning skills is a long-term process. Teaching sport technique is a fundamental skill in successful coaching. Techniques are the building blocks of skilled performance. A skilled athlete has good consistent technique and knows when and how to use technique to produce the best results.

How Athletes Learn

Techniques are the basic building blocks of skilled performance. Techniques are learned skills that allow athletes to compete most efficiently within the rules of sport. Learning is the relative improvement in performance through practice. Skill learning is an invisible process. Because other factors can impact changes in performance, it is not always easy to know if an athlete has learned a skill. An athlete's consistent performance of a skill is the key to knowing if the skill has been learned.

Motor Program

As athletes continue to practice, feedback and instruction are the basic pieces of information used to create a sequence of the athlete's movement (motor program). The motor program is developed whenever skills are practiced. The memory of the previous attempts is used to physically perform the action again. With practice, a clear and precise memory of the skill is formed. The development of an athlete's motor skills is what allows him/her to master a skill. As a coach, one of your major responsibilities is to help athletes develop good motor skills. Many factors impact the learning of motor skills, such as your coaching ability, the environment and the athlete's physical and cognitive abilities, to name a few. Most importantly, your athletes will be influenced greatly by what you do, including how you teach, organize practice and give feedback.

Coaching Tips

- An athlete may be at the advanced stage for one skill and at the beginning or intermediate stage for another skill. Your success is in being able to determine where your athlete is at various learning stages and provide the best instruction, motivation and feedback for each one's success.

Learning Models

There is more to coaching than knowing sport specific skills. Successful coaches must properly teach skills and mentally prepare athletes for competition. Regardless of physical, mental, social and emotional well-being, all students learn differently. Coaches must be aware of the learning process in order to create an improved learning experience for athletes. Coaches must honor the athletes learning style, sensory mode and reasons for participation when assessing and selecting athletes' levels of competition.

- ♦ Athletes may tend to process visually.
- ♦ Athletes may tend to process auditorily.
- ♦ Athletes may tend to process kinesthetically.
- ♦ Athletes may tend to process using a blend of all of the above.



Teaching Skills

There are two basic types of skills: simple and complex. Learning simple skills typically requires little practice. However, they are only considered simple if the athlete can learn them quickly. What is simple for one athlete may not be as simple for another.

Simple Skills

Simple skills are most easily mastered from seeing them performed. It is generally considered that 80 percent of learning takes place through what is seen. The basic methods in teaching simple skills are demonstration and imitation. Basically, athletes copy what you show them (“Watch this ... Try it.”) If the imitation is accurate, immediate and positive feedback is a good way to confirm this to the athlete (“Yes, you got it. Good job. Now, let’s practice it a couple more times to make sure you remember it.”)

Complex Skills

Complex skills require a little more effort on the part of the coach. First, learn to break down complex skills into smaller tasks to assist athletes in learning the skill. Some coaches and educators call this shaping. How do I break down complex skills into smaller tasks? Your sport specific coaching guide will go into greater detail and illustrate actual teaching progressions.



Promoting Increased Athlete Competition Opportunities

Within Your Special Olympics Sports Program

- ◆ Conduct a clinic for Special Olympics athletes and utilize mainstream athletes as instructors.
- ◆ Invite local Special Olympics athletes to mainstream practices; provide an opportunity for them to watch athletes and participate with them in a mini clinic.
- ◆ Assist Special Olympics with identifying other coaches as training school instructors and/or coaches.

Facilitate Inclusion into School and Community Programs

- ◆ Provide a joint training opportunity with the mainstream team.
- ◆ Recognize and reward Special Olympics athletes during the annual sports banquet and school awards program.
- ◆ Provide opportunities for Special Olympics competition as prelude to a local sports competition.

Identify Sports Facilities in Your Area

- ◆ Ask them to host Special Olympics training sessions, clinics and/or camps.
- ◆ Ask them to host Special Olympics competitions, such as a local or Program-level events.

Encourage Other Administrators, Coaches and Students to Volunteer

- ◆ Allow mainstream student-athletes to volunteer as partners during their off-season; Special Olympics athletes can learn from and model talented athletes.
- ◆ Allow mainstream student-athletes to volunteer and assist at local or Program-level competitions.

Build Public Awareness

- ◆ Invite Special Olympics athletes to compete in a demonstration game or exhibition at a local sports competition.
- ◆ Take part in media interviews regarding Special Olympics and its benefits to Special Olympics athletes.
- ◆ Host a “Special Olympics Family Night” at a local sports competition. Special Olympics athletes and their families attend a competition, receive recognition, meet the team after the competition and take part in autograph and picture opportunities.
- ◆ Include information on Special Olympics in your program, media guide, newsletter, etc.

Raise Funds for Your Local Special Olympics Organization

- ◆ Play an exhibition scrimmage or game to benefit Special Olympics.
- ◆ Allow Special Olympics to take donations at the door or at the concessions stands of a local sports competition.



Within Your Community Sports Programs

Invite others in the community to participate in Special Olympics and describe the benefits:

1. Mainstream student-athletes and colleagues will learn a new dimension of sport through contact with or coaching Special Olympics athletes.
2. The experience of developing friendships and working with people who have intellectual disabilities will make a difference in the lives of everyone involved.
3. Opportunities for media coverage will increase because of your support of Special Olympics.
4. When you sponsor/coach a Special Olympics team, you will gain exposure for your Program at major Special Olympics events that are often highly attended.
5. Families and friends of Special Olympics athletes in your community will become active, supportive and more aware of your organization, thus increasing participation and attendance at your events.
6. Your organization will develop better community relations.
7. Your colleagues and mainstream student-athletes will gain new insights into teaching basic skills and reaching out to others.
8. As a committed leader within the community, your leadership role will be reinforced and enhanced.
9. Some Special Olympics coaches may enroll in your coaches' clinics.
10. Awareness levels about the capabilities of individuals with intellectual disabilities will be increased among staff and mainstream student-athletes.



The Coach's Role in Special Olympics Unified Sports®

Special Olympics sport programs offer Special Olympics athletes the opportunity to partner with non-Special Olympics athletes on Unified Sports teams. Unified Sports teams are great for bringing the community together for sport and fun. The following are actions that the coach would be responsible for if coaching a Unified Sports team.

Assess the Special Olympics athlete and partner (athlete without intellectual disability).

Create a practice and training schedule (just as you would for any other level of competition).

Abide by the Special Olympics Official Sports Rules whenever athletes and partners are practicing and competing.

Understand all the levels of playing opportunities for Unified Sports teams.

More information and additional resources are available online at <http://www.specialolympics.org>

Recruiting Coaches

Special Olympics volunteers play a crucial role in running a Special Olympics Program

Any community sports program clearly depends on dedicated volunteers to develop a successful program that offers frequent, high-quality competition opportunities supported by fundamental instruction on the skills, rules and etiquette of the game. While it is helpful that coaches are sport knowledgeable, family members, athletes, teachers, neighbors and friends of Special Olympics athletes can be taught to coach the basic sport skills progression.

Sport-Specific example: Golf

Look For...	Golf Coaches Answer (Sample)	List Your Sports Answers Here
Who is the best at this sport?	Golf professional (LPGA/PGA)	
Who has access to facilities?	Golf course management	
Who enjoys and knows the sport?	Golf club members	
Who knows who ALL the people are that know and enjoy the sport?	Local, state, national golf associations	
Who has access to public relations to help recruit coaches?	Golf sports writers	
Who do you enjoy playing this sport with?	Your golfing buddies	

In the table above, use your sports specific examples: i.e. for Football the answer to the 'Who is the best at this sport?' question could be a FIFA/ UEFA/ CONCACAF Official etc.



Non Sport Specific

Look For...	Example	List Your Sports Answers Here
Where do people who like sports congregate?	Parks and recreation department	
Where might you find energetic sports volunteers?	High schools, colleges	
Who has the most invested in having a team?	Athletes and families	
Where might you find people who have coached Special Olympics before?	Existing Special Olympics Program	
Who might be a help with special populations' sport?	Physical/recreational therapists	
Where do you find large numbers of volunteer-minded people?	Fraternal and civic organizations	
Where do you find people who are interested in coaching?	Sport community in general	
Who is motivated to volunteer?	Church groups	
Who might need to do community service?	High school students	
Who do you enjoy working with?	Your own family and friends	

Link with those who have shared an interest in your Program

- ◆ The greatest success has come when a local Program has been able to link with sports professionals or teams in their geographic area.

Work with the sport community to create a realistic and workable plan, providing competition as the focal point.



Developing Your Team

The keys to developing your team are to surround yourself with a staff of people who understand the mission of Special Olympics, the sport you are coaching, your coaching philosophy and are committed to helping you, as a head coach, accomplish more by doing less. Delegation of roles and responsibilities will provide organization, structure and assistance so that high-quality training and competition experiences can be provided to athletes, volunteers and families. Below are a few helpful ways to demonstrate what might be involved when identifying volunteers for your team.

Identify the positions necessary to run a successful Special Olympics program in your sport. Before you invest too much time, check with the local Special Olympics coordinator to see if they have done something similar. Find out what you are responsible for and then write brief job descriptions for each position.

- ◆ Assistant Coaches
- ◆ Transportation Coordinator(s)
- ◆ Competition Manager(s)
- ◆ Fundraising Coordinator(s)
- ◆ Public Relations Coordinator(s)
- ◆ Equipment and Facility Coordinator(s)

Recruit a balanced staff of volunteers that:

- ◆ have skills and schedules that complement each other
- ◆ will make the time commitment you specify
- ◆ are willing to be trained to work with the athletes and fulfill their roles
- ◆ will accept delegation and enjoy the role selected
- ◆ add resources and experience to the program

Hold orientation for coaches, families and volunteers to:

- ◆ understand the mission and philosophy of Special Olympics
- ◆ clarify roles and responsibilities
- ◆ foster clear communication of all goals and objectives
- ◆ continually motivate and encourage athlete participation
- ◆ understand resource, facility, fundraising, transportation and equipment needs



Management Checklist

- Training facility secured
- Volunteer needs addressed and fulfilled
- Coaches recruited and trained
- Family orientation held
- Equipment needs assessed and secured
- Budget determined and managed
- Potential sponsor contact list created and delegated to fundraising chair
- Training, competition and transportation schedules established and confirmed
- Athletes, families and volunteers have been informed of season start dates, trainings and competition dates and transportation arrangements have been confirmed
- Athletes, coaches and volunteers have completed proper registration materials
- Medical forms, release forms and accident/incident forms are available at all sessions
- Goals and objectives of the season have been clarified with all coaches and volunteers
- Regularly scheduled management and coaching team meetings are confirmed
- Distribution, filing and updating of Individual Skills Tests, Daily Performance Records, Home Training Plans, Athlete Assessments, Special Olympics Golf Rules, Golf Resources, etc., will ensure proper record keeping
- Notify media prior, during and after season about Special Olympics events
- Acknowledge appreciation to all volunteers, sponsors and athletes



Risk Management Responsibilities

Coaches have the ultimate responsibility to reduce the risks of participation for athletes involved in the sport they are coaching.

Conducting a Safe Program

Field of Play

The field of play should be checked before and after all practices and events for any obstacles. An indoor court should be clear of any obstacles or obstructions surrounding the out-of-bounds areas. The actual playing surface should be clear, safe and dry. All lines should be clearly visible. Any indoor facility must have proper ventilation, especially in warm climates.

Outdoor facilities should be checked for uneven playing surfaces, including holes, uneven grade or moisture. The playing area also should be checked for additional obstacles. Out-of-bounds areas should be clear of obstructions. All boundaries should be clearly marked.

Other areas to be used by players, such as locker rooms and showers, should be reviewed for safety and accessibility. Floors should be properly drained and have non-slip surfaces.

Areas utilized by spectators, families and other nonparticipating players should be assessed for safety and accessibility.

Equipment

Athletes need to have the proper equipment for each sport, and if equipment must be worn, it should fit properly. The following areas should be addressed:

- ◆ Adequate amount of equipment—All necessary equipment should be available for every practice and event. Athletes should be able to use the equipment for warm-up and participation.
- ◆ Well-maintained equipment—All equipment should be checked prior to the start of practice or competition. Equipment that is routinely or occasionally used should be maintained and checked before each use.
- ◆ Proper use of equipment—Manufacturers develop equipment for specific uses. The coaching staff should instruct their players in the correct use of the equipment. Improper use is not only unsafe but may invalidate the warranty.
- ◆ Proper size of equipment—Equipment should adhere to the standard specifications designated by the sport.
- ◆ Proper fit of equipment—Any sport equipment should be properly fitted to each athlete.
- ◆ Proper warranty and safety criteria—Review of the safety criteria and appropriate use is recommended.

Traveling

The coaching staff is responsible for all their athletes when traveling to play and compete. The coach should review any special instructions for each player with his/her parents or guardian. Written instructions for any medications should be reviewed and taken on the trip.

The coach should contact the opposing team's coach to review arrangements for supplies, such as water, emergency management plans and locker room space. Important telephone numbers should be recorded.

If the trip involves overnight lodging, safe and accessible accommodations should be secured. Contact information should be given to all parents. Special dietary concerns should be clarified with parents and arrangements made to address them.

Parents need to be advised when and where to pick up their athletes upon return. A telephone tree should be developed in case of an alteration of plans.



Supervisory Planning

The coach needs to provide appropriate supervision for all practices and events. Any other personnel or volunteers should be properly trained and supervised in their work with the athletes. Suitable credentials are recommended for those who are involved, such as Special Olympics and National Governing Body (NGB) coaching credentials and cardiopulmonary resuscitation and first-aid certification.

We recommend that practices and games are covered by medical personnel, including physicians, athletic trainers, physical therapists and emergency personnel.

Prevention of Injury

Many factors contribute to the prevention of injury or the reduction of risk for injury:

- ◆ Appropriate assessment of athlete readiness and skill—The coaching staff should determine a starting point for each athlete based on his readiness and skill. Motivation, interest and physical skill all contribute to development of a plan of action.
- ◆ Training program for year-round fitness—The coach should work with each athlete and family to develop and encourage compliance with a year-round fitness and nutrition plan to foster and develop positive health behaviors as well as physical preparation for activity.
- ◆ Sport-specific training plan—The coach should work with the athlete and family to develop an individualized sports training plan for development of the appropriate skills and conditioning for sport.
- ◆ Medical Forms—Coaches should have athletes' completed medical forms and special medical instructions at all practices and games.
- ◆ First-aid kits should be available at all practices and games.
- ◆ Acclimatization to the environment is recommended.
- ◆ Heat—Athletes should gradually adjust to exercising in the heat over a two-week period. Initially, they should exercise in light clothing during the cooler portions of the day. Gradually expose athletes to short periods of exercise during the hotter part of the day, similar to the time of competition. If the sport involves heavy clothing and equipment, athletes should first adjust to wearing their uniforms and then adjust to wearing the uniform in the heat. Hydration should be maintained at all practices and games.
- ◆ Cold—Athletes should adjust to the cold over a period of several days. They should learn to layer their clothing so they can adjust attire for the temperature. Hats and gloves should be worn if necessary.
- ◆ Altitude—Athletes who are not accustomed to exercising at high altitudes should adjust gradually over a period of 10-14 days. Exercise should be gradually increased in length and intensity. Altitude sickness, consisting of nausea, dizziness, shortness of breath and flu-like symptoms are common without gradual adjustment.
- ◆ Sun or snow blindness—To prevent both sun and snow blindness, athletes should wear dark glasses with lateral shields during outdoor activities. Glasses should have ultraviolet blocking.
- ◆ Sunburn—Visors or long-sleeve shirts should be worn if athletes will be exposed to the sun during their activities. Sunscreen with a minimum SPF 15 should be used on all exposed body parts, including the nose, ears, face, lips and any bald spots on the scalp.
- ◆ Wind—Wind can cause an increase in chills, dry skin and eye irritation. Glasses will provide some protection, as will eye drops or artificial tears. Lip balm maintains moisture of the lips. Proper clothing will provide protection from skin irritation and chilling.



Recognizing Maltreatment

All Special Olympics coaches should be familiar with Special Olympics Protective Behavior Policies and expanded resources. This information is available through your local Program office. When individuals are maltreated (abused), they may exhibit injuries or unusual changes in behavior. Anytime you notice unexplained injuries or persistent changes in behavior, you should consider the possibility that the athlete may be a victim of maltreatment. If this happens in conjunction with your responsibilities as a Special Olympics coach or volunteer, you should inform the Program director at once.

Physical signs of maltreatment

Physical maltreatment often results in injuries such as burns, bruises, lacerations, abrasions and fractures. Due to limitations in the ability of some individuals with intellectual disabilities to communicate, physical characteristics of injuries such as their shape and location may provide the only clues that they were caused by maltreatment.

Ordinary injuries caused by falling down or running into objects are usually found on the shins, knees, elbows and other hard surfaces of the body. When injuries are located in the soft tissues of the abdomen, back and face or are found on the backs of arms and legs, or near the genitals, the injuries are either due to an easily explainable mishap such as an automobile accident or they have been inflicted by another person.

Often the shapes of injuries to soft tissue areas of the body provide clues about how they were inflicted and the weapon used. Abrasions in the shape of elongated loops that wrap around the surface of the body often indicate beatings with electrical cords or belts. Clearly defined thin welts ending with gouges in the flesh may be caused by beatings with wire clothes-hangers. Palm- and fist-shaped bruises may indicate pummeling, slapping or battery.

Another indication of physical abuse is the presence of bruises of different colors in the soft tissues of the body. Bruises change colors as they heal, therefore, bruises of different colors indicate injuries that were inflicted at different times. Multicolored bruises indicate that the individual experienced repeated injuries within a time period that may be estimated by the colors of the bruises. The presence, therefore, of different colors of bruises tends to rule out a one-time experience such as an automobile accident in which all of the resulting bruises would be the same color.

Burns are often indicators of abuse. A very distinctive burn pattern circling wrists, ankles and, sometimes, the neck is caused by friction of ropes and results when an individual is restrained by being tied. Other burns that generally indicate abuse include burns caused by lit cigarettes and cigars that have been pushed into the skin. With maltreated individuals, it is not uncommon to find this kind of burn near the genitals on the upper legs and buttocks inflicted by sadists seeking sexual gratification.

Children and adults with intellectual disabilities who need help bathing may be burned by water that is too hot. Special care must be given when bathing individuals who have impaired nerve function as they may not be able to sense how hot the water is and, therefore, run the risk of being seriously injured.

A considerable amount of maltreatment is centered around control of bodily functions. Binding the penis to prevent urination can result in cutting off circulation and cause gangrene. When individuals have poor bladder or bowel control, scalding may also occur when the person assisting with cleanup is inattentive to the temperature of the water.

Physically abused individuals may have unexplained broken bones or an unusual history of multiple fractures. Spiral fractures of the bones in the arms may be caused by forcefully jerking the arms. Similarly, dislocations of shoulders and elbows may be caused by inappropriately jerking the arms, perhaps while assisting an individual into or out of a wheelchair.

Certainly, all of these injuries are not intentionally inflicted. They are, however, not accidental. Even well-meaning caregivers may cause injuries when they do not understand how to properly render assistance; they are excessive in administering discipline; or, they do not implement required safety precautions.

In addition to the examples of abuse cited above, some kinds of neglect may also be detected through physical conditions. For example, bed sores and chafing from prostheses or orthopedic braces are often indicators that a dependent individual with disabilities is not receiving adequate care and may be neglected. Ever present hunger and consistent deficiencies in personal hygiene may also signal neglectful care. Unmet medical and dental needs are frequently signs of neglect.



Behavior changes may indicate maltreatment

Changes in an individual's behavior that persist for a sustained period of time may also indicate maltreatment. While such behavior changes may signal maltreatment, they may also signal a response to other stressful conditions. Care must, therefore, be exercised when concluding that the behavior changes were caused by maltreatment as there may be other underlying causes, including loss of a loved one (both human and pets), family conflict, changes in the living situation and other similar causes of extreme stress. Common behavioral responses to stress include:

- ◆ Aggression—lashing out at others with little or no provocation; bullying smaller, less physically capable individuals
- ◆ Depression—pervasive sadness; lack of energy
- ◆ Regression—reverting to immature behavior such as thumb sucking, bed-wetting
- ◆ Withdrawal—becoming a loner; avoiding contact with people
- ◆ Sleep disturbances—having night terrors, night sweats, insomnia
- ◆ Suicidal thoughts and actions—talking about or attempting suicide
- ◆ Habit disorders—head banging, rocking or thumb sucking

The behaviors listed above are general signs that an individual is experiencing stress. Maltreatment may be the cause of these behavior changes, but other factors should also be considered. The following list of behaviors are more specific to maltreatment:

- ◆ Difficulty walking or sitting—demonstrating pain from injuries to genitals, buttocks and/or legs
- ◆ Sexualized behavior—including public masturbation, seductiveness, sexual suggestions and inappropriate touching
- ◆ Avoiding a particular person—displaying unexplained aversion to a particular person or persons with specific characteristics (sex, age, hair color, height, etc.)
- ◆ Being overly compliant—trying to avoid physical or emotional pain associated with abuse
- ◆ Appearing extremely fearful or apprehensive—shying away from others; not wanting physical contact
- ◆ Indiscriminately friendly—hungering for affection that leads to accepting affection from anyone who happens to be available

When evaluating behavioral signs of abuse, you should not jump to conclusions that the presence of any single indicator is a sure sign that the individual was abused. Behavioral signs are merely an indication that perhaps something is going on in the life of the person that bears looking into.



Responding to suspected maltreatment

Your reaction to suspected abuse is extremely important. When you approach an individual whom you suspect has been abused, remember that he/she may not trust you and may be fearful about the consequences of reporting maltreatment. If the individual approaches you and discloses abuse, he/she may withdraw the disclosure if you exhibit any signs of doubt, even though the abuse actually occurred. Here are some guidelines that should be helpful when you suspect that a person has been maltreated:

- ◆ Keep control of your own emotions. Your calmness will be reassuring. Let the victim know that whatever happened, it was not his/her fault.
- ◆ Express concern, but do not promise to keep allegations of maltreatment secret. You may have a legal obligation to report suspected abuse to either a social services or law enforcement agency. If the suspected maltreatment occurred in conjunction with a Special Olympics program, you should notify the official in charge of the event of your suspicions as soon as possible.
- ◆ Seek appropriate medical assistance for the victim. Depending upon the circumstances of the suspected abuse and the nature of any apparent injuries, victims of suspected maltreatment should have a medical examination. In case of suspected sexual abuse, the physician conducting the examination should be informed that sexual abuse is a possibility and, if the abuse was recent, evidence should be collected to help prosecute the molester.
- ◆ Listen to, but do not interrogate, the individual who was maltreated. You are not responsible for investigating allegations of maltreatment or abuse. By listening to the victim, you can provide important emotional support. You can ask questions to clarify statements that you do not understand, but you should allow the proper authorities to conduct the in-depth investigation and take any follow-up action.
- ◆ As soon as possible after talking with the victim, write down or tape record what you were told. Since your memories of what transpired will fade over time, you should make a record of what happened. Your report should include what you were told, who told you, when you were told, who the suspected victim is, who the alleged perpetrator is, what you did with the information and when you did it.
- ◆ Comply with reporting requirements of your nation, state and Special Olympics. Many U.S. states have requirements that call for anyone suspecting abuse of a child or dependent adult to report it to the appropriate protective service agency. In addition, if the abuse or maltreatment occurred during a Special Olympics event, the person in charge of the event must be informed.



Tips for Reducing Stress and Preventing Abuse

The next time everyday pressures build up to the point where you feel like lashing out—stop! Try any of these simple alternatives. You'll feel better and so will the individual you are caring for.

1. Take a deep breath; and another. Then remember you are the responsible person.
2. Close your eyes and imagine you're the one on the receiving end of what you were about to do.
3. Press your lips together and count to 10, or better yet, to 20.
4. Put yourself in a time-out chair. Think about why you are angry: Is it the person for whom you care, or is he or she simply a convenient target for your anger?
5. Phone a friend.
6. If someone can relieve you, go outside and take a walk.
7. Take a hot bath or splash cold water on your face.
8. Hug a pillow.
9. Turn on some music; maybe even sing along.
10. Pick up a pencil and write down as many helpful words as you can think of. Save the list!



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 competition.
- ◆ 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, the international federation and the national federation/governing body rules for my sport(s).

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.
- ◆ 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.



What to Expect from Athletes

Learning Considerations (Motivation; Perception; Comprehension; Memory)

Motivation: We all learn faster when we want to. It is important to help athletes (this would be any athlete, not just the Special Olympics athlete) see how much fun they will have once they master what you are teaching. Factors that may affect motivation include the athletes' reasons for coming to practice. Is it because they asked to be there? Did someone else sign them up? Do they feel comfortable that they know this sport? Or is it a new experience for them? While it may be helpful to know the answers to all those questions, your task as a coach remains the same: Regardless of the motivation for coming to the first practice, make the reason for coming to the second practice the fun and sense of success they felt at the first one.

Medical Considerations (Down Syndrome; Autism; Fragile X; Cerebral Palsy; Fetal Alcohol Syndrome [FAS])

All of these terms are defined in the table on the next page titled Intellectual Disability and Other Closely-Related Developmental Disabilities. The most important things to remember regarding these issues are safety, dignity and expectations.

- ◆ Safety is dealt with by talking to parents, guardians and athletes themselves about what you should be aware of. You are not expected to be a physician, just use common sense. Be sure to read the required Special Olympics Medical Release Form so you will know if there are restrictions on activity.
- ◆ Dignity is an easy thing to deny or to give. The best gauge of ability comes from talking to athletes about what they like, how they feel during a workout or what they want to accomplish in this sport. When you talk to athletes, labels like Down syndrome, FAS, or "seizure prone" become less necessary.
- ◆ Expectations come from many sources. You will set expectations for your athletes. They will set them for themselves. Their families may have expectations about what they can or cannot do. As a coach, you need to set expectations that will challenge and push your athletes, then design workouts to help them meet those expectations. Be aware of restrictions that are noted on the Medical Release Form, but don't let them define the athlete.



Intellectual Disabilities and Other Closely-Related Developmental Disabilities

The tables below provide coaches with information about athletes (Special Olympics athletes with different functional and learning characteristics) so that coaches can teach Special Olympics athletes more effectively. A coach may have certain expectations of an athlete that may not be accurate (realistic), not because the coach does not care, but because the coach does not understand or appreciate the differences that exist between athletes that are eligible for participation in Special Olympics.

Disability	Characteristics (Top Three)	Best Three Strategies to Affect Learning
Intellectual Disability (General)	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Information processing and learning occurs at a slower rate. Attention span is short 2. Verbal communication skills may not be age appropriate 3. May or may not distinguish between appropriate and inappropriate behavior 	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Train for short periods of time 2. Provide repetition (key to athlete gaining new skill development) 3. When training, think of athletes as concrete thinkers
Autism	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Speech difficulties/no speech 2. Failure to form social bonds 3. Sensitivity to pain (lower pain threshold) 	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Needs to have sameness; establish routine 2. Signal transition, change, loud noise etc. (Establish eye contact when talking) 3. Provide highly structured environment
Cerebral Palsy	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Poor muscle control 2. Prone to seizures 3. Lack of balance (difficulty with balance/stability) 	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Provide exercises that strengthen muscles 2. Teach skills in isolation to help build muscles 3. Develop gross motor and stability skills
Down Syndrome	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Wide facial shape; weak muscle tone 2. Very affectionate 3. Stubborn 	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Set clear expectations and limits 2. Establish eye contact when talking; work one-on-one to demonstrate new skill (gain full attention) 3. Use repetition and review
Fetal Alcohol Syndrome [FAS]	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Small head/eyes 2. Cleft palate/speech problems 3. Social withdrawal 	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Create routine 2. Set rules and limits 3. Reinforce acceptable behaviors
Fragile X	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Elongated face 2. Prone to seizures 3. Coordination difficulties 	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Provide structured and predictable activities 2. Provide minimal auditory and visual stimulations 3. Establish routine and structure
Prader Willi	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Sleep disturbance 2. Compulsive eating 3. Skin picking 	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Signal and practice transition 2. Set firm rules and expectations 3. Establish routine and structure



Social Considerations (Social Skills; Physical Recreation at Home; Economic Status)

All of these issues and their challenges are part of any athlete’s reality, including a Special Olympics athlete. Where there are challenges in social skills, fitness, economic status or nutrition habits at home, you simply adjust the tools you use to help athletes meet expectations.

Description of Common Behaviors and Recommended Accommodations

Oral Expression

Athletes may	Accommodations
Speak only in single word statements or phrases	If you understand what they mean - great! If you do not understand, ask them to say it differently.
Exhibit word retrieval problems and substitute words for words they are having trouble retrieving	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Help them calm down and relax so they can find the words they want. • Come up with “signs” for common requests or concerns.
Exhibit bizarre patterns of language usage	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • It may be bizarre to you but make perfect sense to the athlete. • Explain that you are having trouble understanding what they mean. Get a conversation going - the give and take should make their intent more clear.
Imitate or repeat words incorrectly	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The accommodation is only necessary if you do not understand. • If that is the case, ask them to pick a different word to tell you what they mean.
Use gestures as a substitute for a word	Learn what the signs or gestures mean.
Have difficulty relating ideas in sequence	Break down sequences into steps and learn them individually; then put them together after the steps have been mastered.
Have difficulty making self understood to peers	If one peer does not understand, ask others if they understand and would be willing to help “translate.”
Contribute to discussion with off-task comments	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Again, it may seem “off task” to you but very on task to the athlete. • Ask them how their comment fits the discussion. They will explain it, give insight into their thinking or realize that they were off the topic.
Confuse words	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Help them use the correct term. • Be patient; give them an opportunity to formalize ideas.



Listening Comprehension

Athletes may	Accommodations
Ask that questions be repeated	Repeat them. If it starts to take too much time, pair the athlete with another athlete who can provide modeling.
Often say “what” or “huh,” etc.	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Check for hearing issues.• Switch from verbal instruction to visual demonstration of the task.
Confuse the meaning of similar sounding words	Explain the difference between the words and try visual techniques instead of auditory.
Fail to follow verbal directions	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Have them repeat directions back to you to verify understanding.• If failure to follow directions creates distractions for other athletes, have the athlete sit out or work with an assistant coach until you can determine the reason for not following original directions.
Do the opposite of the given instructions	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Have them repeat directions back to you to verify understanding.• If failure to follow directions creates distractions for other athletes, have the athlete sit out or work with an assistant coach until you can determine the reason for not following original directions.• Make sure you are stating the direction as a “positive” statement, such as, “Dribble all the way to the basket and shoot a lay-up,” as opposed to, “Never dribble all the way to the basket and then not shoot a lay-up.”
Have difficulty locating the direction of sounds	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Switch to visual cues.• Set up a physical reaction to the sound no matter where it comes from. For example, “When you hear my whistle, stop and look at the sideline.”
Answer questions inappropriately	Establish that they understood the question by restating the question with their answer and then asking if that was what they meant to say.
Confuse time concepts (before/after)	Switch to physical (kinesthetic) mode so that the end of one action leads to the next and will “feel” right. Like what is supposed to happen next.
Confuse direction words (front/back)	Instead of saying, “Go to the top of the key,” say, “Come and stand right here,” so they have a visual and physical way to remember.



Listening Comprehension, continued

Athletes may	Accommodations
Ask irrelevant questions	Make sure you understood the question, or what they were really asking. You may not understand at first, so ask them to help you understand the question.
Show increased difficulty in any of the above areas when noise increases	Make a rule that it must be quiet when you are talking, and explain that it is because some athletes won't be able to understand if it is noisy. "Let's all help each other have the best chance to learn this skill."

Attention Skills

Athletes may	Accommodations
Fail to finish	Provide reward via praise or the right to move on once a task is completed.
Seem easily distracted	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Keep them busy using a variety of short tasks. • Be quick with praise and give it often.
Appear not to listen	Touch them on the shoulder and ask if they understand what to do.
Have difficulty concentrating on tasks requiring sustained attention	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Break skills down into smaller tasks. • Keep instruction time limited so they move more quickly from one activity to the next. • Teach as you do it with them.
Appear to act before thinking (impulse control issue)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Pair them with another athlete who can act as a screener for the impulse. • Deep breaths help them slow down to focus and help you calm down as well!
Shift excessively from one activity to another	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Set up rewards for mastering a skill before moving on. • Ask them to teach the skill to another athlete who is having trouble. This keeps them focused on someone else's action and not on their desire to move on.
Have difficulty awaiting turns in games	Outline the schedule so they understand expectations.



Attention Skills, continued

Athletes may	Accommodations
Excessively run about to climb on things	Help organize activities/limit materials if feasible.
Have difficulty staying seated	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• There should not be a lot of sitting during a sports practice.• Have activities set up so that the minute they arrive they have something to start on. "The first thing you should do when you get to practice is get a ball and shoot five baskets from each of these blue Xs."

Social Perception

Athletes may	Accommodations
Make inappropriate comments	Depends on the nature of the comments. If it is disruptive or makes other athletes uncomfortable, have them sit out or move to work with an assistant until you can explain that this is hurting their teammates.
Make inappropriate use of personal space	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Do a warm-up drill that establishes an arm's length; talk about giving everyone space.• Have partners shake hands and remind everyone that hand-shake distance is usually best for talking. Any closer and people get nervous and can't focus on what you are saying.
Have difficulty anticipating behavior in others	Repetition via drills will help in learning patterns of actions.
Have difficulty in changing behavior	Reward and praise positive behavior and changes. Notice and comment on improvements, no matter how slight.
Appear to be inflexible	Make every action a choice. Say, "Do you want to join the group over here, or do you want to join the group over there?" Try to avoid "or else" comments.
Difficulty responding to non-verbal cues, hand gestures, facial expressions	Experiment with different cues and have them decide which ones work best for them.



Accommodations for persons with physical challenges:

- ♦ Adapt rules—always clarify to the entire group
- ♦ Invite them to be involved with decision making on adaptations
- ♦ Always make sure the person with a physical disability is positioned to see and hear instructions
- ♦ Educate everyone involved in wheelchair safety issues

Explore other roles: for example, scorekeeper/manager/coach



Athlete Behavior Characteristics and Strategies to Improve Learning

The following chart provides coaches with information about Special Olympics athletes with different functional and learning characteristics (not labels) so that coaches can teach Special Olympics athletes more effectively. When an athlete exhibits what is generally perceived as inappropriate behaviors, those behaviors may simply be a reflection or part of the person. Inappropriate behaviors that will not be tolerated include defiance, acting out or silliness.

When possible, talk with parents, providers, teachers, former coaches, etc., about an athlete's characteristics and the successful strategies used to affect learning. Use the characteristics as a checklist. Ensure that one or more of the strategies opposite the respective characteristics are employed in each practice.

Athlete Characteristics	Strategies to Improve Learning
Learning occurs at a slower rate	<ol style="list-style-type: none">1. Provide structure2. Provide repetition and review3. Break down skills into smaller parts
Short attention span	<ol style="list-style-type: none">1. Train for short periods of time2. Provide repetition and review (key to gaining new skill)3. Work one-on-one (gain full attention)
Resistance to change	<ol style="list-style-type: none">1. Provide clear and continuous transitions2. Establish routines (enforce concept of flexibility)3. Build on successes
Stubborn/behavior problems	<ol style="list-style-type: none">1. Set clear rules, expectations and limits2. Enforce rules but provide conditions for coming back3. Reinforce acceptable behaviors
Verbal communication difficulties or no verbal communication	<ol style="list-style-type: none">1. Allow for additional time to express thoughts2. Use picture boards/other assistive devices3. Ask athlete to demonstrate or show what he/she means
Prone to seizures	<ol style="list-style-type: none">1. Know signs and symptoms2. Control atmosphere (heat, sun, sugar, etc.)3. Inform and assure teammates when they occur
Poor muscle tone	<ol style="list-style-type: none">1. Provide specific exercise and strengthening programs2. Stretch safely; do not allow athletes to stretch beyond normal joint range of motion
Lower pain threshold; sensitive to touch	<ol style="list-style-type: none">1. Establish eye contact when talking2. Use softer/adaptive equipment3. Forewarn if any touch is necessary



Athlete Characteristics	Strategies to Improve Learning
Failure to form social bonds	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Work in small groups 2. Have athletes work in pairs (same pairs for several weeks) 3. Provide highly structured and least distracting environment
Easily overstimulated	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Remove or lessen stimuli (dim lights; soften sound; remove unnecessary objects) 2. Train in separate room or smaller group; gradually add people
Difficulty with balance or stability	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Provide additional assistance 2. If stretching, sit down, lean against wall or hold on to partner 3. Allow for extra time to complete a task
Compulsive eating	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Remove food from practice/competition sites 2. Provide structure and routine for eating
Coordination problems	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Break down drills to easier movements 2. Allow additional time with one-on-one support 3. Progress according to athlete's ability
Mood swings (frequency and intensity)	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Provide structured and predictable activities 2. Set clear expectations, limits and conditions 3. Separate from group when necessary, but allow back
Physical limitations or impairments	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Provide adaptive equipment or modifications 2. Provide exercises that strengthen and stretch muscles 3. Develop gross motor and stability skills
Blind	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Use many verbal cues 2. Provide action-specific feedback 3. Hand-over-hand demonstration may be needed
Deaf	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Establish eye contact when talking 2. Use signs, pictures or American Sign Language 3. Demonstrate what is desired

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