*Special Olympics*

# HEALTH MESSENGER COMMUNICATIONS PLAYBOOK

Special Olympics Health

MADE POSSIBLE BY Golisano FOUNDATION

# HEALTH MESSENGER PLAYBOOK

As Special Olympics Health Messengers you are leaders for health and wellness. You use your voice, your actions, and your experiences to help others live healthier lives.

You teach, you speak up, and you lead by example—both in Special Olympics and in your community.

You support your teammates, families, and friends in making healthy choices. You also help health care providers and leaders understand the needs of people with intellectual and developmental disabilities (IDD), so everyone has fair access to health care, education, and services.

## YOUR ROLE AS A HEALTH MESSENGER

As a Health Messenger, you will:

- Be a health leader in your community
- Build skills to talk about health, fitness, health advocacy, training healthcare providers, and more
- Encourage others to learn about health and make healthy choices
- Support people with IDD in getting the care they need
- Speak up and take action to make health better for everyone

## HOW TO USE THIS PLAYBOOK

This playbook is a tool to help you be a strong Health Messenger.
It gives you health tips, social media ideas, and fun activities you can use to teach others.

Each section of the playbook is about an important health topic, including:

- Communication and storytelling
- Physical activity and fitness
- Nutrition and hydration
- Emotional health
- Hygiene
- Advocacy (speaking up for the health of people with IDD)

Each section has different parts that may include:

- **Health Tips**
  - Simple tips you can learn and share with others to help them stay healthy.
- **Social Media Ideas**
  - Sample posts you can use to share health messages online with your team, family, and community.
- **Activities**
  - Fun and easy activities you can lead to help others practice healthy habits and discuss health.
- **Video Concepts**
  - Short video ideas for you to use on social media to share health information with others.

**Use this playbook to help you lead, speak up, and take action to make your community healthier.**

# HEALTH MESSENGER TIPS

**Instructions:** Share health tips with peers, support people, coaches and volunteers. Tips can be shared in person or virtually. Sample tips include:

1. Lead by example by practicing healthy habits every day.
2. Speak up and share why health is important.
3. Be a positive role model for your teammates, friends, and family.
4. Be yourself and lead in a way that feels comfortable and true to you.
5. Keep learning new things about health and wellness.
6. Support and encourage others in their health journeys.
7. Use clear, simple words so everyone understands your message.
8. Take action by teaching, sharing tips, and promoting healthy choices.

# Acknowledgements

This playbook was developed through the collaboration and expertise of individuals dedicated to advancing health and wellness for people with IDD.

## CONTENT DEVELOPMENT, DESIGN AND REVIEW

- Riseability, Maddie Hangerman, & Charlie Wilson

## HEALTH MESSENGER COMMITTEE

- Abbott Philson, Special Olympics Maine
- Adam Kelly, Special Olympics Mississippi
- Cory King, Special Olympics Mississippi
- Emilee Flurry, Special Olympics Mississippi
- Kayla Cornell, Special Olympics Michigan
- Kayte Barton, Special Olympics Minnesota
- Noah Clay, Special Olympics Arkansas
- Renee Manfredi, Special Olympics Texas

## FUNDING SUPPORT

Special Olympics Health activities are supported by many sources, including in the United States by Grant Number NU27DD000021 from the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention of the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, with $18.1 million (64%) financed with U.S. Federal funds and $10.2 million (36%) supported by non-federal sources. These contents are solely the responsibility of the authors and do not necessarily represent the official views of the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention or the Department of Health and Human Services.

## *Questions?*

Contact your local Special Olympics Program or visit: https://resources.specialolympics.org/health/health-messenger

Special Olympics Health

MADE POSSIBLE BY Golisano FOUNDATION

TOPIC 1

*Health Messenger Playbook*

# COMMUNICATION & STORYTELLING

Special Olympics Health

MADE POSSIBLE BY Golisano FOUNDATION

# COMMUNICATION & STORYTELLING

Good communication helps Health Messengers share health information in ways that are clear, engaging, and easy to understand. This section of the Health Messenger Toolkit is designed to help Health Messengers use communication, storytelling, and social media to connect with people with intellectual and developmental disabilities, families, and community members.

**Health Messengers can use this section to:**

- Share health messages through conversation or social media
- Use storytelling to make health topics more personal and relatable
- Create simple videos or messages that promote healthy habits

**Health Messengers are encouraged to:**

- Use positive and respectful language
- Share stories and examples that are meaningful to their audience
- Keep messages simple, clear, and easy to remember
- Use photos, videos, and social media responsibly
- Adapt materials to fit the needs, culture, language, and comfort level of their audience

# A. Communications Tips

## Communication, Storytelling & Social Media

1. Your health story matters. Share your story so that you can help other people understand, feel inspired, and advocate for inclusive health services.
2. Use simple words. You do not need big words to share a strong health message.
3. Be yourself. When you are honest and real, people are more likely to trust you.
4. Talk like you are talking to a friend. Use a friendly voice. You do not have to sound perfect.
5. Pick one main health message. Before you speak or post, ask yourself: “What do I want people to remember?”
6. Use examples from your life. A short personal example can make your message stronger.
7. Practicing can help you feel more confident. Practice sharing your health story. Practice with a friend, coach, mentor, or family member.
8. End with a clear action. Tell people what they can do next. For example: “Drink more water,” “Get your health screening,” or “Include people with intellectual and developmental disabilities.”
9. You are important, and your health story is important. Use your voice to help others learn about health.

## Social media tips

1. Social media can help you reach many people. Use it to share positive messages, health tips, event details, and stories.

2. Keep each post short and clear. One post should have one main idea.

3. Ask questions to start conversations. Questions help people share their own ideas. A conversation can be a learning experience for both people.

4. Celebrate small wins. Small wins help people stay motivated. For example, celebrate trying a new food, going for a walk, or speaking up for your health.

5. Use photos and videos carefully. Always ask permission before posting someone's photo, video, name, or personal story.

6. Be respectful online. Do not post mean comments, private information, or anything that could hurt someone.

## Safety and confidentiality tips

1. Think before you share anything on social media.

2. Ask first. Before sharing a photo, video, quote, or story about another person, ask: “Is it okay if I share this?”

3. Share your own story. It is okay to talk about your own experience.

4. If something does not feel right, tell a trusted person. Talk to a coach, mentor, staff member, family member, or caregiver.

5. If you see something, say something. Report bullying, harassment, unsafe behavior, or anything that makes you worried, to someone you trust.

6. Know when to report. Tell a trusted person or staff member if someone talks about hurting themselves or someone else, if someone is being abused, or if someone is in danger.

# B. Social Media Video Concepts

This section outlines three video concepts, an example of a Health Messenger telling their health story, and tips on how to record your own video. It is recommended that you review the concepts, example, and tips before you shoot your own video.

## Video Concept: My health story

**Overview**
Using video is a great way to share your personal health story. Your personal health story can help inform others about health topics and inclusive health.

**Script**
Hi, my name is [Your Name].

I am a Special Olympics Health Messenger.

Today I want to share my health story: [share your health story - **example** - I recently went to a doctors appointment and the doctor talked to my mom the entire time instead of talking to me about my health].

This experience made me feel [share how the experience made you feel - **example** - frustrated because I am not a child, and I should have a say in my health care].

In the future [share a simple action you intend to take in the future - **example** - I am going to ask my doctor to talk to me directly and I am going to share my thoughts about my health].

**Suggested Caption**
Inclusive health services are not always offered. Today, I am sharing how I intend to make sure I get more inclusive health services in the future.

#InclusiveHealth

## Video Concept: Lead by example

**Overview**
Using video is a great way to share your personal health story. Your personal health story can inspire others to make a positive health change based on a change you have made and how it made you feel.

**Script**
Hi, my name is [Your Name].

I am a Special Olympics Health Messenger.

Today, I want to share my health story: [share your health story - **example** - I recently decided to stop drinking soda].

This experience made me feel [share how the experience made you feel - **example** - more energetic because I was no longer crashing after drinking my favorite soda].

This taught me [share what you learned - **example** - that water is the best beverage for me!].

**Suggested Caption**
Sharing your health story can inspire others to learn about health and change their behavior. Tell me your health story!

#InclusiveHealth

## Video Concept: Ask me a health question

**Overview**
This video uses a question-and-answer format to show how Health Messengers can talk about health in a clear, respectful, and supportive way. You answer one common health question using simple words and remind viewers that it is okay to ask for help from a trusted person or health professional. The goal is to make health conversations feel welcoming and safe. Work with your mentor to make sure that you find correct answers from reliable sources.

**Script**
Hi, my name is [Your Name].

I am a Special Olympics Health Messenger.

Today I am answering a health question: [Share a health question - **example** - How much water should I drink in a day?].

My answer is: [Share a simple answer in your own words - **example** - Five bottles of water per day].

If you want to learn more about [Share a health topic - **example** - hydration] visit [share Special Olympics source where you got this information - **example** - the Fit 5 resource page].

If you do not understand something about your health, it is okay to ask questions and ask for more information. You can talk to a coach, mentor, family member, caregiver, or health professional.  Speaking up and asking questions is part of taking care of your health.

**Suggested Caption**
Asking questions can help us understand our health and feel more confident about what to do next.

#InclusiveHealth

## Video Example

**Overview**
The most important part of storytelling as a Health Messenger is to speak from the heart and share an idea or experience that is important to you. Health Messenger, Esteban Mercado is a great example of this.

**Example Video Summary**
In his video, Esteban shares how Special Olympics Strong Minds has helped him learn healthy coping strategies for stress, like taking deep breaths and playing with a fidget toy. These strategies help him relax and manage anger and stress. Esteban uses these strategies during competition and when he has to deal with rude customers at work. He also shows his personality and makes the video relatable.

**Click here to watch the full video**

**Reflection**
After watching Esteban's video, take a moment to reflect on these questions:

- What parts of Esteban's video did you like?
- What made the video engaging?
- What is a topic that you would like to share about in your health video?

# How to Film a Health Messenger Video

**Overview**
Video is a great way to share your health message to many people. Video helps share your story in an way that shows your personality and is relatable to others.

**How to Film**

- **Length of Video:** 30-60 seconds. It's okay if it's a little longer, but viewers are more likely to watch the full video if it is this long.

- **Recording set up**: Videos can be recorded on a mobile phone, vertically (like this emoji 📱). Filming a video in this way is best for social media.

- **What to wear**: To show you are a Health Messenger, it is helpful to wear a Special Olympics Health shirt or any Special Olympics branded clothing.

**Additional Video Tips**

- Record in a quiet place so your voice is easy to hear.
- Keep your background simple. Try to avoid having a lot of things in the background.
- Use natural light, like sunlight. But avoid bright lights behind you.
- Speak as clearly as you can and at a steady pace. If you tend to talk fast, try to speak more slowly.
- Clean your phone camera before you start recording.

## *Questions?*

Contact your local Special Olympics Program or visit: https://resources.specialolympics.org/health/health-messenger

Special Olympics Health

MADE POSSIBLE BY Golisano FOUNDATION

TOPIC 2

*Health Messenger Playbook*

# PHYSICAL ACTIVITY & FITNESS

Special Olympics Health

MADE POSSIBLE BY Golisano FOUNDATION

# PHYSICAL ACTIVITY & FITNESS

Regular physical activity and fitness are important for overall health, energy, confidence, and sport performance. This section of the Health Messenger Playbook is designed to help Health Messengers lead simple and practical conversations with people with intellectual and developmental disabilities (IDD), families, and community members about moving more, building strength, staying active, improving sport performance and making physical activity a fun part of everyday life.

**Health Messengers can use this section to:**

- Lead group discussions or presentations
- Share physical activity and fitness tips with people with IDD and others
- Facilitate interactive movement activities
- Encourage safe and enjoyable physical activity during practices, competitions, and community events
- Support athletes and community members in setting realistic fitness goals

**Health Messengers are encouraged to:**

- Use positive, encouraging language
- Focus on progress, participation, and enjoyment rather than comparison or performance only
- Make activities fun, inclusive, and interactive
- Adapt activities for different ages, abilities, fitness levels, and comfort levels
- Recommend safe movement, warm-ups, cool-downs, and rest when needed
- Collaborate with Fitness Captains, who lead warm-ups, cool-downs, and health education tips for their sports team, to encourage safe movement
- Recommend drinking water and eating a variety of healthy foods
- Use examples that fit the local community, available spaces, and everyday routines

# A. Health Tips

**Instructions:** Share health tips with peers, support people, coaches and volunteers. Tips can be shared in person or virtually. Sample tips include:

1. Try to be active for at least 30 minutes each day.
2. Move your body every day! Physical activity helps you build strength, feel more energized, and stay ready for sports, play, and everyday activities.
3. You do not need a gym to be active. You can walk outside, dance at home, use stairs, follow a simple exercise video, or do bodyweight exercises like squats, wall push-ups, or marching in place.
4. Try to do activities that make your heart beat faster, like walking, biking, swimming, or dancing. These activities help build endurance, which means your body can stay active longer without getting tired as quickly.
5. Build muscle strength with activities like push-ups, sit-ups, squats, lifting light weights, carrying groceries, or using resistance bands. Strong muscles help with sports, balance, and everyday activities.
6. Stretch your body to help your muscles stay loose and support better movement. Stretching can improve range of motion, which means how far your joints and muscles can move comfortably. Stretching may also help lower the risk of injury when it is part of a safe warm-up or cool-down routine.
7. Fit 5 guides, cards, and videos are a resource that can be used to complete endurance, strength, flexibility, and balance exercises.

8. Practice balance with simple activities like standing on one foot, walking heel-to-toe in a straight line, or stepping over small objects. Balance can help prevent falls and support safer movement.

9. Strengthen your core, which means the muscles in your stomach and back. Core exercises like planks, sit ups, bridges, or seated marches can help with posture, balance, and movement.

10. Warm up before being active and cool down when you are done. A warm-up can be a short walk, arm circles, or easy marching. A cool-down can be slow walking and gentle stretching.

11. Start small with movement and physical activity and build up over time. Pick one goal, like taking a short walk after dinner, doing 5 squats during a TV break, or doing a few yoga poses before bed.

# B. Social Media Posts

### POST: What counts as physical activity

Physical activity is any movement your body makes.
Walking, dancing, sports, and even chores all count.
Everyday movement helps your body stay strong and active.

Try:
✅ Taking a short walk
✅ Dancing to your favorite song
✅ Moving more throughout your day

How did you move your body today?
#HealthMessenger #MoveMore #PhysicalActivity #InclusiveHealth #SpecialOlympics

## POST: Warm up and cool down

Warming up and cooling down helps your body stay safe.

Getting your body ready before activity and cooling down after can help you avoid injuries.

What kind of warm up do you like to do?
#HealthMessenger #StayActive #PhysicalActivity #SpecialOlympics #InclusiveHealth

---

## POST: Different ways to exercise

There are many ways to move your body.  Building strength, balance, flexibility, and endurance all matter.

Mixing different activities keeps things fun and helps your body in new ways.

What kind of exercise do you enjoy most?

#HealthMessenger #FitnessForAll #PhysicalActivity #SpecialOlympics #InclusiveHealth

---

## POST:  Every movement counts

Every movement counts toward better health.
Moving your body can help you feel stronger, have more energy, and support your heart.

Try:
✅ Moving for 10 minutes today
✅ Walking, dancing, or stretching at home
✅ Walking to your destinations when possible
✅ Taking the stairs instead of the elevator
✅ Walking around while talking on the phone or during commercials when watching TV

What is one way you like to stay active?
#HealthMessenger #EveryMovementCounts #MoveMore #SpecialOlympics #InclusiveHealth

---

# C. Health & Wellness Activities

## Activity: Move more, sit less

| Topic: Physical activity | Who: Individual or group | Time: 10-15 min | Materials: Paper Optional |
|---|---|---|---|

### OVERVIEW

Small movement breaks add up. In this activity, participants identify times when they sit for a long stretch and choose simple ways to move for 1-5 minutes during the day.

### EASY MOVEMENT BREAKS

| At home | At practice | At work or school | With friends |
|---|---|---|---|
| • Stand during commercials<br>• Walk or roll while calling a friend | • Arrive 5 minutes early<br>• Do warm-up laps or dynamic stretches | • Take the long hallway<br>• Use stairs if safe<br>• Walk or roll for transportation | • Invite someone to walk or wheel together<br>• Try a short dance break |

### STEPS FOR THE HEALTH MESSENGER

| | |
|---|---|
| 1 | **Ask the group to think.** During a typical day, when do they sit the longest? |
| 2 | **List exercises.** Together, list 5 exercises that do not need equipment. |
| 3 | **Identify movement breaks.** Have each person choose one time they sit for a long time and one movement break to try instead. |
| 4 | **Practice a movement break.** Practice a 2-minute exercise march, roll, side bend, side step, or squats. |
| 5 | **Set goals.** Invite everyone to set a goal: I will move for [number of minutes you will move] minutes after [a time you are sitting for a long period]. |

### DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

- Can you name one way that you include extra movement in your day?
- Which movement break feels easiest to start?
- Who could remind you or join you for a short movement break?

**Health Messenger tip:**
Keep movement breaks simple and fun. A short walk, stretch, or dance counts - especially when it becomes a habit.

# Activity: Balance and flexibility stations

| Topic: Physical Activity | Who: Group or pairs | Time: 20-25 min | Materials: Chairs optional |
|---|---|---|---|

## OVERVIEW

Balance and flexibility help people move safely, recover, and feel more confident. This station activity practices steady balance, gentle stretching, and body awareness.

## BALANCE + FLEXIBILITY BASICS

**Balance**
- Stand tall
- Use a chair or wall for support

**Flexibility**
- Stretch gently
- No bouncing or forcing
- Make sure you warm-up first!

## STEPS FOR THE HEALTH MESSENGER

| | |
|---|---|
| 1 | **Create stations.** Heel-to-toe walk, single-leg stand with support, calf stretch, and shoulder stretch. |
| 2 | **Balance support.** Demonstrate how to use a wall, chair, or partner for balance support. |
| 3 | **Rotate through.** Visit each station for about 1 minute. Encourage participants to work at their own safe level. |
| 4 | **Compare.** Ask the group to compare how their balance feels with eyes forward, arms out, or one hand on a chair. |
| 5 | **Stretch.** Finish with a group stretch and one deep breath in and out together. |

## DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

- Which of the activities will you do at home this week?
- When do you need good balance in your sport or daily life?
- What other stretches do you like and can you demonstrate?

**Health Messenger tip:**

Balance activities should feel challenging but safe. Keep support nearby and remind everyone that using the support still counts.

Use Fit 5 cards, visuals, and videos for examples of these exercises.

# Activity: 7-day physical activity challenge

| Topic: Physical activity | Who: Team | Time: 7-day challenge | Materials: Tracker optional |
|---|---|---|---|

## OVERVIEW

Healthy physical activity habits stick better with support. In this challenge, the Health Messenger leads a group in choosing one daily movement goal, checking in for 7 days, and celebrating progress. If leading a sports team, work with the team's Fitness Captain if they have one to lead this activity. Check-ins can be done in a group chat via social media or text message, individually over the phone, or in person. Use either the tracker on the next page, or the Fit 5 tracker or Special Olympics Fitness App (smartphone required) where you can also choose to track your hydration and nutrition.

## HOW IT WORKS

| The goal | The check-in | The celebration |
|---|---|---|
| Move 7 days<br>Aim for at least 10 minutes a day<br>Build up when ready | Did you move yesterday?<br>What helped?<br>What is today's plan for movement? | Progress counts<br>No judgment for missed days<br>Share what worked |

## STEPS FOR THE HEALTH MESSENGER

| | |
|---|---|
| 1 | **Day 1 kick-off:** Introduce the challenge and explain that any safe movement counts - walking, dancing, practicing drills, stretching, or doing active chores. |
| 2 | **Set goals:** Have each person choose a personal goal for the seven days. Keep it realistic and write it down or mark a tracker. |
| 3 | **Partner up:** Encourage accountability partners to remind each other, move together, or send a positive message to a teammate. |
| 4 | **Days 2-8:** Track actvitity. Open each session with a quick check-in. Celebrate effort, teamwork, and problem-solving. |
| 5 | **Day 9 wrap-up:** Share what changed. Celebrate everyone who participated and choose one habit to keep going. |

## DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

- What was the hardest part of moving every day?
- What helped you get started on days when you did not feel motivated?
- What was your favorite movement today?

**Health Messenger tip:**
Lead by doing. Share your own daily movement goal and check in honestly with the group - your example builds trust.

# 7-Day fitness challenge tracker

**INSTRUCTIONS**
On every day of the challenge, check the box on the left if you exercised. Write how many minutes you exercised for next to it on the right side.

## Day One

| | |
|---|---|
| | **_____ minutes** |

## Day Two

| | |
|---|---|
| | **_____ minutes** |

## Day Three

| | |
|---|---|
| | **_____ minutes** |

## Day Four

| | |
|---|---|
| | **_____ minutes** |

## Day Five

| | |
|---|---|
| | **_____ minutes** |

## Day Six

| | |
|---|---|
| | **_____ minutes** |

## Day Seven

| | |
|---|---|
| | **_____ minutes** |

# D. Social Media Video Concepts

## Video Concept: How I like to move

**Overview**
This video highlights a favorite way to be active. You introduce yourself, show a physical activity you enjoy, and explain why it is meaningful to you. The goal is to make movement feel personal, simple, and enjoyable.

**Script**
Hi, my name is [Your Name].

My favorite way to move is [your activity].

[Show yourself doing the activity]

I like doing this because [share why you like it - **example** - it helps me feel strong and gives me more energy].

Being active can be fun and it is a great way to take care of your health.

**Suggested Caption**
Being active is an important part of my life. Share a photo or video of yourself doing one of your favorite activities. 🤸‍♀️💃
#HealthMessenger #PhysicalActivity #SpecialOlympics

## Video Concept: My 4 part workout

**Overview**
This video demonstrates different types of physical activity. You introduce yourself and show one example each of endurance, strength, balance, and flexibility. The focus is on variety and showing simple ways to stay active.

**Script**
Hi, my name is [Your Name].

This is my endurance activity.

[Show an endurance activity like walking, jogging, or biking]

This is my strength activity.

[Show a strength activity like squats, lunges or push ups]

This is my balance activity.

[Show a balance activity like standing on one foot or walking in a line]

This is my stretch.

[Show a simple stretch]

I like to include all of these to help my body stay strong, balanced, and active.

**Suggested Caption**
When planning for your exercise, try to make sure you include activities that work on your endurance, strength, balance and flexibility.
What is your favorite stretch? 🌟🤔
#HealthMessenger #PhysicalActivity #SpecialOlympics

## *Questions?*

Contact your local Special Olympics Program or visit: https://resources.specialolympics.org/health/health-messenger

Special Olympics Health

MADE POSSIBLE BY Golisano FOUNDATION

TOPIC 3

*Health Messenger Playbook*

# NUTRITION & HYDRATION

Special Olympics Health

MADE POSSIBLE BY Golisano FOUNDATION

# NUTRITION & HYDRATION

Good nutrition and hydration are important for overall health, energy, wellness, and sports performance. This section of the Health Messenger Playbook is designed to help Health Messengers lead simple and practical conversations with people with intellectual and developmental disabilities, families, and community members about healthy eating and hydration habits.

**Health Messengers can use this section to:**

- Lead group discussions or presentations
- Share quick nutrition and hydration tips with athletes and families
- Facilitate interactive activities and demonstrations
- Support healthy nutrition and hydration habits during practices, competitions, or community events

**Health Messengers are encouraged to:**

- Use positive, encouraging language
- Focus on balance rather than “good” or “bad” foods
- Make activities fun and interactive
- Use local foods and culturally relevant examples whenever possible
- Adapt materials to fit the needs of their audience
- Collaborate with a team's Fitness Captain for delivering h[illegible] education tips to a sports team

# A. Health Tips

**Instructions:** Share health tips with peers, support people, coaches and volunteers. Tips can be shared in person or virtually. Sample tips include:

1. Small healthy food changes can make a big difference over time.
2. Prepare healthy snacks to help maintain your energy between meals and practices.
3. Try to make half your plate fruits and vegetables when you can.
4. Eat different colors of fruits and vegetables. Different colors give your body different nutrients.
5. Choose whole grains more often, like whole wheat bread, oatmeal, brown rice, or fiber-rich whole grain pasta.
6. Eat protein foods like beans, eggs, chicken, fish, nuts, tofu, or lean red meat with every meal.
7. Red meat can give your body important nutrients, like protein and iron. If you eat red meat, choose lean options when you can. “Lean” means it has less fat. Try to eat red meat sometimes, not every day.
8. Avoid processed meats. Processed meats include bacon, sausage, hot dogs, and deli meats. Eating less processed meat is better for your heart.

9. Drink water throughout the day, not just when you feel thirsty.

10. Drink water before, during and after practice. Water is the best drink for your body.

11. Sugary drinks like soda, sweet tea, sports drinks, and energy drinks are not healthy. Try drinking fruit-infused water instead.

12. Eating healthy foods and moving your body can help lower your risk for type 2 diabetes. Eat healthy, stay active, and manage your weight to help prevent or delay type 2 diabetes.

13. Try one small change at a time. For example, add a fruit at breakfast, drink one more cup of water, or choose a fiber-rich whole grain.

14. Add fiber. Beans, lentils, vegetables, fruit, oats, brown rice, and whole grain foods have fiber. Fiber helps you feel full.

15. Watch portion sizes. Consult Snack Zone about portion sizes. Use a smaller plate, eat slowly, and stop when your body feels full.

16. Try healthier swaps. For example, chickpea pasta can add more protein and fiber than regular pasta. Or, use lettuce instead of a bun when eating a hamburger.

17. Plan healthy snacks. Good options include fruit, yogurt, nuts, cheese, fiber-rich whole grain crackers, carrots with hummus, or peanut butter on whole wheat toast.

# B. Social Media Posts

## POST: One fruit or vegetable

Healthy eating and hydration can help us feel strong, energized, and ready to move! 💧🍎

Small changes in your nutrition can add up. Try making small healthy eating changes every week to improve your health.

What is one healthy eating habit you are working on this week?

#HealthMessenger #InclusiveHealth #Nutrition #Hydration #SpecialOlympics

## POST:  Water is the best drink

Water is the best drink for your body! 💧
Drinking water throughout the day helps your body stay hydrated and ready for sports, work, school, and daily activities.

Try:
✔️ Carrying a water bottle with you so you can drink water wherever your day takes you.
✔️ Drinking water before and after practice.
✔️ Choosing water instead of sugary drinks like juice and soda.

Small habits can help support your health and wellness every day.
#Hydration #InclusiveHealth #HealthMessenger #Wellness #SpecialOlympics

---

## POST: One fruit of vegetable with every meal

Health Challenge!

I am a Special Olympics Health Messenger and today I challenge you: add ONE fruit or vegetable to every meal today. Just one. That's how healthy habits start — one small step at a time. Try it today, and then see if you can keep it up!

#HealthMessenger #Nutrition #SpecialOlympics

---

## POST: Healthy eating doesn’t have to be expensive

Healthy eating does not have to cost a lot. 🍽️

Simple ideas:
🥕 Plan healthy snacks ahead of time to avoid eating out
🫘 Add lower costing proteins like beans or eggs
🌾 Buy fiber-rich whole grain foods in larger amounts
🥤 Drink water instead of energy drinks or juice

What is your favorite affordable healthy snack?

#Nutrition #HealthMessenger #HealthyHabits #SpecialOlympics

---

## POST: Use the stoplight

Sugary drinks like soda and energy drinks might taste great, but they can leave you tired and dehydrated. Try using the stoplight guide below to choose healthy beverages.

🔴 Avoid sodas, energy drinks, and sports drinks.
🟡 Moderate amounts of milk, including full-fat, and 100% juice are also good choices in small amounts.
🟢 Water is the best choice for a beverage!

#Hydration #HealthMessenger #Wellness #SpecialOlympics

---

# C. Health & Wellness Activities

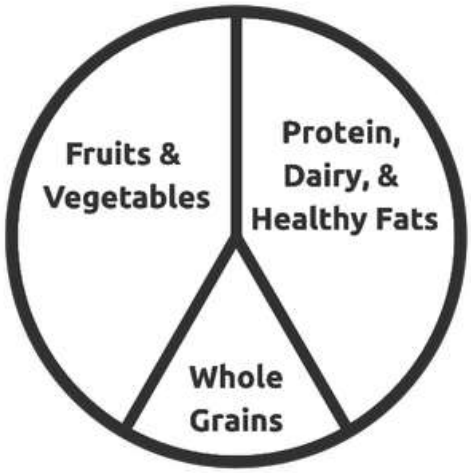
## Activity: Build your plate

| Topic: Nutrition | Who: Group or pairs | Time: 20–30 min | Materials: None |
|---|---|---|---|

### OVERVIEW

Each group (or pair) builds a balanced meal by choosing foods from a list or calling them out. The Health Messenger leads the group in understanding what goes on a healthy plate — and why.

### HOW TO SPLIT THE PLATE




### STEPS FOR THE HEALTH MESSENGER

| | |
|---|---|
| 1 | **Three sections.** Describe the three sections of the plate. |
| 2 | **Last meal.** Ask each person to name or write down what they ate for their last meal. Don't judge any answers — this is just a starting point. Or you can use a picture of a meal from a restaurant website or magazine. |
| 3 | **Review meals.** Together, look at those meals. How close were they to the half-plate rule? What's one thing that could be swapped or added? |
| 4 | **Build a plate.** Have each person "build" one healthy meal out loud or on paper — one breakfast, lunch, or dinner using the three sections of the plate. |
| 5 | **Celebrate.** Share out and celebrate — every plate counts, no matter how small the change. |

### DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

- What is one fruit or vegetable you already love and eat often?
- What is one small change you could make to your next meal to make it healthier?
- Who in your family or community could you share the half-plate rule with?

**Health Messenger tip:**
Share what YOUR favorite healthy meal looks like. Personal stories make this activity come alive.

# Activity: Water challenge

**Topic: Hydration** | **Who: Team** | **Time: 7-day challenge** | **Materials: Tracker sheet optional**

## OVERVIEW

Healthy habits stick better with support. In this challenge, the Health Messenger leads their team, household, or group of friends in tracking their daily water intake for 7 days. Each day starts with a quick check-in. Check-ins can be done in a group chat via social media or text message, or individually over the phone, or in person. Use either the tracker on the next page, the Fit 5 tracker, or Special Olympics Fitness App (smartphone required) where you can also choose to track your physical activity and nutrition.

## HOW IT WORKS

**The daily goal**

- Drink 5 bottles of water a day
- Mark off each bottle on your tracker

**The daily check-in**

- Did you hit your goal yesterday?
- What helped you remember?
- One tip to share with the group
- Set your intention for today

## STEPS FOR THE HEALTH MESSENGER

| | |
|---|---|
| 1 | **Day 1 kick-off.** Introduce the challenge. Explain the goal, hand out (or draw) tracker sheets, and have everyone set a personal water goal for the next seven days. |
| 2 | **Partner up.** Encourage accountability partners — pair up to check in with each other during the day via text or in person. |
| 3 | **Days 2–8.** Track bottles! Start each day with a check-in. Who hit their goal? What strategies are working? Celebrate any progress — no judgment for off days. |
| 4 | **Day 9 wrap-up.** Share results as a group. What changed? Did anyone notice more energy, better focus, or fewer headaches? |
| 5 | **Celebrate!** Recognize everyone who participated — completing the challenge is a win, regardless of how many bottles they hit. |

## DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

- What was the hardest part of drinking more water?
- What did you notice about how you felt on days when you drank more water?
- Will you keep this habit going? What will help you stick with it?

**Health Messenger tip:**

You lead by doing. Bring your water bottle every day of the challenge and share your own check-ins alongside the group — your example is the most powerful teaching tool you have.

# Water Challenge Tracker

**INSTRUCTIONS**
On every day of the challenge, cross off one number for each bottle of water that you drink.  Try to cross off all five numbers every day.

## Day One

| | | | | |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 |

## Day Two

| | | | | |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 |

## Day Three

| | | | | |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 |

## Day Four

| | | | | |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 |

## Day Five

| | | | | |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 |

## Day Six

| | | | | |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 |

## Day Seven

| | | | | |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 |

# D. Social Media Video Concepts

## Video Concept: My water bottle goes everywhere with me

**Overview**
This video uses a day-in-the-life format to show how you carry your water bottle with you during your daily routine. The goal is to make hydration feel simple, personal, and part of everyday life. If you decide to use this concept, you may want to talk to your mentor about video editing ahead of time to see if they can support you with this. You may also want your mentor to accompany you on the day that you shoot your video so that they can be the videographer. A day that you have multiple activites may work best.

**Script**
Hi, my name is [Your Name].

My water bottle goes everywhere with me.

[Show yourself carrying your water bottle during the day — at practice, at work, at school, at home, or in the community.]

I drink water because it helps my body stay hydrated.

Water helps me feel focused, energized, and ready to move.

Staying hydrated is one way I take care of my health every day.

Where does your water bottle go with you?

**Suggested Caption**
Where does your water bottle go with you? 💧
Drinking water can help you feel energized!
#HealthMessenger #Hydration #SpecialOlympics

## Video Concept: Watch me build my plate

**Overview**
This video shows you preparing or serving a simple healthy meal. You explain how easy it is to build a healthy plate by showing fruits or vegetables, protein, whole grains, and water. The goal is to make healthy eating feel easy and realistic.

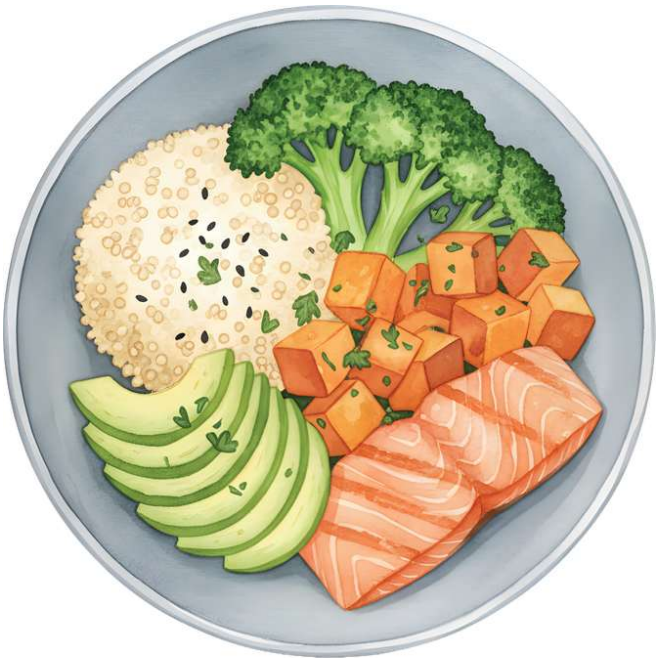
**Script**
Hi, my name is [Your Name].

Want to see an easy way to build a healthy plate?

[Show your plate or meal.]

First, I add fruits or vegetables.

Fruits and vegetables give my body vitamins and help me stay healthy.



Next, I add protein.

Protein helps build strong muscles.

Then, I add a fiber-rich whole grain.

Whole grains help give my body energy.

And I drink water to help keep my body hydrated.

Healthy eating does not have to be perfect —
small changes can make a big difference!

**Suggested Caption**
What's on your healthy plate today? 🍎💧🥗
Healthy eating can help us feel strong, energized, and ready to move!
#HealthMessenger #Nutrition #Hydration #SpecialOlympics

## Video Concept: 3 Things I eat every week to stay healthy

**Overview**
This video highlights three foods you eat often to help support your health. The goal is to share real examples and encourage viewers to think about healthy foods they enjoy.

**Script**
Hi, my name is [Your Name].

Here are three things I eat every week to stay healthy.

Number one is [food item].

I like this because [reason — it gives me energy, helps me feel full, or tastes good].

Number two is [food item].

This helps my body because [reason].

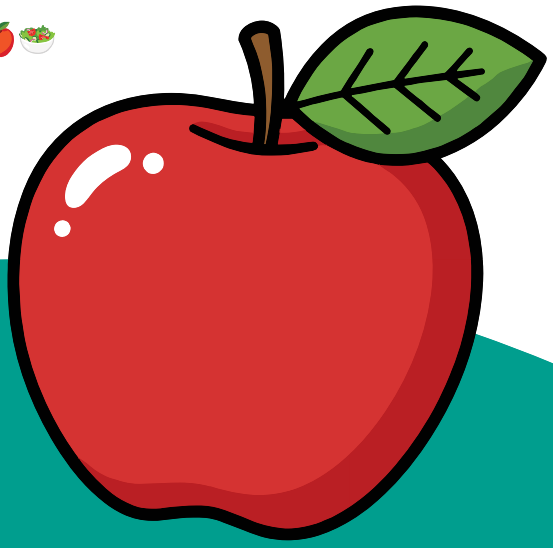
Number three is [food item].

I choose this because [reason].

Healthy eating can look different for everyone.

What are three foods you eat to stay healthy?
Share yours in the comments!

**Suggested Caption**
Healthy eating can look different for everyone.
What are three healthy foods you eat to stay healthy? 🍎🥗
#HealthMessenger #Nutrition #SpecialOlympics



## Video Concept: Label check with me

**Overview**
This video shows you explaining a few simple things to look for on a nutrition label, such as sugar, sodium, fiber, protein, and serving size. It is helpful if you pick an item that you know is not very healthy.

**Script**
Hi, my name is [Your Name].

Let's do a quick label check. [Show one product with a nutrition label]

When I look at a nutrition label, I check the serving size first. Then I look for things like added sugar, sodium, fiber, and protein. [Point to the label as you explain.]

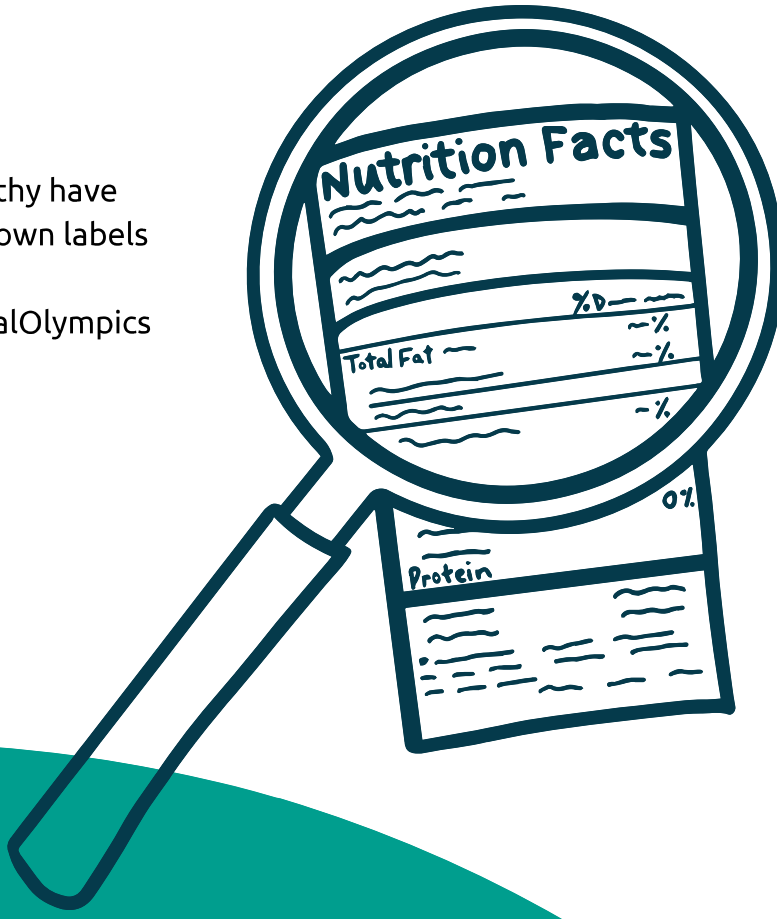
I try to choose foods with less added sugar and salt when I can. No amount of added sugar is recommended as part of a healthy diet.

I also look for foods with fiber or protein because they can help me feel full.

I also try to pick foods with fewer ingredients, because they tend to be healtier.

Next time you pick a snack, try checking the label!

**Suggested Caption**
Some foods and drinks that we may think are healthy have ingredients that are not good for us. Review your own labels and share what you discover!
#HealthMessenger #Nutrition #Hydration #SpecialOlympics



## *Questions?*

Contact your local Special Olympics Program or visit: https://resources.specialolympics.org/health/health-messenger

Special Olympics Health

MADE POSSIBLE BY Golisano FOUNDATION

TOPIC 4

*Health Messenger Playbook*

# EMOTIONAL HEALTH

Special Olympics Health

MADE POSSIBLE BY Golisano FOUNDATION

# EMOTIONAL HEALTH

Emotional health is about how you feel inside and how you respond to different situations in your daily life. This section of the Health Messenger Playbook helps Health Messengers talk about feelings, stress, and ways to support a calm and positive mindset.

**Health Messengers can use this section to:**

- Start conversations about emotions and stress
- Encourage others to express how they feel
- Share simple ways to relax and manage stress
- Promote healthy coping skills and self care
- Support others in building positive daily habits

**Health Messengers are encouraged to:**

- Use positive, encouraging language
- Remind others that all feelings are normal, including being happy, sad, mad, or nervous
- Share that everyone has difficult days and no one is perfect
- Create a safe space for people to discuss their feelings
- Convey the importance of confidentiality when discussing others' feelings
- Encourage others to talk to professionals like couselors when they are having significant mental health challenges

# A. Health Tips

**Instructions:** Share health tips with peers, support people, coaches and volunteers. Tips can be shared in person or virtually.

1. Emotional health is about how you feel inside. Try to write or draw pictures about your feelings to help process them.
2. It is okay to feel sad, mad, or nervous sometimes. Try identifying five things that you are grateful for to help you feel more positive.
3. Everyone has bad days and no one is perfect. Try to let go of negative thoughts by remembering a funny life experience.
4. Try deep breathing to slow your heart and help your body relax.
5. Stretch your body to help let go of stress in your muscles.
6. Add 5-10 minutes of meditation or chair yoga into your day.
7. Try listening to soothing music or going for a walk to help you feel calm.
8. Talk to someone you trust when you feel stressed or upset.
9. Talking to a counselor or therapist can help you learn how to share your feelings and manage stress.
10. Take time for yourself by doing something fun that you enjoy, like spending time in nature.

# B. Social Media Posts

## POST: Emotional health matters

My emotional health matters just like my physical health.
Taking care of my feelings is an important thing to do.

Try:
✅ Taking a few deep breaths
✅ Pausing and checking in with how you feel
✅ Giving yourself time to relax

Deep breathing helps me stay calm.
What helps you feel calm?
#HealthMessenger #EmotionalHealth #InclusiveHealth #SpecialOlympics

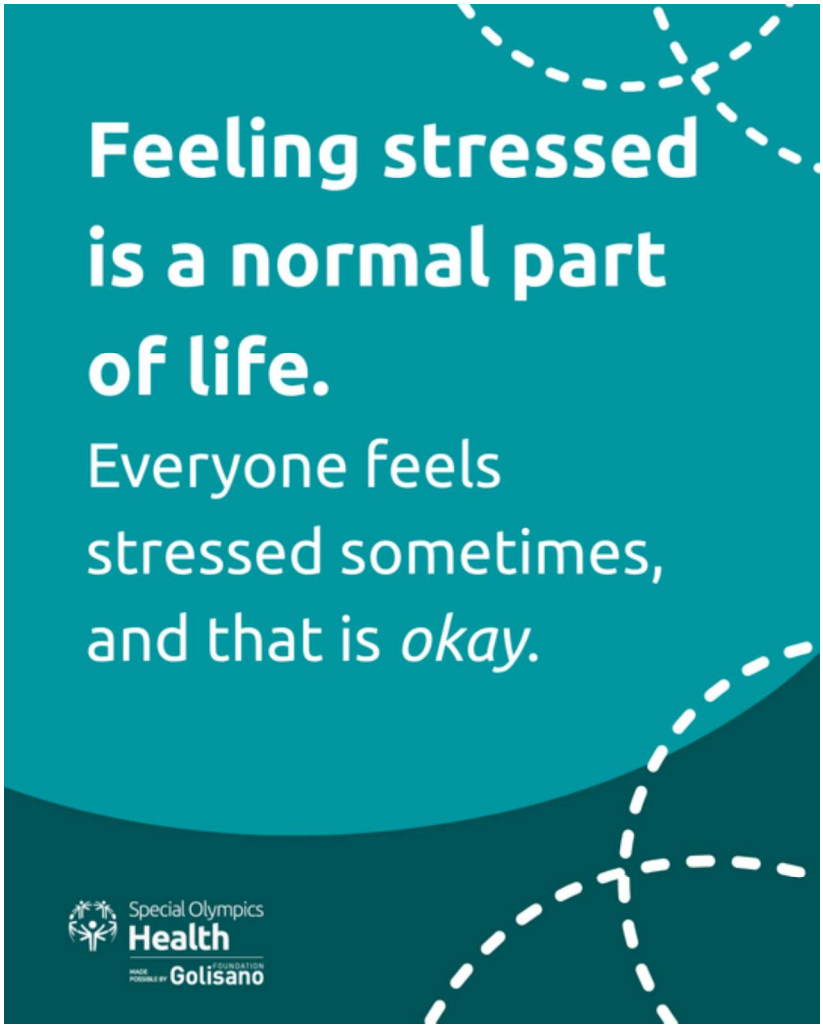
## POST: Stress is normal

Feeling stressed is a normal part of life.
Everyone feels stressed sometimes, and that is okay.

Try:
✅ Using a stress ball
✅ Stretching your body
✅ Taking a short walk

I use simple tools like squeezing a stress ball and stretching to help me.
What tool works for you?
#HealthMessenger #StressManagement #InclusiveHealth #SpecialOlympics

---



## POST:  Positive thoughts

Positive thoughts can help when you feel stressed.
Reminding yourself of your strengths can make a difference.

Try:
✅ Telling youself, “I can handle this.”
✅ Remembering something you’ve done well before.
✅ Thinking of places that make you feel calm, like the beach.

When I feel stressed, I remind myself that I am strong.
What positive words help you?
#HealthMessenger #PositiveMindset #InclusiveHealth #SpecialOlympics

---

## POST: Triangle breathing

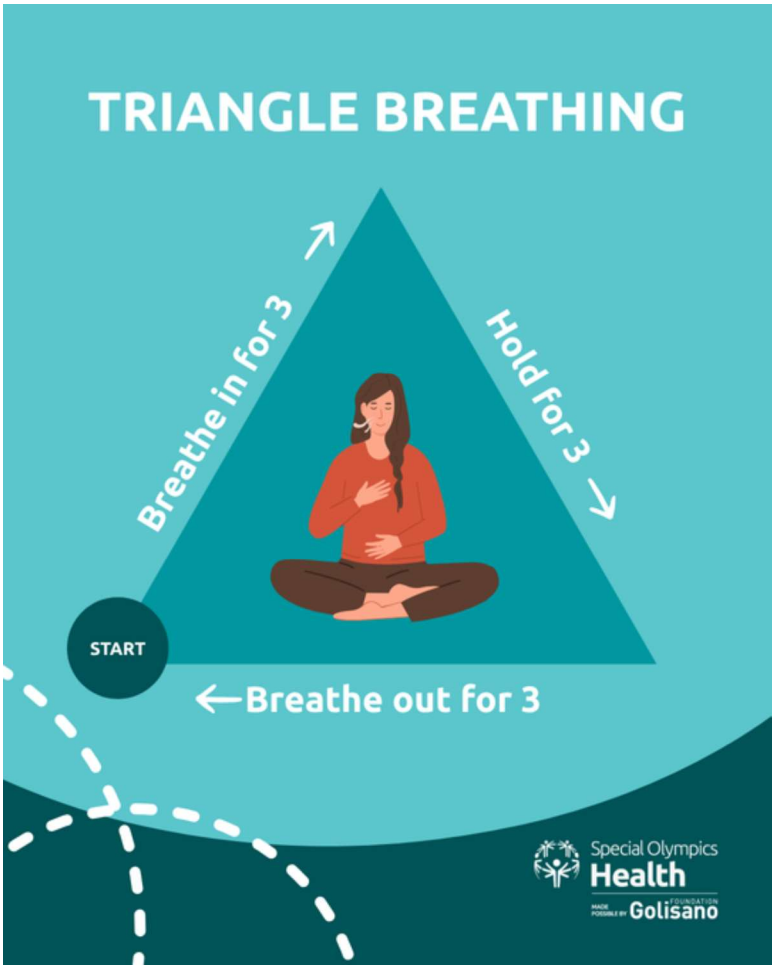
Triangle breathing can help you feel calm and relaxed.
It is a simple way to slow your breathing and focus your mind.

These are the steps to triangle breathing:

1. Breathe in for 3 seconds
2. Hold your breath for 3 seconds
3. Breathe out for 3 seconds
4. Repeat slowly

I use triangle breathing to help me relax when I am feeling anxious.
What helps you slow down and feel calm?
#HealthMessenger #Mindfulness #InclusiveHealth #SpecialOlympics

---



# C. Health & Wellness Activities

## Activity: Understanding my emotions

| Topic: Emotional awareness | Who: Individual or small group | Time: 10-15 min | Materials: None |
|---|---|---|---|

### OVERVIEW

Participants learn to recognize and name their emotions and understand that all feelings are normal. This activity helps participants connect feelings to real-life situations and practice talking about emotions in a safe way.

### FEELINGS AND REMINDERS

| Common feelings | Helpful reminder |
|---|---|
| • Happy<br>• Sad<br>• Mad<br>• Nervous<br>• Stressed<br>• Proud | • All feelings are normal<br>• Feelings can change<br>• Talking about feelings can help |

### STEPS FOR THE HEALTH MESSENGER

| | |
|---|---|
| 1 | **Start with awareness.** Ask: "When was the last time you felt happy, sad, or stressed?" Participants may answer out loud, think quietly, or share with a partner. |
| 2 | **Normalize emotions.** Say: "Everyone has different feelings. It is okay to feel happy, sad, mad, or nervous." |
| 3 | **Identify emotions.** Ask participants to share one emotion they felt earlier in the week. |
| 4 | **Connect feelings to situations.** Ask: "What happened to make you feel that emotion this week?" Help participants notice how situations and feelings are connected. |

### DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

- How does it feel to talk about your emotions?
- What helps you understand your emotions?
- Who can you talk to when you are experiencing strong feelings?

**Health Messenger tip:**
Encourage all responses and remind participants there are no wrong answers.

# Activity: Stress relief tools practice

| Topic: Stress management | Who: Group or individual | Time: 10-15 min | Materials: None |
|---|---|---|---|

## OVERVIEW

Participants practice simple stress relief tools, including deep breathing and using a stress ball to help calm the body and mind. The activity gives participants tools they can use at home, work, school, practice, or in the community.

## STRESS RELIEF BASICS

| Deep breathing | Muscle tension and relaxation | Use both together |
|---|---|---|
| 1. Breathe in slowly<br>2. Hold for a few seconds<br>3. Breathe out slowly | 1. Squeeze hands tightly into fists<br>2. Hold for a few seconds<br>3. Release slowly | 1. Squeeze while breathing in<br>2. Release while breathing out<br>3. Repeat until calmer |

## STEPS FOR THE HEALTH MESSENGER

| | |
|---|---|
| 1 | **Set the context.** Say: "Stress happens to everyone. Let's practice simple ways to help our bodies feel calm." |
| 2 | **Teach deep breathing.** Guide participants: "Breathe in slowly through your nose for 3 seconds. Hold for 3 seconds. Breathe out slowly through your mouth for 3 seconds." |
| 3 | **Repeat together.** Practice the breathing pattern 3 to 5 times. Keep your voice calm and go slowly as you count for others. |
| 4 | **Practice muscle tension and relaxation.** Say: "Pretend to hold a lemon. Squeeze your fist tight as if you are trying to make lemonade. Hold for a few seconds. Release slowly." Repeat several times. |
| 5 | **Combine both tools.** Ask participants to squeeze their fists while breathing in and release while breathing out. |

## DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

- When do you feel stress during the day?
- Is there another stress relieving activity that you like to use?
- Which tool do you like better, breathing or using a stress ball? Where could you use one of these tools this week?

**Health Messenger tip:**
Keep instructions simple and demonstrate each step so participants can follow along easily.

# Activity: Building a support system

| Topic: Communication / support | Who: Individual or pairs | Time: 10-15 min | Materials: Paper optional |
|---|---|---|---|

## OVERVIEW

Participants identify people they trust and practice asking for support when they feel stressed. This activity helps participants understand that asking for help is a healthy choice and that no one has to handle hard feelings alone. While this activity can be done with blank paper, or through discussions, the Support Plan Worksheet available through the Health System Navigation materials can also be a useful tool to use.

## MY SUPPORT SYSTEM

| People I can ask | Ways they can help |
|---|---|
| • Family member<br>• Friend or teammate<br>• Coach or teacher<br>• Counselor or therapist | • Listen to me<br>• Help me calm down<br>• Help me make a plan<br>• Help me get more support |

## STEPS FOR THE HEALTH MESSENGER

| | |
|---|---|
| 1 | **Start discussion.** Ask: "Who do you talk to when you feel stressed or upset?" Participants can think quietly, write a name, or share with a partner. |
| 2 | **Emphasize sharing.** Say: "Talking to someone you trust can help you feel better and less alone." |
| 3 | **Identify support people.** Ask participants to name one or two trusted people in their life. |
| 4 | **Practice communication.** Ask: "What would you say if you needed help?" Give examples such as, "Can I talk to you?" or "I feel stressed and need help." |

## DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

- What makes it easier to talk to someone?
- Does anyone want to tell us about a time when they asked for support?
- How do you feel after you have asked someone for help?

**Health Messenger tip:**
Remind participants that talking to a counselor or therapist is also a healthy option.

# D. Social Media Video Concepts

## Video Concept: Emotional health matters

**Overview**
This post helps people understand that emotional health is just as important as physical health. It encourages self awareness and simple ways to stay calm.

**Script**
Hi, my name is [Your Name].

My emotional health matters just like my physical health.

I take time to check in with how I feel and use simple tools like [describe what you do - **example** - deep breathing to help me stay calm].

What helps you feel calm?

**Suggested Caption**
Your emotional health matters. 😊🧘🏾
What helps you feel calm?
#HealthMessenger #MentalHealth #SpecialOlympics

## Video Concept: Stress is normal

**Overview**
This post reminds people that stress is a normal part of life. It shares simple tools to manage stress and encourages others to find what works for them.

**Script**
Hi, my name is [Your Name].

Feeling stressed is normal and it happens to everyone.

When I feel stressed, I use simple tools like [describe what you do - **example** - stretching or taking a short break to help my body relax].

What helps you manage stress?

**Suggested Caption**
Feeling stressed is normal. 😟 It can be challenging to cope with.
What helps you manage stress?
#HealthMessenger #MentalHealth #SpecialOlympics

## Video Concept: Positive thoughts

**Overview**
This post focuses on the power of positive thinking. It encourages people to use encouraging words and focus on their strengths during stressful moments.

**Script**
Hi, my name is [Your Name].

When I feel stressed, I [describe what you do - **example** - try to focus on positive thoughts].

I remind myself that [share what you tell yourself - **example** - I am strong and capable].

What positive thoughts help you feel less stressed?

**Suggested Caption**
Positive thinking can help to minimize stress and improve your mood. 😊🧲
What positive thoughts help you feel less stressed?
#HealthMessenger #MentalHealth #SpecialOlympics

## *Questions?*

Contact your local Special Olympics Program or visit: https://resources.specialolympics.org/health/health-messenger

Special Olympics Health

MADE POSSIBLE BY Golisano FOUNDATION

TOPIC 5

*Health Messenger Playbook*

# HYGIENE

Special Olympics Health

MADE POSSIBLE BY Golisano FOUNDATION

# INTRODUCTION

Good hygiene helps keep your body healthy and helps stop the spread of germs. Simple habits like brushing your teeth, washing your hands, taking regular showers, and keeping your nails clean can help prevent illness and support your overall health. Good hygiene can also help you feel confident, comfortable, and ready for work, school, sports, and social activities. Making hygiene part of your daily routine is an important way to take care of yourself and the people around you.

**Health Messengers can use this section to:**

- Connect with others through honest and relatable messages
- Encourage healthy changes
- Show ways to include healthy habits in daily routines
- Motivate others to think about their own health choices

**Health Messengers are encouraged to:**

- Be themselves when they are speaking
- Keep messages short, clear, and meaningful
- Highlight simple habits rather than complex routines
- Focus on what feels realistic and possible
- Create a supportive and encouraging tone
- Use examples that show real life situations and daily habits

# A. Health Tips

**Instructions:** Share health tips with peers, support people, coaches and volunteers. Tips can be shared in person or virtually. Sample tips include:

1. Take a shower or bath every 1 to 2 days. Wash your body with soap and water.
2. Floss helps remove food and germs between your teeth. Floss once a day.
3. Brush your teeth two times every day to keep your mouth clean and healthy. Brush for 2 minutes each time.
4. Put on deodorant after a shower or bath. Use it every day if needed.
5. Cough or sneeze into your elbow or a tissue to avoid spreading germs.
6. Wash your hands before eating and after using the bathroom.
7. Wash reusable water bottles daily with soap and warm water. Pay special attention to lids, straws, and mouthpieces where germs build up.
8. Do not shake hands or high-five people when you are sick. Try waving instead to avoid spreading germs.
9. Wash and brush your hair regularly.
10. Trim your fingernails and toenails regularly to help keep them clean.
11. Clean your glasses, hearing aids, earbuds, and mobility aid handles regularly. These items touch your face and/or hands frequently and can collect oils, dirt, and germs over time.

# B. Social Media Posts

### POST: Stay clean 🚿

Take a shower or bath regularly. Every 1-2 days is ideal.

Washing your body helps remove dirt, sweat, and germs. Clean clothes after a shower can help you feel fresh and confident.

#PersonalHygiene #HealthyHabits #HealthMessenger #SpecialOlympics

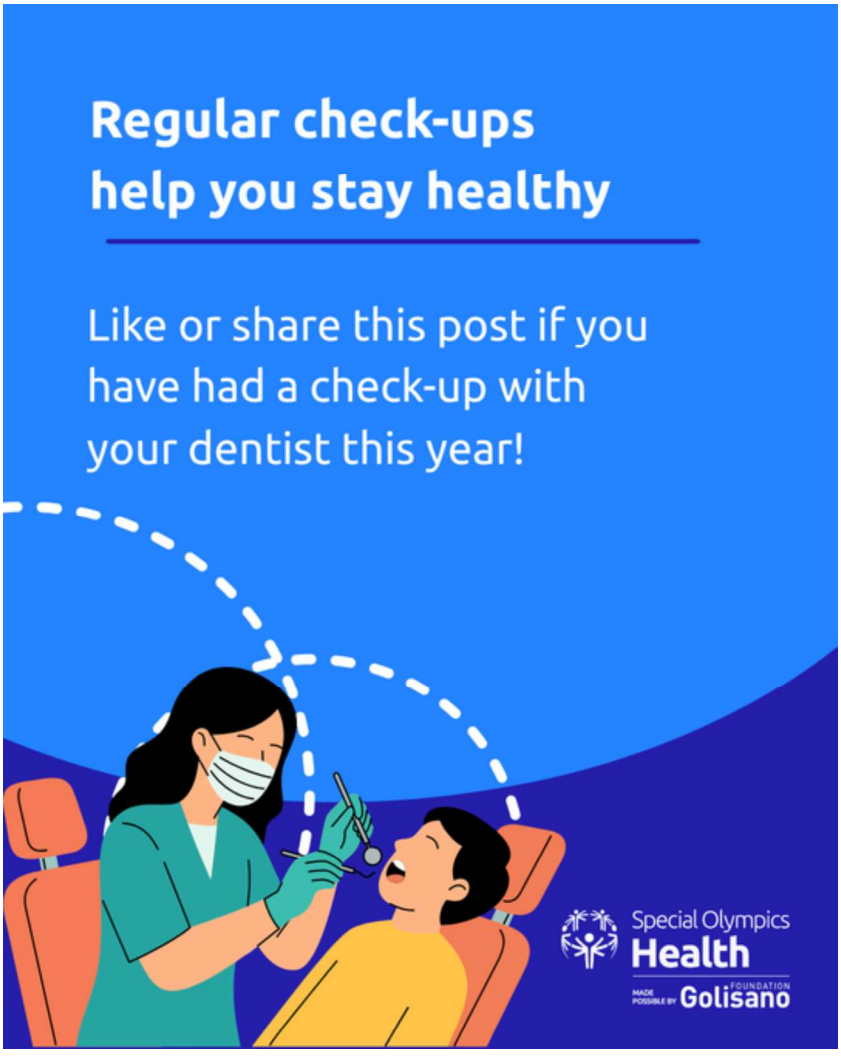
## POST: Visit the dentist

See a dentist for regular check-ups each year. 🪥🦷 A dentist can help find problems early and keep your mouth healthy.

Like or share this post if you have had a dental check-up this year.

#HealthyTeeth #DentalCare #HealthMessenger #SpecialOlympics

---



## POST: Washing your hands!

Keeping clean helps keep you healthy 🧼

Small habits like washing your hands make a big difference! Wash your hands with soap and water for 20 seconds. 👋

#HealthyHabits #HealthMessenger #Handwashing #SpecialOlympics

---

## POST: Unwell? Stay home!

Stay home if you have a fever, are vomiting, or feel sick. 🤒🤧🏠

Rest helps your body get better. Staying home also helps protect other people from getting sick.

#StayHomeWhenSick #HealthMessenger #SpecialOlympics

---

## POST: Clean nails

Keep your fingernails and toenails clean and trimmed. 🖐🏾🦶🏾

Clean nails can help prevent germs and infections.

#HealthyHabits #SelfCare #HealthMessenger #SpecialOlympics

---

## POST: Brushing and flossing

Brushing and flossing your teeth is an important part of each day. Your toothbrush cleans the front, back, and top of your teeth. Floss helps remove food and germs from places your toothbrush can't reach.

🪥 Brush in the morning
😁 Brush before bed
🦷 Floss every day
🗓️ Replace your toothbrush every 3-4 months

Small habits can make a big difference for your oral health.

#HealthyHabits #DentalCare #HealthMessenger #SpecialOlympics

---

## *Questions?*

Contact your local Special Olympics Program or visit: https://resources.specialolympics.org/health/health-messenger

Special Olympics Health

MADE POSSIBLE BY Golisano FOUNDATION

TOPIC 6

*Health Messenger Playbook*

# ADVOCACY

## (Speaking up for the health of people with IDD)

Special Olympics Health

MADE POSSIBLE BY Golisano FOUNDATION

# A. Understanding Advocacy and Inclusive Health

## Advocacy and inclusive health

- Everyone has the right to be healthy.
- People with intellectual and developmental disabilities (IDD) may face extra barriers to good health services. This can include not being understood, not getting enough time at appointments, or not getting information in a way that is easy to understand.
- Inclusive health means health care that works for everyone. Inclusive health services should meet your needs, respect you, and help you understand your choices.
- Advocacy means speaking up to help make things better. You can advocate for yourself, for another person, or for your community.
- Health Messengers are advocates.

## Self-advocacy and systems advocacy

As a Health Messenger, you can be an advocate in two important ways: self-advocacy and systems advocacy. Both help create a healthier, more inclusive world.

## What is self-advocacy?

Self-advocacy means speaking up for yourself.
It can include:

- Asking questions
- Sharing your needs and preferences
- Making decisions about your health
- Knowing and using your rights
- Speaking up when something is not working for you

Self-advocacy helps you take an active role in your own health and well-being.

## What is systems advocacy?

Systems advocacy means working to create change that helps many people.
It can include:

- Sharing your personal health story
- Meeting with health professionals, community leaders, or policymakers
- Identifying barriers people with IDD face
- Suggesting ways to make health services more inclusive and accessible
- Helping others understand the needs and experiences of people with IDD

Health Messengers support systems advocacy when they participate in partnership meetings, attend advocacy events, and share their experiences to help improve health systems.

## How do self-advocacy and systems advocacy work together?

Self-advocacy is often the first step toward systems advocacy.
When you learn to speak up for yourself, you gain skills and experiences that can help create change for others.
For example:

- Self-advocacy: You ask your doctor to explain information in a way you understand.
- Systems advocacy: You encourage clinics to use plain-language materials so everyone can understand their health information.

## Key message

Self-advocacy is speaking up for yourself. Systems advocacy is speaking up for change that helps many people. Self-advocacy builds the skills and confidence needed for systems advocacy. Together, they help create healthier and more inclusive communities.

## Sharing your message

- Your story can help leaders understand what needs to change.
  - Stories help people care and understand real-life experiences.
- Facts and data can make your message stronger.
  - You can use facts to show why change is needed. Stories help people feel the problem. Data helps people understand how big the problem is.
- Use both stories and facts.
  - A strong advocacy message can include:
    - What happened
    - Who is impacted
    - Why it matters
    - What needs to change
    - What action you want people to take
- Your voice matters. When you speak up, you can help make health care better for yourself and for others.

# B. Social Media Posts

### POST: Speak up

Speaking up is an important part of staying healthy.

My health matters, and my voice matters.

What helps you feel confident speaking up about your health?

#InclusiveHealth #SelfAdvocacy #SpeakUp

## POST: Inclusive health

Inclusive health means everyone can get the care they need.

That means:
💙 Having enough time during an appointment
💙 Getting health information in a way you can understand
💙 Using pictures, models, or other tools to explain health information
💙 Getting support to ask questions and make decisions

Everyone deserves quality health care.

What makes you feel supported during a health appointment?

#InclusiveHealth

---

## POST: Ways to advocate

People often think advocacy means giving a speech or meeting with leaders.

But advocacy starts with you and can include things like:

✔️ Asking questions during an appointment with a healthcare provider
✔️ Making a social post about the importance of inclusive health services
✔️ Telling friends and family about the importance of inclusive health services

Every time you speak up for inclusive health, you are advocating.

What is one way you have spoken up recently?

#InclusiveHealth #Advocacy #ListenToUs

---

**POST:  Anyone can advocate**

MYTH: Advocacy is only for leaders.

FACT: Anyone can be an advocate.

Advocates are people who speak up, ask questions, share experiences, and help others understand what is needed.

You do not need a title to make a difference.

💙 Your voice matters.

#InclusiveHealth

---

**POST:  One change**

If you could change ONE thing about health care, what would it be?

💭 More time with doctors?
💭 Easier-to-understand information?
💭 Easier to get care?
💭 The kind of care you need, instead of the care everyone else does?

Big changes often start with simple conversations.

Share your idea below.

#InclusiveHealth

---

## POST:  Advocacy ally

Who is someone who has helped you speak up for your health?

Tag them or tell us about them in the comments.

Advocacy is stronger when we support each other.

#InclusiveHealth

---

# C. Health & Wellness Activities

## Activity: My voice, my message

| Topic: Advocacy / communication | Who: Individual, pairs, or group | Time: 30-45 min | Materials: Paper, markers, microphone prop optional |
|---|---|---|---|

### OVERVIEW

Participants identify an issue they care about and practice sharing a clear advocacy message. This activity helps athletes speak up about what matters to them and explain how others can help make health more inclusive.

### MESSAGE BUILDER

| I care about... | This matters because... | I would like people to... |
|---|---|---|
| • Inclusive health care<br>• Plain-language health information<br>• Access to fitness programming<br>• Leadership opportunities | • Everyone deserves to understand their health<br>• People need support to stay healthy<br>• Fitness helps people feel strong<br>• People with IDD can be leaders | • Use plain, simple language that everyone can understand<br>• Ask people with IDD for their input and take their feedback seriously<br>• Include people with IDD in planning, decisions, and participation<br>• Create more programs, events, and leadership opportunities for people with IDD |

### STEPS FOR THE HEALTH MESSENGER

| | |
|---|---|
| 1 | **Think about what matters.** Ask: "What would help people with intellectual and developmental disabilities live healthier lives?" |
| 2 | **Share examples.** Offer examples such as easy read health information, more inclusive health care, better access to fitness programming, or more leadership opportunities. |
| 3 | **Build the message.** Use this simple formula: "I care about [what do you care about]. This matters because [why it matters] I would like people to [what do you want people to do]." |
| 4 | **Practice the message.** Give everyone time to practice with a partner, small group, or the Health Messenger. A microphone prop can make practice feel fun. |
| 5 | **Share with the room.** Invite each person to present their message to a partner, small group, or the whole room. After each message, ask the audience what they learned and what was powerful. |
| 6 | **Reflect together.** Talk about how it felt to speak up and where people with IDD could share this message in real life. |

### DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

- How did it feel to speak up?
- What made a message strong?
- Where could you share this message in real life?

**Health Messenger tip:**
Allow participants to write, draw, point, or talk to a support person to build their message. Keep the message short and personal.

# Activity: What do I want to change?

| Topic: Advocacy goal-setting | Who: Individual or small group | Time: 10-15 min | Materials: Paper and markers optional |
|---|---|---|---|

## OVERVIEW

Participants think about a health experience issue they notice and choose one advocacy goal. The goal can be big or small. The focus is on helping each person name something they would like to change.

## GOAL EXAMPLES

| Health experiences I see | Changes I want |
|---|---|
| • Complicated words at the doctor's office<br>• Not enough time to ask questions<br>• Transportation to appointments<br>• Not enough inclusive fitness programming | • Use easier words<br>• More time to listen<br>• Help with rides or scheduling<br>• More chances to be active |

## STEPS FOR THE HEALTH MESSENGER

| | |
|---|---|
| 1 | **Ask about the problem.** Ask: "What health problem do you see?" Give examples if participants need help getting started. |
| 2 | **Ask about change.** Ask: "What do you want to change?" Remind participants that changes can be big or small. |
| 3 | **Name one goal.** Help each person choose one advocacy goal. Keep the goal clear and simple. |
| 4 | **Share ideas.** Invite participants to share their goal with the group or with a partner. |
| 5 | **Celebrate each goal.** Remind the group that noticing a problem and naming a goal is the first step in advocacy. |

## DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

- What health problem do you notice in your community?
- What is one change that would help?

**Health Messenger tip:**
Allow drawing, pointing, or speaking. Goals can be big or small.

# Activity: Who can help?

| Topic: Advocacy / decision-makers | Who: Group | Time: 10-15 min | Materials: None |
|---|---|---|---|

## OVERVIEW

Participants identify people who can help make a change. They learn that advocacy often means knowing who to talk to and what that person can do to support the goal.

## MY SUPPORT SYSTEM

| People You Know | Community Organizations | Public Leaders |
|---|---|---|
| • Doctor<br>• Coach<br>• Teacher<br>• Program leader | • Health clinic staff<br>• School staff<br>• Community leader<br>• Transportation provider | • Lawmaker<br>• City or town leader<br>• Agency leader<br>• Disability advocate |

## STEPS FOR THE HEALTH MESSENGER

| | |
|---|---|
| 1 | **Start with the goal.** Ask participants to think about a change they want to make or use a shared example from the group. |
| 2 | **Ask who can help.** Ask: "Who can help make this change?" Give examples such as a doctor, coach, leader, teacher, or lawmaker. |
| 3 | **Talk about their role.** For each helper named, ask: "What could that person do to help?" |
| 4 | **Keep it local.** Help participants focus on people they may already know or people in their community. |
| 5 | **Choose one helper.** Ask each participant or pair to name one person they could talk to about their advocacy goal. |

## DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

- Who could help with a health change you care about?
- What could that person do to help?
- Why is it helpful to know who makes decisions?

**Health Messenger tip:**
Give examples and keep the activity focused on local people whenever possible.

# D. Social Media Video Concepts

## Video Concept: I speak up

**Overview**
This video shares one health issue that is important to you. You introduce yourself, name the issue you care about, and explain why it matters. The goal is to show that speaking up about health can help create better care for everyone.

**Script**
Hi, my name is [Your Name].

One health issue I care about is [share an issue - **example** - people with IDD are less likely to get their hearing checked than people who do not have disabilities].

This matters to me because [share why it is important to you or your community - **example** - I love to listen to music, and I want all of my peers to be able to enjoy music for as long as possible].

Everyone deserves to be heard, respected, and supported when it comes to their health.

Speaking up can help make health care better for all of us.

**Example talking points:**
- "I care about fair health care."
- "I care about doctors listening to people with IDD."
- "I care about people getting respect when they go to the doctor."
- "I care about everyone feeling safe at the doctor."
- "I care about health information being clear."

**Suggested Caption**
One health issue I care about is [share an issue - **example** - people with IDD are less likely to get their hearing checked than people who do not have disabilities].

What health issue do you care about?

#SpeakUpForHealth #HealthMessenger #InclusiveHealth #SpecialOlympics

## Video Concept: My advocacy message

**Overview**
This video shares a message about something that needs to change in health care or the community. You introduce yourself, explain what needs to change, and tell others how they can help. The goal is to encourage people to listen, take action, and support better health for everyone.

**Script**
Hi, my name is [Your Name].

One thing about health care that needs to change is [share what needs to change - **example** - doctors need to be trained to work with people with IDD].

I believe this matters because [share the reason why this change is important - **example** - it will help them to provide better services to people with IDD].

People can help by [share how others can help - **example** - encouraging their doctors to take the Inclusive Health Fundamentals course offered by Special Olympics].

Together, we can help create care that includes everyone.

**Example Talking Points:**
- "Doctors should listen to us."
- "We need care that fits our needs."
- "We should have enough time to ask questions."
- "Doctors should talk to us, not just about us."
- "We should be part of decisions about our health."

**Suggested Caption**
One thing about health care that needs to change is [share what needs to change - **example** - doctors need to be trained to work with people with IDD].

Act now! [share how others can help and include links to resources as appropriate - **example** - Encourage your doctor to take the Inclusive Health Fundamentals course offered by Special Olympics! Find the course here.]

#SpeakUpForHealth #HealthMessenger #InclusiveHealth #SpecialOlympics

## *Questions?*

Contact your local Special Olympics Program or visit: https://resources.specialolympics.org/health/health-messenger

Special Olympics Health

MADE POSSIBLE BY Golisano FOUNDATION