

# Virtual Health Messenger Training Guide



Special Olympics  
**Health**  
MADE POSSIBLE BY **Golisano**



## Contents

Overview .....	3
Why virtual? .....	3
Objectives of the training: .....	3
Practicum .....	4
Training Logistics.....	4
Zoom .....	4
Materials .....	5
The Role of a Mentor .....	5
Training Timeline .....	5
Application .....	6
Conducting the training: .....	6
Evaluation .....	6
Homework .....	6
Things to consider: .....	7
Session 1: Introduction .....	8
Session 2: Health Overview .....	9
Session 3: Physical Activity .....	10
Session 4: Nutrition and Hydration .....	11
Session 5: Emotional Health .....	12
Session 6: Communications .....	13
Session 7: How to be an Advocate .....	14
The Eighth Session: Practicum .....	15

## Overview

Health Messengers are leading the way across the Special Olympics Movement! Not even a pandemic can stop Health Messengers and the work they do! In fact, COVID-19 just makes the role of Health Messenger more important.

The goals of the Health Messenger training are to:

- Train Special Olympics athletes to serve as health and wellness leaders, educators, advocates and role models within their teams, Special Olympics Programs, and communities.
- Empower Special Olympics athletes to advocate for the health needs of people with intellectual disabilities (ID.)

## Why virtual?

By connecting virtually, we can continue to train athletes as Health Messengers. Programs including SO Texas and United Arab Emirates were among the first Programs to shift to this model. SOI followed this lead and held three virtual trainings between March and August of 2020.

The topics chosen are especially relevant during the COVID-19 pandemic. The virtual training reviews physical activity, nutrition and hydration, emotional wellness, and advocacy. These are all topics that can be applicable at home. This will directly benefit Health Messengers and Athletes that they reach.

This toolkit is to enable Programs to host their own virtual Health Messenger training. Programs are encouraged to adapt the materials to best fit their training or add relevant components. We would be grateful if you share those adaptations with us so we can keep learning and improving the guide. You can email: [healthmessenger@specialolympics.org](mailto:healthmessenger@specialolympics.org)

Virtual trainings can take place without some of the expenses and obstacles that in-person trainings present. For in-person trainings Athletes are required to come in from across their state or even their country. This can be a large financial obstacle. Virtually training Health Messengers allows people from diverse locations to join without traveling. This is the same for guest speakers. By connecting virtually, the possibilities are endless.

## Objectives of the training:

Health Messengers will:

- Understand how to live a healthy lifestyle and be a positive role model to others.
- Learn about healthy activities that can be done at home or virtually.
- Develop skills to help them lead in their community and advocate for the health of people with ID
- Develop skills to lead on their teams and in their communities to help others establish healthy lifestyles
- Think about how they can best use their leadership skills for action
- Leave feeling empowered to lead SO athletes in health and fitness

## Practicum

Each Health Messenger is required to do one health and wellness-focused practicum (putting learning to practice!) in their communities or virtually within one year of receiving training, to demonstrate their leadership in health and wellness. Health Messengers should work with their mentor and local Program to complete their practicum. During the training, practicums should be talked about frequently. Providing an example of what can be done for a practicum relating to the lesson can be helpful to give Health Messengers different ideas.

All information on practicums including a document that has lots of ideas for practicums, can be found [here](#).

## Training Logistics

Meeting logistics for a virtual training will look different than they would for an in-person training. Programs will first need to decide on a platform to use, to host the training. There are a variety of different platforms to choose from. We recommend using Zoom because many athletes seem to be already familiar with it through other programming. We also recommend that there are two people leading the training, one person to facilitate and one person to handle the platform's controls and features. The ideal number of participants for each training is between 10 and 15 trainees.

## Zoom

Zoom is a platform that can be used for hosting video chats, meetings, webinars, etc. Zoom meetings are ideal for hosting interactive sessions where you will have participation from the audience. Zoom has the capability for closed captioning, recording, annotation, and registration. Not all participants need a license to attend the meetings, only the host will need a license. Zoom meetings can also be livestreamed on Facebook, YouTube, and more. Meetings are designed to be a collaborative event where all parties can share. For online event best practices on Zoom, please click [here](#).

It is important for the Program and Health Messengers to feel comfortable navigating Zoom during the training. SOI has created an [athlete-led Zoom tutorial](#). Please feel free to use this resource and share it with your Health Messengers. It is recommended that Program staff does a test-run prior to the first session. For assistance navigating zoom, please email [healthmessenger@specialolympics.org](mailto:healthmessenger@specialolympics.org).

## Break Out Rooms

If you want to break into smaller groups for certain points of the training, you have an option to personally select groups (ideal for making sure that health messengers and mentors are in the same group). To learn more about break out rooms, click [here](#).

## Polling

Zoom allows you to use polls during your meeting. This can be a great to keep everyone engaged and do a quick knowledge check! To learn more about using polls, click [here](#).

## Subscription

To ensure your platform meets your needs for hosting participants, it is important to assess how many people you will have on the training. This includes Health Messengers, mentors, facilitators, and any outside speakers. Different subscription options will limit the duration of the meeting and how many participants can join. A standard subscription for Zoom is \$14.99 per license. For more information on Zoom licensing, click [here](#).

Additionally, Programs may request to use an SOI Zoom Pro account to host their training. Email [healthmessenger@specialolympics.org](mailto:healthmessenger@specialolympics.org) for more information.

## Materials

To share the resources needed for the training with the participants, it is recommended that you upload all related resources to a Dropbox folder, add a page on your website, or use Google Drive. Additionally, recording each training session can be useful for Health Messengers and Mentors to refer back to at a later time. After each session an email should be sent out to participants with the recording, slides used, and any resources related to the topic. Resources for trainings can be found [here](#).

For some participants, using all the resources online may be difficult. SOI has put together [this digital binder](#) containing worksheets related to the training. It is encouraged to add the presentations that your Program will use to the binder. Printing this binder and mailing it to participants ahead of time can provide an alternative option to following along online. Printing this binder and mailing it to participants ahead of time can provide an alternative option to following along online.

The Fit5 worksheets in the binder have been adapted for purposes of this workbook. We highly recommend that your Program distributes a full copy of the Fit5 guide.

## The Role of a Mentor

Mentors play a key role in making sure an athlete successfully becomes a Health Messenger. A mentor can be a family member, coach, friend, Program staff, etc. All mentors must be present on each call. A mentor should be able to provide support for the Health Messenger throughout the training and beyond. Mentors help health messengers stay on task and help them apply their learnings. To learn more about a mentor's role, click [here](#).

To prepare mentors for the training, it is recommended to talk with mentors prior to the first session. Having clear expectations for mentors during this training will be a key factor in success! [This presentation](#) can help set the stage.

## Training Timeline

It is recommended that the training is broken up into a few different sessions so that there is focus and participants are not overloaded with information. You can decide how to breakdown the training. For the SOI-led trainings, they have been done over eight sessions to keep each session focused on a specific topic and help virtual engagement through shorter sessions. These sessions occurred twice a week. Each session was an hour long to ensure there was enough time for a presentation, discussion, and questions. We encourage the Program to decide what pace they would like to run the course. We recommend conducting the training two hours a week for four weeks or one hour a week for eight weeks.

Training Schedule	
Session 1	Introduction
Session 2	Health Overview
Session 3	Physical Activity
Session 4	Nutrition and Hydration
Session 5	Emotional Health
Session 6	Communication
Session 7	How to be an Advocate
Session 8	Practicum and Closing

If you'd like to see how the sessions can look, all the SOI-led sessions have been recorded and they can be found [here](#). It is important to make sure the Health Messenger and their mentor can attend each session to successfully become a Health Messenger.

## Application

An application process can be used to select participants for the training. An application can be set up through Smartsheet to gather applicants' information such as their name, email, mentor's name, mentor's email, and what Program they are from. We asked that applicants submit a video introducing themselves and explaining why they want to be a Health Messenger. Applicants could also submit a written response for this. In order to make sure that the participants are able to attend each training, it is helpful to add all of the dates to the application. It is important to ask if they had access to technology with a webcam for this training. You can view the sample application [here](#). Any platform that has form capabilities can be used for the application.

## Conducting the training:

### Evaluation

The goal of the Health Messenger program is to train Special Olympics athletes to serve as health and wellness leaders, educators, advocates, and role models within their Special Olympics communities and their communities at large. From an evaluation perspective, we are seeking to measure the impact of the Health Messenger training on athletes in three key areas: 1) Self-determination and ability to advocate for their own health.

2) Health knowledge and health behaviors; and

3) Preparedness to engage in the community as a Health Messenger.

In the short-term, we hope to show that the Health Messenger training is improving athletes' confidence as leaders in their communities and changing athletes' health knowledge and behaviors. In the long-term, we hope to show that the Health Messenger training is improving athletes' health outcomes and quality of life.

Please have your Health Messengers take a [pre-training survey](#), [immediate post-training survey](#), and [3 month post-training survey](#).

Mentors can fill out an [immediate post-training survey](#) as well.

### Homework

To reinforce the lessons learned and keep participants engaged, it is recommend to provide optional homework assignments as follow up to each session. These are typically activities that would have been done at an in-person training. For some participants, completing homework assignments online may not be the best option. This is where it can be beneficial to mail the participants all resources, including worksheets, ahead of time. Homework for each session is outlined below.

### Things to consider:

- If you have current Health Messengers in your Program, it is highly encouraged to utilize them throughout the training, whether it's asking them to share what they have done for their practicums or asking them to be a co-facilitator.
- Virtual learning is not everyone's strong suit. Some people are better at hands-on learning. It can be difficult for some people to complete the worksheets on their computers, tablets, phones, etc. It is strongly recommended to give participants the option to have the materials mailed to them.
- Interactions between all the participants will look different than it does with the virtual training. We encourage Health Messengers to use the chat feature on Zoom to introduce themselves and talk to one another. Breakout rooms are a great tool to utilize if you want to split a larger group up to talk through an activity.

## Session 1: Introduction

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**Objective:** Familiarize Health Messengers with the format of the training and set expectations for the course.

**Slideshow:** [Click here](#)

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### Session details

The first session should be dedicated to making sure everyone is comfortable using the virtual tools and resources for this training. Participants should learn about the different features of Zoom (or whatever online platform you are using) and how to use it. It is important to talk about proper Zoom etiquette for the training (using the raise hand feature, staying on mute, etc.).

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### Homework

For session one's homework, ask Health Messengers to respond to three discussion questions (below) and complete the [Health Messenger Role worksheet](#).

- Introduce yourself!
- What are challenges you face to achieving good health? What challenges do others face to achieving good health?
- What is the Athlete role in educating and motivating leaders/influencers in communities, schools, local organizations, and government to promote and support health of people with ID?



## Session 2: Health Overview

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**Objective:** Health Messengers learn about what health is and what healthy decisions look like. This session will give a preview of what Health Messengers will learn throughout the training.

**Slideshow:** [Click here](#)

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### Session Details

The health overview helps participants become familiar with Special Olympics health initiatives. It also provides an opportunity to learn what health means to the participants! You can incorporate participation by asking questions like, “What does being healthy mean to you?” and asking participants to type their answers in the chat or raise their hand to share.

Health Messengers learn about the different roles of Health Messengers and share practicum examples. This session helps set the stage for what they will learn throughout the course.

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### Homework

Homework for the second session is to complete the [Importance of Being Healthy](#) worksheet.

## Session 3: Physical Activity

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**Objective:** Teach Health Messengers about physical activity and exercise. They will learn about the different fitness resources and how to lead exercises for different ability levels.

**Slideshow:** [Click here](#)

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### Session Details

This session reviews the physical activity component of fitness! Physical activity is an important part of being healthy. Through this session participants will learn about different types of physical activity and resources, such as the Fit5 Guide.

Facilitators have the opportunity to make this session very interactive. Using the [Create Your Own Workout](#) worksheet, you can work with your group by asking them to put suggestions into the chat. Once the workout has been created it recommended you do workout with our group virtually! It was a great opportunity to get virtually moving with everyone and have some fun. Health Messengers should be notified prior to the session that they will need to be ready to work out (wearing proper clothes, shoes, and space to move around).

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### Homework

For Homework, ask Health Messengers to create a video they would share with their fellow athletes on how to do an exercise or write a 10-minute exercise plan using the Fit5 Guide.

Related resources: [Fit 5 resources](#)

## Session 4: Nutrition and Hydration

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**Objective: Teach** Health Messengers the importance of nutrition and hydration to keep your body healthy. They will also learn how to build a healthy meal.

**Slideshow:** [Click here](#)

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### Session Details

Nutrition and Hydration are important to keep a healthy body! This session gives health messengers an overview of what to eat and how to build a healthy plate. Health Messengers also will learn the importance of staying hydrated.

To make this session interactive, breakout rooms can be utilized and split the group into two smaller groups to talk about our lunches that day and how we can make it healthier.

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### Homework

For homework, ask participants to respond to the following discussion questions:

- What can you do to help your Program make sure athletes have health meals, snacks, and beverages at competitions?
  - What would a healthy meal at games be?
  - What could be some healthy choices and how do we encourage athletes to pick those?
- What is one thing you might try to improve in terms of what you eat or drink in the next month?

Related resources: [Educational postcards](#)

## Session 5: Emotional Health

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**Objective: Teach** Health Messengers the importance of taking care of your emotional health. Health Messengers will learn about Strong Mind strategies that can help reduce stress and improve emotional health.

**Slideshow:** [Click here](#)

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### Session Details

Emotional health is an important part of overall health. This session teaches Health Messengers about having an optimistic approach to life and being able to enjoy life. They learn Strong Minds strategies that they can use and share with anyone!

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### Homework

For homework, have health messenger share a Strong Mind strategy with another person.

Related resources: [Strategies for Strong Minds](#)

## Session 6: Communications

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**Objective: Health**      Messengers will learn about how they can share their message and represent SO Health.

**Slideshow:**      [Click here](#)

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### Session Details

The communications session reviews how to communicate, storytelling, being a brand ambassador for SO Health, social media and traditional media. This session helps participants learn how to deliver their message whether it's through doing an interview or on their personal social media account.

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### Homework

For homework, ask the Health Messengers to practice creating a sound bite in preparation for future media interviews with the following guidance:

- Answer what your personal definition of what inclusive health means for you, and for everyone
- Answer the following questions:
  - What is your name and what sports do you play?
  - Why is Special Olympics important to your health?
  - How are you inspiring others to commit to a lifetime of fitness and health?
  - What is your call to action?

Ask participants to record themselves on their phone practicing what they would say in an interview, pretending that they are speaking to a reporter OR submitting their personal health story for review. For those who are not comfortable doing that, give the option to do a written response.

## Session 7: How to be an Advocate

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**Objective: Health**      Messengers learn what it means to be an advocate and how they can advocate for themselves and others.

Slideshow: [Click here](#)

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### Session Details

This is a great session to include a previously trained Health Messenger as a co-facilitator. In this session, participants learn about what self-advocacy is and why it is important. They will learn about advocating for inclusivity in everyday life and healthcare settings.

A good exercise is to ask Health Messengers and their mentors to spend the allotted amount of time to prepare for how they would advocate and influence someone. This activity can be found in the [How to be an Advocate](#) worksheet.

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### Homework

For Homework, Health Messengers should prepare to discuss their practicum idea for the final session. They should use the [practicum planning worksheet](#).

## The Eighth Session: Practicum

**Objective:** Each Health Messenger will present a one-minute presentation on their practicum idea.

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### Session Details

For this session we gave each Health Messenger a minute to highlight what their practicum idea. This is a great chance for them to practice their public speaking and learn about what everyone is doing.

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### Follow-up

Now that the training is complete, send out the immediate post-training surveys for Health Messengers and mentors, along with their [Health Messenger Certificates](#).

Please submit a roster of your participants to [healthmessenger@specialolympics.org](mailto:healthmessenger@specialolympics.org).

Additionally, please let your Health Messengers know about the Facebook Group page we have for Health Messengers. This is another way they can interact with Health Messengers all over the world and share what they are doing.

Don't forget to make sure all Health Messengers submit a completed practicum within a year of the training to [healthmessenger@specialolympics.org](mailto:healthmessenger@specialolympics.org).