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NEW RESOURCES FOR ACTIVATING HEALTH MESSENGERS:

HM ACTIVATION GUIDE & HM COMMUNICATIONS PLAYBOOK

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Who are Health Messengers?

Health Messengers (HMs) are **Special Olympics athletes who are trained** to become **health leaders**, educators, advocates and role models within their Special Olympics communities and the community at large.

Athletes must **activate** at least once in the first year after their training to become a HM.

Activating Health Messengers

- Activation: HM is **serving in a health leadership role** – it looks different for everyone.
- The **Health Messenger Activation Guide** (the Guide) gives **Program staff** role ideas, best practices, and resources to facilitate activations.
- The **Health Messenger Communications Playbook** (the Playbook) gives **HMs** content to use while they are carrying out different activations.



Health Messenger Activation Guide

Health Messenger Activation Guide



LAST UPDATED MAY 2026

What's inside the Guide

Four sections

- **Overview:** what activation is and the one-year requirement
- **Activation ideas:** organized by the four components of the health strategy
- **Tips for activating:** best practices, mentors, travel and accommodations
- **More resources:** Athlete Leadership curriculum, mentor course, Easy Read tools

Two callouts to look for



SUPPORT CONSIDERATIONS

You will find these in lightly shaded boxes containing strategies to consider for a leadership role. They are not required but may help.



CONTINUING EDUCATION!

These boxes contain reminders for other leadership trainings that could help your Health Messengers learn about the role.



ACTIVATION IDEAS BY P.A.T.H. COMPONENT

Activation ideas:

PREVENTION

Fitness, early childhood development, family support

BECOME A YOUNG ATHLETES ASSISTANT COACH

Increase capacity for Young Athletes programming by recruiting Health Messengers to serve as assistant coaches. Their role can vary depending on their interests and abilities. They could help set up, welcome participants, run warm-ups/cool-downs, lead or demonstrate activities, support participants one-on-one, and/or tear down.



SUPPORT CONSIDERATIONS

The head coach should meet with the Health Messenger before each practice to provide instruction.

ASSESSMENT

Healthy Athletes screenings, care linkage, referrals

ASSIST AT HEALTHY ATHLETES DISCIPLINES

Health Messengers can provide additional assistance to Clinical Directors at specific screenings. Their presence may help other athletes feel more comfortable in a healthcare setting.



SUPPORT CONSIDERATIONS

Make sure the Health Messenger has time to meet the Clinical Director ahead of time. Provide specific instructions for how the Health Messenger can and cannot support.

Activation ideas:

TRAINING

Training current and future health workers

CO-LEAD AN INCLUSIVE HEALTH TRAINING

Health Messengers can co-present Inclusive Health Trainings to community partners or healthcare students. They can share both the content and their personal health story depending on their comfort level.



SUPPORT CONSIDERATIONS

If virtual, take the time to ensure the Health Messenger knows how to use the online communications tool (e.g. Microsoft Teams, Zoom, etc.). If in person, give the athlete the chance to be in the room early to become familiar with the layout, systems, and technology.

HEALTH SYSTEMS STRENGTHENING

CO-FACILITATE A HEALTH MESSENGER TRAINING

Who better to present Health Messenger content than a Health Messenger? Health Messengers can co-lead the whole training or present a specific section of the training. They can also share examples of their roles as Health Messengers.



SUPPORT CONSIDERATIONS

Have a prep call to prepare stories and examples. Hold a practice run through for the sessions the Health Messenger is presenting—in-person if the training is in-person.



TIPS FOR ACTIVATION

Tips for activating



Before: explore the HM's interests, offer options, ask how they want to communicate and be supported.



During: meet them at the entrance, bring printed notes or slides, and follow the plan you agreed on.



After: debrief together – what worked, and what could grow next time.

Mentors

- Role of the mentor
- Questions to ask when supporting Health Messenger
- Questions to ask when supporting with travel





PROGRAM USE OF THE GUIDE

How Programs can use the Guide

- **Match activation** ideas to goals already in your **Program's HCIIG project plan**.
- Ensure every newly trained HM plans to activate **within their first year**.
- Share the Guide with **event and training staff and volunteers** so roles for HM **are built in from the start**.

Health Messenger Communications Playbook

Special Olympics

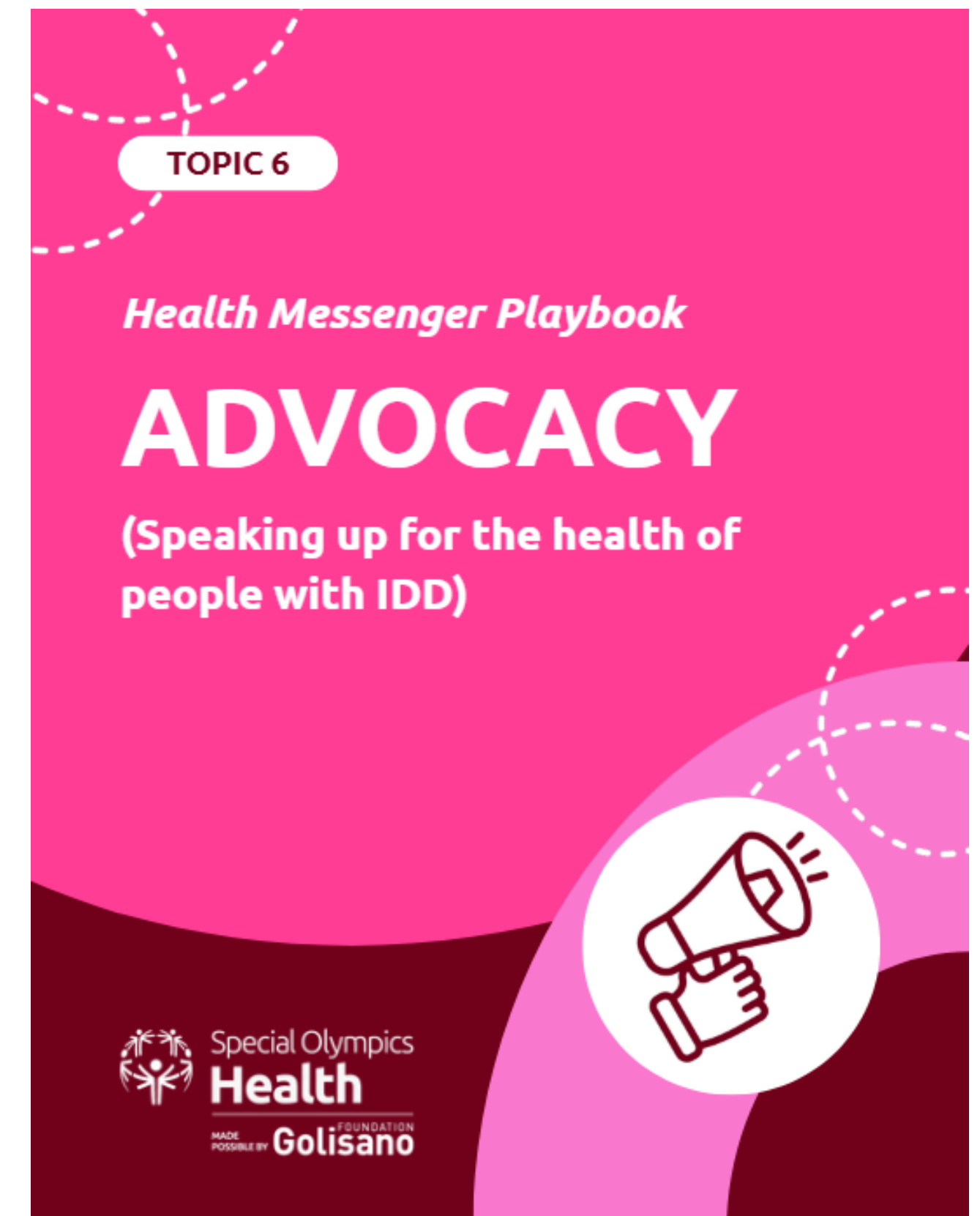
HEALTH MESSENGER COMMUNICATIONS PLAYBOOK

Overview of the Playbook

Purpose: To provide HMs with ready-made content that they can use to activate in their roles.

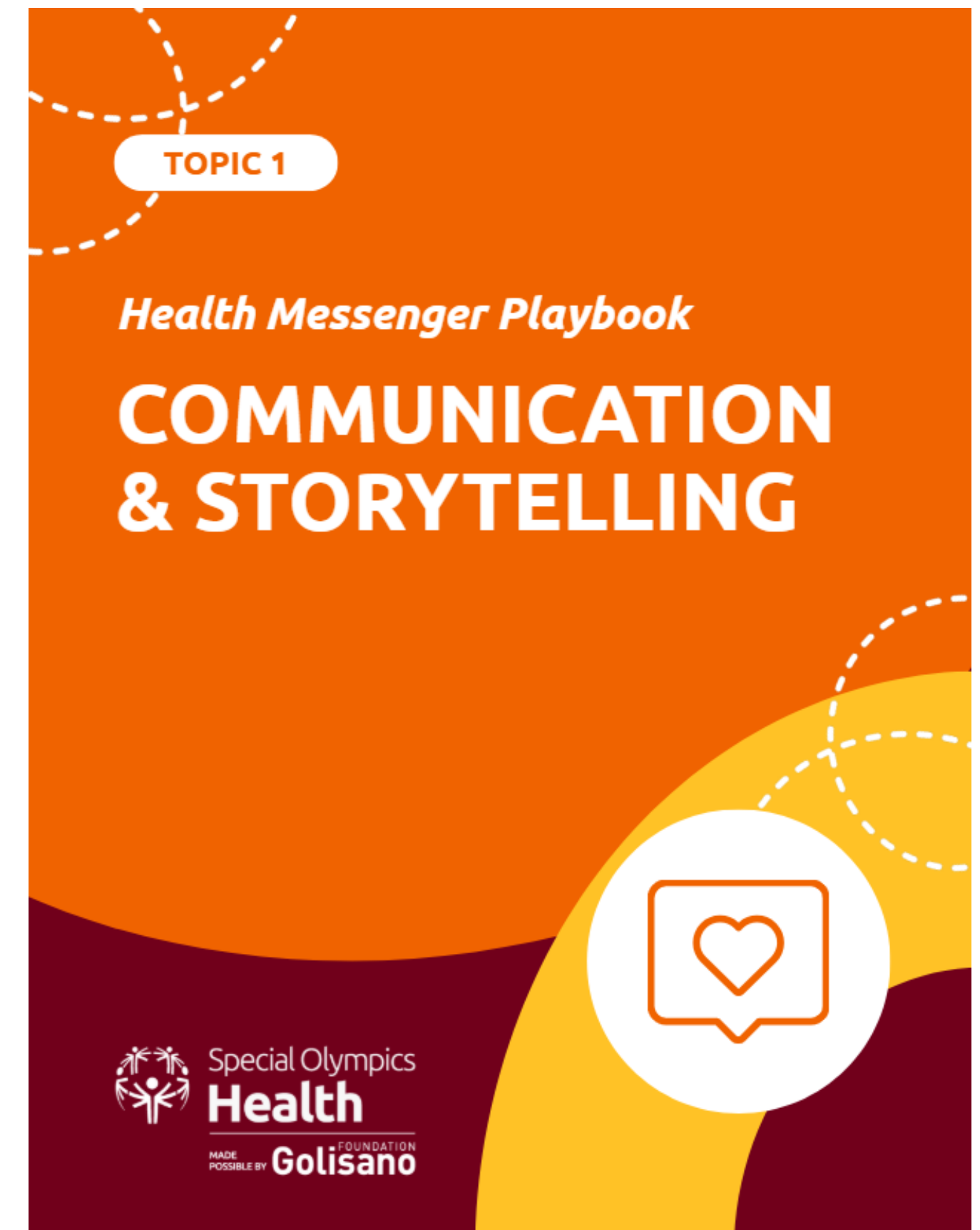
Sections: Aligned with the HM training content

- Introduction
- Communications and Storytelling
- Physical Activity and Fitness
- Nutrition and Hydration
- Emotional Health
- Hygiene
- Advocacy (Speaking up for the health of people with IDD)



Communications and Storytelling

- The Communications and Storytelling section is unique and is **worth reviewing prior to using other sections** of the Playbook.
- The section provides guidance on **how to shoot a video for social media**.
- It also provides **tips on communicating effectively and safely**.



What do you find in each section?



Health tips



Social media posts



Health and wellness activities



Video concepts

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.

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

C. Health & Wellness Activities

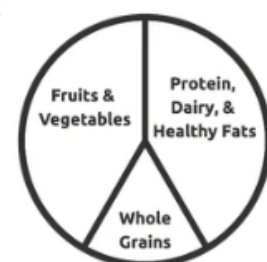


Activity: Build Your Plate

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.

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

Health tips

- Health tips are intended to be used by HMs in several ways.
- They can be shared online, via **social media**.
- They can be shared during **presentations**.
- They can be included in **written handouts**.

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.



Social Media Posts



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



- The Social Media Post sections of the Playbook provide **graphics** along with content to add to the **body of a post**.
- **Graphics are available online** and can be downloaded as **PNG files**.
 - Canva files can also be shared with Regional staff for translation.
- Each post includes **hashtag recommendations**.
- HMs can use **their own** social media accounts, or work with **Programs** to use theirs.

Health and wellness activities

- Activity sections of the Playbook outline different activities that **HMs can lead others through**.
- Some activities are for **individual** participation and others are for **groups**.
- The Playbook includes **specific steps** for the HM to take in leading each activity.
- It also includes **discussion questions** and helpful **tips** for the HM.



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

Video concepts

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. 😊🧘

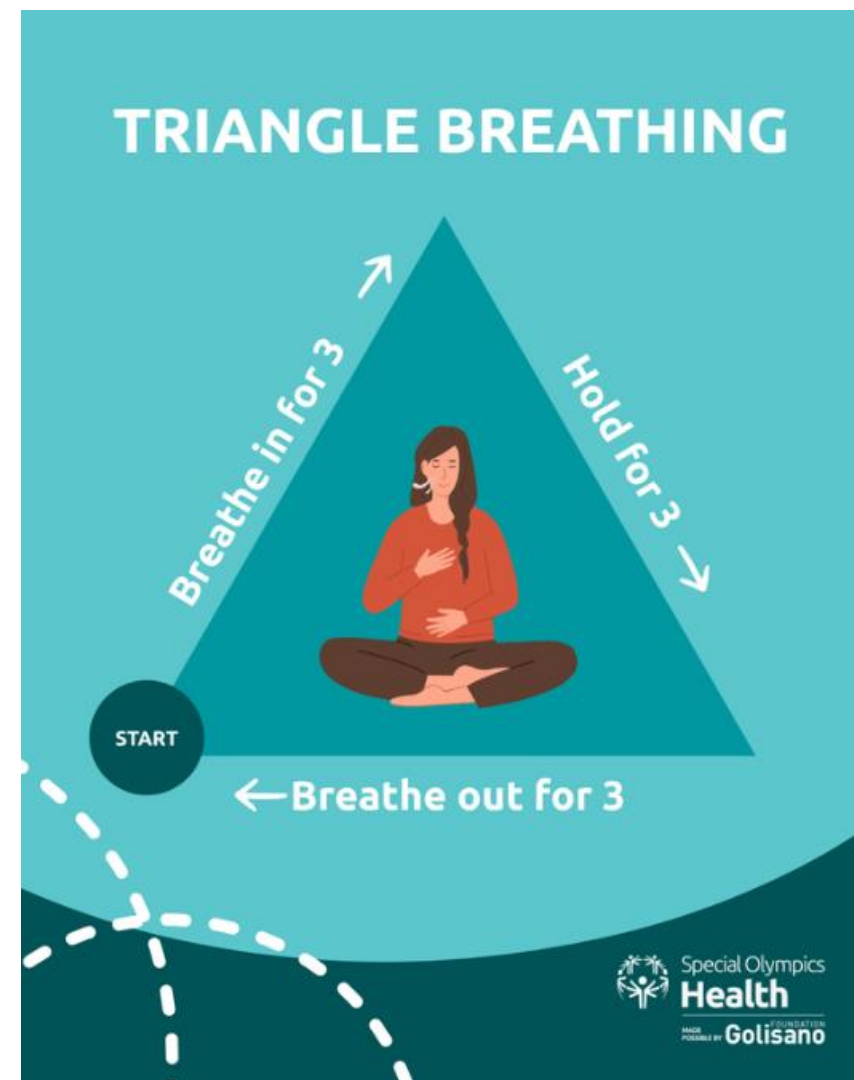
What helps you feel calm?

#HealthMessenger #MentalHealth #SpecialOlympics

- Video concepts include an **overview** description of the video along with a **script** for the HM to use.
- Each concept also includes a **caption** that HMs can use alongside their video when they post on social media.
- **Hashtag recommendations** are also provided.

How can Programs use the Playbook?

Share it with your HMs (in parts or as a whole) and their mentors and encourage them to use it!!



THANK YOU. QUESTIONS?

Webpage: <https://resources.specialolympics.org/hma>

Contact: inclusivehealth@specialolympics.org

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