

**Special
Olympics**



A Special Olympics Course for Mentoring Athlete Leaders

Participant Handbook



**ATHLETE
LEADERSHIP**

Welcome to the Special Olympics Course for Mentoring Athlete Leaders!

You will utilize this handbook as a resource and activity guide throughout the four lessons of this training. This handbook contains important content that will continue to serve as a resource after the training has concluded and you begin your mentor journey.

The eLearning course for mentors is also another resource that will be helpful; it can be found at <https://learn.specialolympics.org>. Search for “Athlete Leadership: Mentor Course.”

Learning Objectives



ATHLETE LEADERSHIP

Module Overview



By the end of the training, you will be able to:

- Discuss how mentors support and uphold the **Athlete Leadership Guiding Principles**.
- Utilize best practice methods and strategies when mentoring Special Olympics **athletes** to become **leaders**.
- Understand and practice a **Unified Leadership approach** to mentoring.
- List mentor responsibilities and activities specific to your **local Special Olympics Program**.

Lesson 1

Key words and concepts to look for in this Lesson:

Mentor Characteristics

Mentor

Mentee

What two adjectives would you use to describe a good mentor:


1. _____
2. _____

Athlete Leader Mentor Definition

Using a Unified Leadership approach, mentors support athlete leaders in identifying, planning, and achieving their leadership goals.




The Characteristics of a Good Mentor



ATHLETE LEADERSHIP

The Characteristics of a Mentor



<p>A trusted role model</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">▪ Sets a good example▪ Creates an environment with a balance of power and trust	<p>Supports growth</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">▪ Understands the mentee's interests▪ Presents opportunities to gain skills and knowledge▪ Finds experts and resources	<p>Defines success</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">▪ Determines goals and vision for success▪ Creates a tangible and attainable plan	<p>Co-creates a plan</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">▪ Teaches mentees how to create a personal plan▪ Assists with coping strategies	<p>Has high, yet reasonable expectations</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">▪ Has appropriate and realistic expectations▪ Provides challenge and support to face and overcome obstacles
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Questions

1. Good mentors live the characteristics listed above. What are some examples of good mentor/mentee relationships that you've seen either in your personal or professional life?

2. Do you have a mentor at work or personally? If so, which of these characteristics do they exhibit that you appreciate?

3. What are some other characteristics that you think are missing from this list?

Lesson 2

Key words and concepts to look for in this lesson

Athlete Leadership

Guiding Principles of Athlete Leadership

Unified Leadership

Inclusion

Athlete Leader Mentor

Athlete Leadership creates opportunities for Special Olympics athletes to develop and demonstrate leadership skills, utilize their voices and abilities to take on meaningful leadership roles (such as speaker, board member, or coach), influence change in Special Olympics, and help create inclusive communities.

There are **three guiding principles of Athlete Leadership**:



1. Education and Awareness

This principle emphasizes that for athlete leaders to have opportunities to lead, people **without** intellectual disabilities need to see the value in people with intellectual disabilities. This approach is called Unified Leadership.



- In **Unified Leadership**, leaders **without** intellectual disabilities learn how to:
- **See the value** of all people, especially those with intellectual disabilities;
 - **Recognize their own behavior** that excludes others and work to change it;
 - Have a better understanding of what it is like to **work with people with intellectual disabilities**, and;
 - **Create environments** where people with intellectual disabilities can be successful.

2. Training

This principle shows the importance of athletes having a choice in how and where they lead in Special Olympics. Through Athlete Leadership, people with IDD have the opportunity to learn skills required to be successful in whatever they choose.

3. Leadership Positions

This principle points out that with the help of athletes, Special Olympics Programs have an obligation to create meaningful positions of influence and leadership throughout the organization for people with intellectual disabilities. Roles within Special Olympics will vary by Program, but some roles that we have identified and developed resources for include: public speaking, serving on a committee or board, being a coach or official, talking about health inequities, facilitating trainings, and more.



Unified Leadership focuses on leaders **without** intellectual and developmental disabilities, to help create and maintain full inclusion for people with IDD.

Athlete Leadership focuses on leaders **with** intellectual and developmental disabilities. It trains them in a variety of courses to become leaders within the movement and in their communities

In summary, for people with IDD to lead,

- › People without IDD need to **see the value in people with IDD**.
- › **People with IDD need to train in leadership skills so that they have a choice** in how and where they lead in Special Olympics.
- › **People with IDD** should be encouraged to **determine policy**, set direction, and lead programming.

Questions

1. What can you actively do to support the existence and promotion of Unified Leadership within your Program?

2. Think about the trainings you have taken over the years. What set you up to have the most success? What can you learn from those experiences to share with the athlete leader you are mentoring?

3. Within Unified Leadership, the existence of meaningful positions for athlete leaders is an important foundation. What are two ways that people with IDD can have meaningful positions of influence within your Program (whether it currently exists or not)?

Why do mentors have to talk about inclusion?

It is hugely important to **understand inclusion** to practice **Unified Leadership**.

Why?

Because many people without IDD **think they are being inclusive but sometimes say or do things that are not inclusive.**

As part of the Special Olympics Unified Leadership training series, we have identified **three levels of inclusion: Diversity 101, Diversity 2.0, and Inclusion 3.0**. These levels apply to all marginalized and underrepresented groups of people (race, gender, LGBTQIA+, etc.), but for the purpose of our training and examples, we apply this to the world's largest minority group (more than 15 percent of the world's population) – disabled people and even more specific to our target audience, we are focusing on people with intellectual and developmental disabilities



(IDD).

Diversity 101 is what happens in the **beginning when people first try to be inclusive** and invite people with IDD to partake in leadership activities. While intentions are good, **this type of inclusion is typically tokenism**.

- › **An example:** An athlete is invited to be part of the board of directors. Their participation includes coming to the meetings so that they are physically present. The athlete leader talks maybe once or twice to share their experience as an athlete but is not asked for their opinion on the topics discussed and is not assigned follow-up tasks nor asked for their vote.

Diversity 2.0 is the next step. This is where athletes are engaged, and their input is sought. **Diversity 2.0 is better**, but it's **not the end goal**. Diversity is good at first because that means you have **people from different backgrounds involved**, but **true inclusion** means those people are not just in the room but are **part of the decision process**.

- › **An example:** An athlete is part of the board and is engaged in the conversations

throughout the board meeting. Other board members stop and ask the athlete leader what their opinion is on each topic they discuss. Even more than that, they are provided basic accommodations needed to be a successful member on the board, such as meeting with another board member ahead of time to discuss meeting topics so that they can come prepared.

Inclusion 3.0 is the **goal**. It is where we want every Program, department, Local Organizing Committee, and person within the organization to be, but is unfortunately not where most have reached yet. **Inclusion 3.0 is when athlete leaders have earned meaningful roles and responsibilities** and the rest of us **adapt how we conduct our business** to the fit needs of the athlete leader.

- › **An example:** An athlete is not only a general member of the board, but also serves on or leads a committee within the board. The athlete leader participates in all votes. The athlete leader works with the chair in advance to set board meeting agendas, and materials and setting of the meeting are produced in a format suited to the athlete leader (for example, using easy-read language). Someone works with the athlete leader to ensure they are up to speed on all materials, they understand what is required of them, and they are encouraged to speak up about problems they see within the organization.



Unified Leadership involves people **without** disabilities looking at themselves and asking reflective questions, such as:

1. Do I have prejudices, judgments, or stereotypes about people with disabilities and what they can or cannot do?
2. Are there barriers to inclusion for historically underrepresented or marginalized groups including people who are disabled, that I do not see?
3. Are there barriers to inclusion that I actively encourage and promote without realizing it?

Questions

1. How does Unified Leadership benefit me?

2. How does Unified Leadership benefit my community?

3. How does Unified Leadership impact people from marginalized communities?

4. What can I do when I see someone using someone with IDD as a token?

Lesson 3

Key words and concepts to look for in this lesson

Stages of Mentorship

Growth Opportunity

Progress

Progressing Through Stages

Role Clarity

Support

The relationship between the athlete leader and the mentor will likely change over time as the athlete leader gains knowledge, skills, and self-assurance, all while developing the competence to work more independently. While some athlete leaders require ongoing support, everyone benefits from having a trusted helper throughout their personal and professional journeys.

These stages of mentorship show the **progression of the relationship between the mentor and the athlete leader.**

Stages of Mentorship

Athlete leaders benefit from the support of a volunteer Mentor.

At all times, the mentor should reserve their own opinions, while supporting the athlete leader's involvement and ability to make decisions.



- Athlete learns about Special Olympics and leadership roles.
- Mentor highly involved (participates in training; guides athlete leader through practical experiences).



- Athlete works closely with mentor to develop and refine leadership skills.
- Mentor helps arrange leadership activity and interacts as needed to ensure results.



- Athlete participates in leadership roles with minimal support.
- Mentor may assist in preparation and follow-up, but is virtually invisible as athlete engages in leadership activities.



- Athlete serves in meaningful leadership roles independently.
- Mentor's only role is to provide ongoing advice, encouragement and transportation as needed.

While **progressing through the stages** of mentorship, all mentors will continue to **use the mentor skills and strategies** covered in this training. Specifically:



Patience



Respect and partnership



Growth and opportunity



Role clarity



Unified Leadership



Patience

Progress is not linear. There will be times where you take **two steps forward and one step back** or times where you take one step forward and two steps back while working with the athlete leader; and that is okay. It is about you figuring out, together, how to know **when to provide support and when to “let them lead.”**



Respect

As the athlete leader grows and progresses toward the fourth stage on this diagram, be aware that you still need to have a close relationship. When assuming a leadership role, it is important that you continue to work with the athlete leader, so they stay **grounded, humble, and open** to continued learning. **Your relationship should be a partnership.**



Growth and Opportunity

If the leadership role is for a specific period of time, work with the athlete leader so they are **aware and prepared for when you transition** out of the role. It is also important for them to understand that just because they reach the fourth stage with you **does not mean they have to stop working with you.** It also does not keep them from **finding another mentor** who has a different set of skills they want to learn from. People can have multiple mentors for different things in their lives.



Role Clarity

It's a good idea to constantly **evaluate your relationship** so you and the athlete leader are on the same page as far as what stage of mentorship you think you are currently on. If the athlete leader thinks you are on Stage 4 when you think you are in Stage 1, that will lead to problems.



Unified Leadership

As your mentee progresses through the stages, make sure you keep an eye on your attitudes and maintain a **willingness to change how you do things so people with IDD can reach their full potential.** You may need to talk to other people without disabilities and teach them how to be more inclusive.

It is your **job as a mentor to help others without disabilities see Special Olympics athletes** as:



- > **Equals**, not subordinates;
- > **Capable**, not inept;
- > **Accountable**, not irresponsible;
- > **Leaders**, not just contributors, and;
- > **Part of the community**, not outsiders.

Questions

- 1.** Being a mentor to an athlete leader involves helping people without IDD see Special Olympics athletes as equals, capable, accountable, leaders and part of the community. What is one way you can do this?

- 2.** Which of the above mentor skills do you think is the most important? Why? How will you make sure you help the athlete leader in this area?

Lesson 4

Key words and concepts to look for in this lesson

Mentoring in this Program

Expectations

What's next

Mentor growth

Improvement

Support for mentors

Mentoring in this Program

This section is for you to fill in with any specific rules or expectations that your Special Olympics Program has for mentors.

Mentor Criteria and Expectations

Age / Familial Restrictions	
Time Commitment	
Training Requirements	
Communication Methods	
Forms and Documentation	

Mentor Self Assessment

It's time to **reflect on your own mentor skills you see as strengths and areas to work on.**

Think about the **skills and strategies** discussed as part of this training. List them in the far left column. Next, decide and check the appropriate box if this is an area that is "**strong**" or "**could use improvement**" for you. Next, create a few **action ideas** as to how you "will improve in this skill."

Finally, complete the column entitled: "**Who will help me?**" This is where you identify an athlete leader, Program staff, personal mentor, or additional training where you might find **assistance with skill improvement.**"

Mentor Self-Assessment

Skill/ Strategy	I am strong in this skill	I could use improvement in this skill	This is how I will improve in this skill	Who will help me? How will I learn more?



To connect with your local Program and start the process to become a mentor, [click here](#)

To learn even more skills related to being an athlete leader mentor, search “Mentor” for the mentor eLearning course at: <https://learn.specialolympics.org>.

Thank you for playing such an important role in the leadership development of a Special Olympics athlete!