



# Special Olympics Developmental Sports Implementation Guide

*Coaching Special Olympics Athletes ages 6-12*

**Special  
Olympics**



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Overview2

- How to Use this Guide
- Special Olympics Mission

Special Olympics Developmental Sports6

- Introduction
- Benefit of Sports Participation for Children
- Transition and Progression are Important
- Special Olympics Athlete Development Model
- Age-Appropriate Competition
- Registration and Coaching Requirements
- Building a Practice Plan
- Demonstration Events

Implementing Developmental Sports20

- Implementation in Schools
- Implementation in Communities

Engaging and Supporting Families36

- Family Forums
- What Comes After Developmental Sports?

Coaching Athletes with Intellectual Disabilities41

- Coaching Children
- Definition of Sports Adaptation
- Ideas for Coaching Athletes with Profound or Multiple Disabilities
- Tips for Supporting Athletes with a Diagnosis of Autism
- Adaptations through the STEP
- Adaptations in Unified Sports Experiences

Sport Specific Adaptations and Resources52

# OVERVIEW

## HOW TO USE THIS GUIDE

Special Olympics provides a lifelong opportunity for people with intellectual disabilities to participate in competitive and recreational sports. Children as young as age 2 can participate in Special Olympics Young Athletes, which includes activities that develop the fundamental gross motor movements that build a foundation for future participation in sports. As children advance through Young Athletes, they can transition to developmental sports activities beginning at age 6. In developmental sports, children receive an age-appropriate introduction to sports, and learn the necessary skills to transition into traditional Special Olympics sports programs. With competitive opportunities starting as young as age 8, Special Olympics athletes have the opportunity to play and compete throughout the rest of their lives.

**This guide will address developmental sports activities for children ages 6-12. It is packed with ready-to-use resources designed to help schools, communities and coaches effectively offer and implement developmental sports activities.**

It is important to review all sections of the guide as it contains valuable information for teachers, coaches and family members. This guide is meant to be used in conjunction with sports-specific resources that contain relevant age-appropriate activities and lesson plans. These resources have been carefully developed by Special Olympics' sport federation partners. All supplementary materials can be found at [Special Olympics Developmental Sports Resources](#).

## SPECIAL OLYMPICS MISSION

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

Special Olympics is a global movement that unleashes the human spirit every day around the world through the transformative power and joy of sport. Special Olympics athletes discover new strengths, abilities, skills and successes. They find joy, confidence and fulfillment on the playing field and in life, and inspire people in their communities to open their hearts to a wider world of human talents and potential.

**Through programming in sports, health, education, and community building, Special Olympics is changing the lives of people with intellectual disabilities by solving the global injustice, isolation, intolerance, and health risks they face.**





# SPECIAL OLYMPICS DEVELOPMENTAL SPORTS

## INTRODUCTION

Participation in sports helps children develop physically, mentally and socially, and contributes to a lifelong emphasis on health and well-being. The fundamental movement and sports skills gained through developmental sports activities provide a valuable framework that supports children as they progress to become Special Olympics athletes and Unified partners.

Developmental sports activities can be introduced through schools and communities in any Special Olympics sport; however, this guide includes sport-specific curricula from eight Special Olympics sport federation partners. These sport-specific, inclusive, and age-appropriate activities are not meant to be structured as a new Special Olympics Program or initiative, but rather can be used to support a child's transition to traditional Special Olympics participation, or as an introduction to Unified Sports.

### UNIFIED SPORTS

Unified Sports joins people with and without intellectual disabilities on the same team. In Unified Sports, teams are made up of people of similar age and ability. That makes practices more fun and games more challenging and exciting for all.

This guide features resources in the following sports:



BADMINTON



BASKETBALL



CYCLING



FLOORBALL



FOOTBALL  
(SOCCER)



SWIMMING



TENNIS



VOLLEYBALL

## BENEFIT OF SPORTS PARTICIPATION FOR CHILDREN

A broad collection of research highlighting the impact of sports participation on children without disabilities, collated by the Aspen Institute's Project Play, showcases how participation in sports and physical activity can have a lasting impact on many critical domains.<sup>1</sup>

### HEALTH

- Improves overall physical health.
- Helps build and maintain healthy bones, muscles and joints.
- Controls weight and reduces fat, including a reduction in obesity.
- Prevents or delays high blood pressure.

### EDUCATION

- Develops and improves cognitive skills.
- Improves academic achievement, including grades and test scores.

### PSYCHOSOCIAL

- Supports children with aspects of personal development, like self-esteem, goal-setting and leadership skills.
- Promotes teamwork and improved self-confidence.
- Teaches discipline, dedication and how to get along with others.

## TRANSITION AND PROGRESSION ARE IMPORTANT

There is a known participation gap between Young Athletes (a sport and play program for children with and without intellectual disabilities, ages 2-7), and traditional Special Olympics sports offered for individuals with intellectual disabilities beginning at age 8. By emphasizing age-appropriate sports skill development in a structured sport environment, Special Olympics can focus on retention of participants, and development of athlete skills, while also creating a more robust opportunity for participation.

**Below are some of examples of scenarios in which developmental sports activities would be necessary to support existing Young Athletes participants moving to traditional or Special Olympics Unified activities:**

- A child under age 8 has advanced beyond the skills in their Young Athletes activities, but is not yet old enough to participate in Special Olympics.
- A child is 8 or older and is not ready or not yet comfortable with participating in 8+ weeks of practice and competition in one sport.
- A community program or team is primarily made up of adults and it is not safe or developmentally appropriate for an 8-year-old child to join the team.
- An elementary or primary school wants to provide inclusive sports activities through Special Olympics, but does not have the structure to support team sports and competition.

**By focusing on athletes who are 6-12 years old, an overlap of opportunities is created to meet the needs of children at the end of their Young Athletes experience and the beginning of their Special Olympics journey.**

It is important to remember that this opportunity may not be appropriate for all children. Participants should be identified not just by their age, but also by their readiness to participate in more advanced sports-specific skills. The Special Olympics Athlete Development Model (**Fig. 1.0**) should be used to better understand athlete progression.

## SPECIAL OLYMPICS ATHLETE DEVELOPMENT MODEL



Figure 1.0

The Athlete Development Model (ADM) is a structure designed for Special Olympics athletes to progress in their sport development and achieve their personal best. The model promotes motor and skill development, and lifelong health and fitness while preparing athletes for sports participation or competition at all levels. During the Fundamental stage of the ADM, Young Athletes focuses on basic motor development skills. When children have mastered the fundamentals, they are ready to learn how to train in a sport. The ADM recognizes that not all athletes will move through the stages at the same pace, and provides coaches the guidance to support athletes so that they may participate at the stage most appropriate for them.

**While participating in developmental sports activities, athletes are considered to be in the Learning to Train stage of the ADM. As referenced in the model, this stage focuses on converting skills learned in the Fundamental stage into sports-specific skills within multiple sport settings, with a focus on learning to train.**



## AGE-APPROPRIATE COMPETITION

Special Olympics General Rules define that children age 8 and above are eligible to participate in Special Olympics competition, which includes having official results and being awarded medals and ribbons recognizing their place of finish. However, competition earlier than age 8 is often offered in non-Special Olympics youth sports activities and can help children understand proper game play and goal setting. Therefore, developmental sports encourages local, modified, age-appropriate competition for participants. **When considering the role of competition in developmental sports activities, the following guidelines should be used:**

- Do not track official results (score, place of finish, standings) – the emphasis should be on the opportunity for competition and game play, not celebration of one person or one team's victory over another.
- Participants should not travel more than 60 minutes for appropriate competition for this age group– in many cases, the best opportunity for introductory competition is an inner team practice session or game, known as a scrimmage, where children have the opportunity to play against others on their team.
- Competition for developmental sports activities should be done in a low-pressure environment that meets the athlete's developmental needs.

Special Olympics has partnered with iCoachKids to support the growth and quality of developmental sports. Their research indicates that competition at this age should be fun, engaging and not solely focused on winning.<sup>2</sup> Additionally, for children of this age, it is critical that adults prioritize this attitude as well. **Too often, children feel pressure and stress from adults, i.e., coaches and family members, to compete, perform and win, which can take away the fun children have while learning and developing a passion for the game.**

**“Children want to have fun and to learn they need to feel safe. Build positive relationships and enjoyable and caring climates that allow them to thrive and that keep them coming back.”**

- iCoachKids

<sup>2</sup> Marieke Fix et al., Coaching Children Literature Review Practical Summary, (iCoachKids, 2017), 5, accessed April 7, 2020, [www.icoachkids.eu/\\_assets/files/ick-practical-summary-coaching-children-literature-review-final.pdf](http://www.icoachkids.eu/_assets/files/ick-practical-summary-coaching-children-literature-review-final.pdf)



## REGISTRATION AND COACHING REQUIREMENTS

Athletes and partners participating in developmental sports activities should be registered as “trained but DID NOT compete (M02)” in the Special Olympics registration system, and must complete the appropriate athlete registration and medical forms.. If a Special Olympics Program has a policy about specific registration and medical requirements for participation in schools, the local Program’s policy and requirements should be considered the default registration protocol.

### COACH REQUIREMENTS

Developmental sports coaches, at a minimum, must complete the Special Olympics Level 1 Sport Assistant course, available through the [Special Olympics Online Learning Portal](#). This ensures coaches can provide athletes with fun, safe, and developmentally appropriate instruction in a progressive sports program. All coaches should also be certified in the specific sport they are coaching, and can receive sport-specific training by contacting the local Special Olympics Program office. Additional policies and minimum requirements for coach certification are required by each local Special Olympics Program, and these must be met before developmental sports coaching can begin.

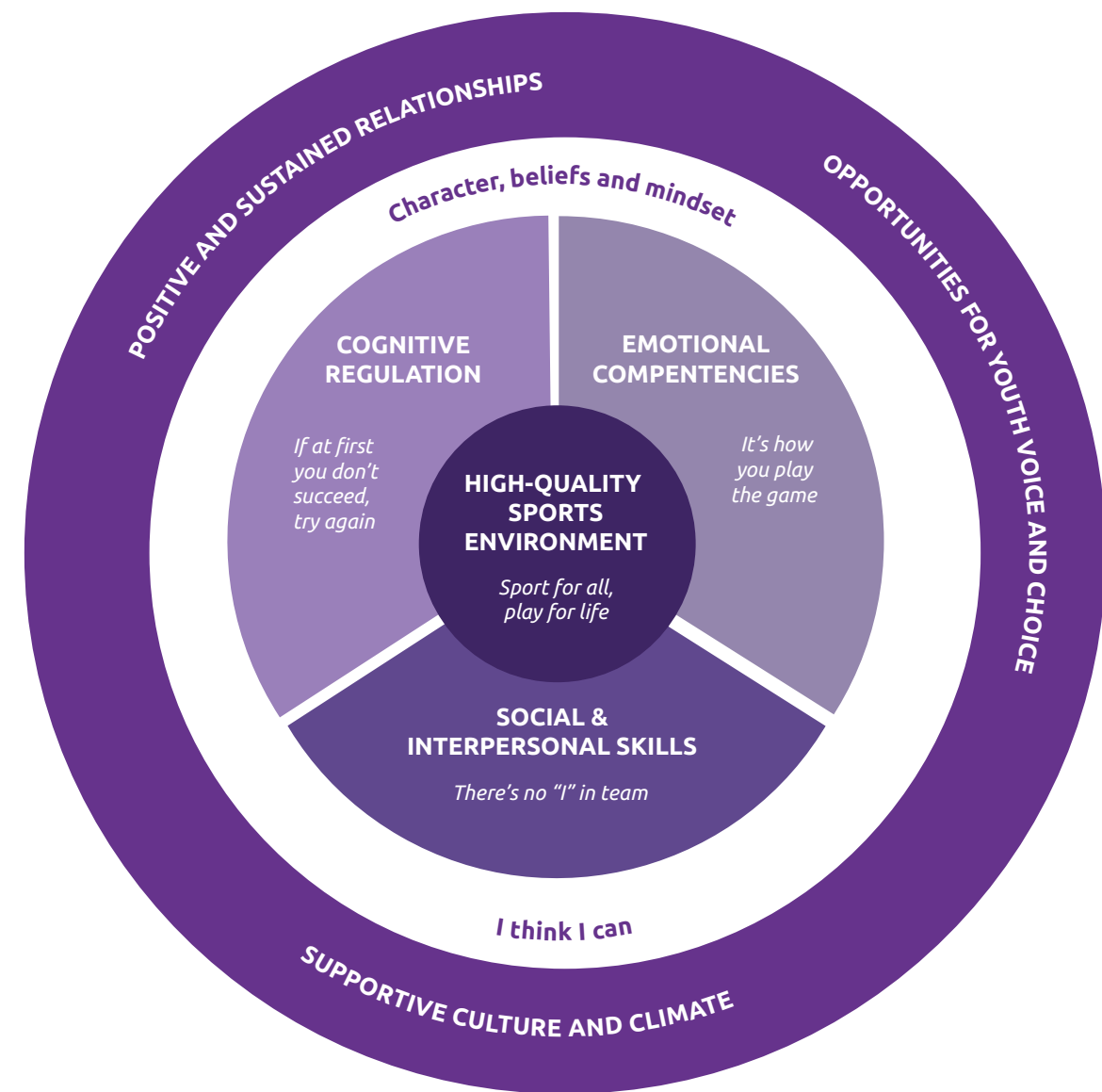
## BEST PRACTICES FOR COACHING ATHLETES AGES 6-12:

- The coaching ratio should be one coach for every four athletes.
- Athletes aged 6-12 have vastly different levels of skill. Breaking the athletes into smaller groups based on ability will assist with coaching according to skill level.
- Coaching should include supporting athletes through social and emotional learning (SEL). SEL refers to the process through which individuals learn and apply a set of social, emotional, behavioral and character skills required to succeed in schooling, the workplace, relationships, and citizenship.

## TO CREATE AN ENVIRONMENT THAT SUPPORTS SOCIAL AND EMOTIONAL LEARNING:

- Build positive adult-youth relationships.
- Create a safe space that supports social and emotional skill development.
- Embody effective leadership strategies that emphasize effort, autonomy and learning.
- Prioritize and provide opportunities for direct skill building and practice.
- Model good character and decision making.
- Engage with families, schools, and other community organizations.<sup>3</sup>

<sup>3</sup> Susan Crown Exchange. Coaching Social & Emotional Skills in Youth Sports, 14-17, accessed April 7, 2020, [assets.aspeninstitute.org/content/uploads/2019/03/Calls-for-Coaches-White-Paper-2.22.19.pdf](https://assets.aspeninstitute.org/content/uploads/2019/03/Calls-for-Coaches-White-Paper-2.22.19.pdf).



## SPECIAL OLYMPICS COACHES CODE OF CONDUCT

All coaches must adhere to the [Special Olympics Coaches Code of Conduct](#), and should review it prior to holding the first developmental sports practice. Coaches should also refer to the local Special Olympics Program office for training requirements regarding protective behaviors.

When hosting the first practice session, coaches should share with families their commitment to the safety and well-being of the children, and note training received from Special Olympics, along with steps that will be taken to keep children safe. Coaches should allow for open communication with families regarding safety.

## BUILDING A PRACTICE PLAN

### ATHLETE WELCOME

Each week, athletes should be encouraged to share one thing they have done since the last practice. Time should be provided during the welcome session for the children to get to know each other to increase teamwork throughout practice.

### WARM-UP

The warm-up gets children mentally and physically prepared for the sports activities. Stretching is a critical component of warming up, and should be dynamic, meaning that it is done while moving the body, rather than holding a movement. This technique helps to loosen the body's muscles and prevent injury. A warm-up should consist of aerobic activities to raise the heart rate; dynamic stretches; and sport-specific movements, which remind athletes of skills and drills previously learned. A similar warm-up routine should be used before every practice so that children become familiar with the concept of warming up, and the important role it plays in sports. Children should be encouraged to have fun during the warm-up session:

- They should be allowed to rotate leading the warm-ups.
- They may want to run as their favorite animal during the warm-up.
- A new stretch can be introduced to athletes each week during practice.

*The goal of the warm-up is to raise the body and muscle temperature to prepare the entire body for vigorous activity. There is an important difference between a cardiovascular warm-up and stretching. Stretching without warming up can make an athlete more prone to injury, as the muscles are cold.*

*An effective warm-up routine can be created using the endurance and flexibility exercises found in the [Special Olympics Fit 5 Fitness Cards](#).*

## SPORTS SKILL DEVELOPMENT

This section allows athletes to focus on their individual growth through sports skill development. The priority is to provide a fun atmosphere to help children understand the individual components and skills associated with each sport. New sports terminology should be introduced during this time, which will help children understand the fundamentals. Coaches may select a skill and activity based on the sport, and run it as a singular activity, or select several activities and set up sports skills stations that athletes can rotate through simultaneously.

### GROUP ACTIVITY

These activities or exercises are a fun and effective way to practice skills as a group. They encourage teamwork through communication and social interaction. Fun group activities can also be incorporated throughout the other sections.

### COOLDOWN

The practice should be completed with a few static stretches. The Fitness Cards provide great ideas for stretches that can be integrated into the cool-down. This section helps children to slow down. This time should incorporate review of the activity or skills learned, concluding with cool-down stretches.

## HEALTH AND FITNESS

Coaches and teachers play an important role in promoting physical activity and fitness among participating athletes, and they can assist athletes in reaching their health and fitness goals. With minor adjustments to practice plans, coaches can prepare athletes with tactical and technical skills while also maximizing physical activity, thus improving fitness.

### TIPS FOR MAXIMIZING FITNESS

- Limit the amount of time athletes are standing and waiting, instead finding activities that keep multiple children moving at a time.
- Encourage athletes to drink water during play, instead of sugary drinks, and provide water breaks every 20 minutes to ensure athletes remain hydrated.
- If snacks are provided, encourage healthy snacks like fruit, and share information with athletes about the right foods to fuel their bodies for sports participation.

## DEMONSTRATION EVENTS

As they learn new sports skills, children will gain confidence and pride in their growth. Demonstration or celebration events provide an opportunity for athletes to showcase the skills they have learned throughout their practices. These events are not meant to be a competition, where participants would earn a placement award or advance to further competition, but rather are meant to highlight the sports skills gained, and introduce the competitive experience through scrimmages and modified play. Demonstration events also provide an opportunity to connect families and communities to Special Olympics sports.

### Suggestions for planning an event that will be a valuable experience for all:

- Invite families and community members so they can share in the success. For school events, invite other classes to attend so that all children can experience the fun of inclusion.
- Consider making the event feel more festive by having a small opening and closing ceremony.
- Host the event at the end of the school year or after sessions are complete. The event should celebrate successes and progress of all participants.
- Set up sports skill stations that reflect the sports children have practiced, or set up a scrimmage game.
- In lieu of a placement medal or ribbon, children can receive a participation award that recognizes all athletes equally for their success at the event.



Meet with  
the team



Develop a plan;  
Set date & time



Publicize the  
event



Amplify the event  
through social media



Thank everyone  
involved after the  
success



# IMPLEMENTING DEVELOPMENTAL SPORTS

## IMPLEMENTING ACTIVITIES IN SCHOOLS

### DEVELOPMENTAL SPORTS IN A SCHOOL SETTING

Developmental sports activities can be used to provide structure for existing school-based programming, or to help create new sports opportunities in schools. As it relates to Unified Sports, a developmental sports program provides age-appropriate activities, resources and curricula that can be used to implement a Unified Sports recreation model in elementary or primary schools. Although there is room for flexibility in implementation, activities should take place in single-sport or multi-sport experiences.

#### MULTI-SPORT EXPERIENCES

##### Typical Setting

School

##### Structure

Takes place during physical education time at school or as an after-school program

Multiple sports taught with at least 6-8 weeks spent on each sport

#### SINGLE-SPORT EXPERIENCES

##### Typical Setting

Community

##### Structure

Integrated into other community-based Special Olympics practices or sport club activities

Single sport taught with at least 6-8 weeks spent on each sport

## MULTI-SPORT EXPERIENCES

The school structure provides a unique opportunity to develop the sport skills of children over a longer period of time, as coaches may expose children to multiple sports throughout the span of an entire school year. For this reason, activities should be conducted over the period of a semester or full school year, with at least six to eight weeks being spent on each sport.

When identifying participants for inclusive opportunities in schools, the following implementation options should be considered:

- For integrated schools with specialized classrooms for children with intellectual disabilities, the specialized class should be paired with a class of general education students of the same age, grade, or developmental level.
- In inclusive classrooms, developmental sports activities should be offered during a designated physical education class time. In a non-inclusive setting, these activities may occur as part of a designated adapted physical education or motor development class period.
- For schools that only have children with special needs, Unified Sports opportunities can be created by partnering with a general education school.

## SINGLE-SPORT EXPERIENCES

In the event that resources or staff are not available to provide multi-sport experiences, single-sport experiences may be provided. This model can be implemented in the school setting with a focus on a single sport. Practices can be offered as part of a physical education class during the school day, or implemented as part of before- or after-school activities. For example, if a primary school has a basketball team for students in higher grade levels, offering basketball as a developmental sport would help the younger students to learn the skills that would allow them to join the team in the future.

**If access to sport-specific facilities is a barrier, students may still participate in a multi-sport experience with some creativity. Some sports facilities can be used in multiple ways. For example, if only a basketball court is available, this space may be used to practice both athletics and football.**

## GETTING STARTED CHECKLIST FOR TEACHERS

- Schedule a meeting with school administrators to discuss providing inclusive sports activities in the school. Develop a timeline for recruiting participants, defining the structure, and preparing for regular activities.
- Work with the local Special Olympics Program to complete all necessary registration requirements for participants, and trainings for coaches.
- Choose the sport(s) that will be implemented, and define when and where activities will take place.
- Recruit a head coach who will develop plans for practice, lead activities, and correspond with families regarding their child's success. Additionally, identify assistant coaches or volunteers who can provide support, and ensure a ratio of one adult over the age of 16 for every four youth participants.
- Identify appropriate participants with and without intellectual disabilities.
- Secure a venue and equipment, and set a schedule for team practices and any potential scrimmages.
- Conduct an orientation for school staff, and parents/caregivers to introduce the developmental sports activities children will be doing in the school.
- Start practicing and let the fun begin!

## INCLUSION AND UNIFIED SCHOOLS

Developmental sports activities support the pathway to athlete participation in Unified Schools. The Special Olympics Young Athletes inclusive skills and play program is the sports pillar of Unified Schools for children in pre-primary through early primary school. As an athlete transitions out of Young Athletes, developmental sports activities can be offered as the sports pillar for older primary school athletes. All of the sports offerings through developmental sports can be inclusive to support Unified Sports in schools.

### EXAMPLE OF DEVELOPMENTAL SPORTS IN UNIFIED SCHOOLS

Special Olympics Panama has shared their method for introducing sports in Unified Schools:

*"Together with educators, we create opportunities for athletes who are part of Unified Schools to perform in sports in their school, and we help them in making the correct transition from their physical education classes to their training as formal athletes in competitive sports disciplines in Special Olympics."*

To support Unified Schools programming, a developmental sports curriculum and associated lessons can provide physical education teachers with adaptations and developmentally appropriate sport skills that will assist students in the transition to competitive Special Olympics sports.



## COACHES AND VOLUNTEERS

Physical education or special education teachers are likely to be the main coaches for activities in schools, since they already play vital roles within the school day and understand sports or working with people who have intellectual disabilities. In addition to school personnel, others may serve in leadership or volunteer roles. For example:

- Secondary school students may serve as volunteers during sports practices, working under the supervision and guidance of a certified coach. Volunteers may assist with skills stations, or support athletes as they transition from one sports activity to the next.
- A local university partner may enhance the developmental sports experience through relevant departments, such as special education, physical education, sports medicine, or physical therapy. University students may serve as volunteers or coaches, and may even take a lead in helping to create lesson plans.
- Special Olympics athlete leaders may serve as assistant coaches or volunteers. Involving athlete leaders not only creates a meaningful leadership opportunity for people with intellectual disabilities, but also provides a positive example for families who have children participating in developmental sports activities.

All volunteers and coaches must meet the requirements outlined by their local Special Olympics Program. Additionally, coaches are required to meet the coach certification requirements stipulated by Special Olympics (see Registration and Requirements section for more detail).

## PRACTICE STRUCTURE

- Practices should be held at least one time per week as part of a physical education class during school, or built into an on-campus before- or after-school program. It is important to set a routine with practices scheduled at the same time each day or week. For many children, establishing a routine helps to provide clear expectations, consistency and comfort.
- Coaches should spend a minimum of six to eight weeks teaching each sport. In a multi-sport structure, between five and six sports can be taught throughout the school year.
- Sports practices should last 45-60 minutes to ensure proper time for children to warm up, practice individual and group skills, and cool down. When necessary, the length of practices can be modified to fit the individual needs of each school or participant group.
- Practices should be held in an appropriate indoor or outdoor setting, based on the individual sport.

# SPORTS SUPPORT EDUCATION STANDARDS

While sports provide a fun outlet for staying fit, participation in organized sports and physical activity has also demonstrated an impact on the broader development of children. According to a study that tracked children from kindergarten through fourth grade, **organized sports participation helps children develop and improve cognitive skills.**<sup>4</sup> Physical activity in general is associated with improved academic achievement, including grades and standardized test scores. Additionally, sports activity can affect attitudes and academic behavior, including enhanced concentration, attention, and improved classroom behavior.<sup>5</sup> In its own research, Special Olympics has found evidence that the Young Athletes program supports young children in developing gross motor, social, and cognitive skills, while Unified Sports has been shown to build confidence and self-esteem.

## PHYSICAL EDUCATION STANDARDS

To ensure quality education through sport and physical activity, organizations like the International Council for Health, Physical Education, Recreation, Sport and Dance (ICHPER-SD) and SHAPE America have created physical education standards for school-aged children. These standards provide a guideline to measure the typical development of a child's physical fitness over time.

In collaboration with United Nations Educational, Scientific, and Cultural Organization (UNESCO), ICHPER-SD has defined seven international standards for physical education and sport for school children. Age-specific benchmarks for the standards on page 28 are available [here](#). These standards provide guidance to create meaningful sports experiences in schools and can provide guidance for implementing quality developmental sports activities.

4 Geneviève Piché, Caroline Fitzpatrick, Linda S. Pagani, "Associations Between Extracurricular Activity and Self-Regulation: A Longitudinal Study From 5 to 10 Years of Age", *American Journal of Health Promotion*, 30, no.1 (2015): 32-40.

5 Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, *The Association between School Based Physical Activity, Including Physical Education, and Academic Performance* (Atlanta, Ga.: 2010), accessed April 7, 2020, [www.cdc.gov/healthyyouth/health\\_and\\_academics/pdf/pa-pe\\_paper.pdf](http://www.cdc.gov/healthyyouth/health_and_academics/pdf/pa-pe_paper.pdf).



PHYSICAL EDUCATION STANDARDS

STANDARD 1	<p>MOVEMENT COMPETENCY AND PROFICIENCY</p> <p>Demonstrate competency in many movement forms, and proficiency in a few movement forms.</p>
STANDARD 2	<p>KNOWLEDGE AND APPLICATION OF MOVEMENT CONCEPTS</p> <p>Apply movement concepts and principles to the learning and development of motor skills.</p>
STANDARD 3	<p>HEALTH-ENHANCING FITNESS</p> <p>Achieve and maintain a health-enhancing level of fitness.</p>
STANDARD 4	<p>PHYSICALLY ACTIVE LIFESTYLE</p> <p>Exhibit a physically active lifestyle.</p>
STANDARD 5	<p>PERSONAL AND SOCIAL BEHAVIOR</p> <p>Demonstrate responsible personal and social behavior in physical activity settings.</p>
STANDARD 6	<p>UNDERSTANDING AND RESPECT FOR INDIVIDUAL DIFFERENCES</p> <p>Demonstrate understanding and respect for differences among people in physical activity settings.</p>
STANDARD 7	<p>PERSONAL MEANING DERIVED FROM PHYSICAL ACTIVITY</p> <p>Understand that physical activities provide opportunities for enjoyment, challenge, self-expression, and social interaction.</p>

SHAPE America’s physical education standards fall in line with those outlined by ICHPER-SD<sup>6</sup>; however, they also define that the goal of physical education is to develop physically literate individuals who have the knowledge, skills and confidence to enjoy a lifetime of healthful physical activity. A physically literate individual is defined as:

- Having learned the skills necessary to participate in a variety of physical activities.
- Knowing the implications and the benefits of involvement in various types of physical activities.
- Participating regularly in physical activity.
- Being physically fit.
- Valuing physical activity and its contributions to a healthful lifestyle.

Visit [Shape America](https://www.shapeamerica.org/standards/default.aspx) for more on their physical education standards.

6 “National Standards,” Shape America, accessed April 8, 2020, <https://www.shapeamerica.org/standards/default.aspx>



# IMPLEMENTING ACTIVITIES IN COMMUNITIES

Around the world, many children learn sports and develop their skills through participation in community sports clubs, sports organizations, and recreation centers. As such, developmental sports can provide a local community program with new and innovative adaptive and inclusive sports programming resources to deliver quality training to children of all abilities. **Additionally, there are many benefits to developing Special Olympics sports programming for children within the community setting, including:**

- **Built-in Structure:** Community sports organizations often have staff, certified coaches, and facilities built into the structure of their organization.
- **Family Engagement:** Parents and family members can be more closely connected with activities by attending or volunteering, which allows them to celebrate in their child's achievements.
- **Community Involvement:** Similarly-aged siblings, friends and other children in the neighborhood can all participate in community-based Unified Sports activities.



## GETTING STARTED CHECKLIST FOR COMMUNITY

- Understand the need for developmental sports in the community. Identify how/where participants will be recruited.
- Develop a timeline for recruiting, organizing and preparing for the activity. It is important to create a structured approach to starting a team, recruiting coaches and volunteers, and finding a location.
- Recruit a head coach, assistant coach, and volunteers who can support the practices in different ways. Coaches and volunteers can be recruited from a variety of locations, i.e., local sports clubs, universities, parks and recreation facilities, Special Olympics events.
- Choose the sport(s) that will be implemented, and times and locations of activities. The sports that are offered can be determined by available space or vice versa. It is important to select a space that is appropriate for the sport of choice.
- Complete the required Special Olympics coaches training. All coaches should contact their local Special Olympics Program to complete the Special Olympics coaches requirements.
- Recruit participants. Contact local special needs organizations, schools, and the local Special Olympics Program to recruit participants.
- Ask interested parents/guardians to complete and submit required participation forms. All forms that are required for participation should be completed prior to the first practice.
- Communicate dates, times and locations for each practice to the families of participating athletes.
- Conduct an orientation meeting to introduce developmental sports to parents and family members. Address all questions, concerns and instructions for participation in developmental sports.
- Be sure that everyone understands the goals and objectives for participation.
- After connecting with the local Special Olympics office, begin practices. Have fun!

## INCLUSION

Developmental sports activities in schools and communities support Unified Sports implementation with age-appropriate inclusive sports skills practice. Community developmental sports can be inclusive through the participation of siblings and children without intellectual disabilities. In the Sports Adaptations section of this guide, there are suggestions on how to create an inclusive environment during sports practices. This information should be reviewed prior to the first practice.

## COACHES AND VOLUNTEERS

Coaches and volunteers are the backbone of the Special Olympics movement. Coaches take on the leadership of developmental sports activities by planning and organizing each session. Volunteers support the coaches and athletes by attending the sessions, supporting the coaches' plans, and assisting athletes as they learn new sports skills. Coaches and volunteers may come from many places in the community, and may range from a specialized volunteer to a family member or university student.

Volunteering or coaching can also be offered as a great leadership opportunity for Special Olympics athlete leaders. Interaction with athlete leaders is also valuable for families as this may inspire them about future possibilities for their child.

The number of volunteers and coaches should be a direct reflection of the number of participating children and their ability level. Some athletes may need more hands-on assistance. In addition to one head coach, each practice should have a minimum of one adult for every four children. This can include assistant coaches, volunteers, or athlete leaders. All volunteers and coaches must adhere to their local Special Olympics Program's coaching or volunteer requirements and processes.



PRACTICE STRUCTURE

- Practices should be held at least one time per week. It is important to set a routine with practices scheduled at the same time each week. For many children, establishing a routine helps to provide clear expectations, consistency and comfort.
- Coaches should spend a minimum of six to eight weeks teaching each sport. In a multi-sport structure, between four and five sports can be taught throughout a calendar year. For example, two sessions can be hosted each year, with two sports per session for a total of four sports. A break may be included between sessions.
- Sports practices should last 45-60 minutes to ensure proper time for children to warm up, practice individual and group skills, and cool down. When necessary, the length of practices can be modified to fit the individual needs of each school or participant group.
- Practices should be held in an appropriate indoor or outdoor setting, based on the individual sport.
- Practices may be held in various community spaces including a community center, sport club, university campus, public recreation space, or other appropriate venue.

DEVELOPMENTAL SPORTS ACTIVITIES IN SPORTS CAMPS

Sports camps are a great community-based option for introducing multiple sports skills and help transition children from Special Olympics Young Athletes programming to traditional and Unified sports. After participating in Young Athletes during the year, children may participate in a sports camp where they focus on learning a variety of sports.

**Any sport can be offered; however, the goal is to provide skill development and training in multiple sports.** The camp should be led by trained sports coaches, and can be offered seasonally (spring, summer, winter and fall), or organized regularly throughout the year. Sports camps should function in a similar manner as community programming, but may offer practices more frequently, or engage more children.

EXAMPLE OF DEVELOPMENTAL SPORTS  
IN ACTION

Special Olympics Massachusetts offers developmental sports activities for children by partnering with a local school. The activities are led each week by a group of volunteers from the local high school, which includes some student athletes. High school students were a great fit to lead activities because they knew the sports skills and served as great role models for the younger athletes. The high school volunteers were mentored by Young Athletes leaders, who provided tips and advice on situational awareness, working with younger children and making appropriate modifications.

Sessions began with static stretching and a dynamic warm up, leading into a team cheer. The group of 12 athletes, including youth with and without intellectual disabilities, then split into three rotating stations to practice different sport-specific skills. Each athlete wore a colored nametag, so they would know which group to join. At the stations, athletes had the opportunity to practice the skill three times to progress in their development. For team sports, such as basketball and floor hockey, athletes had the opportunity to scrimmage at the stations so that they could learn what it was like to play the sport against an opponent.



# ENGAGING AND SUPPORTING FAMILIES

## ENGAGING FAMILIES

Families play a critical role in supporting a child's development, and can help ensure children stay connected with Special Olympics throughout their life, whether in school or community programs. **Families can be engaged with activities in a variety of ways:**

- **Initial meeting:** Host an introduction for parents and caregivers at the start of the school year or sports season to provide information about the developmental sports activities, and how to support their child by practicing skill development at home.
- **Newsletters and email:** Use newsletters and email to share activity updates and progress with families.
- **Volunteer opportunities:** Invite family members to support practices by volunteering. This will also support families in their replication of activities at home. Family members can also become involved as coaches by taking the required training courses (refer to Registration and Requirements section).
- **Demonstration event:** At the conclusion of the school year or sport season, plan an inclusive demonstration event. Invite family members to come and see the different sports skills that were learned during practices.
- **Health and fitness:** Families play a vital role in influencing their child's healthy choices, and can support the reinforcement of healthy decision making outside of sports. Encourage families to play an active role in encouraging healthy habits across four components: physical activity, nutrition, hydration and sleep. [The Special Olympics Fit 5 Guide](#) and [Fitness Cards](#) are a great way to educate athletes and families on living a healthy lifestyle. More information can be found in the [Fitness Family Involvement Guide](#).

More tools, resources and information about connecting with parents and families can be found through the [Aspen Institute's Project Play](#) and [iCoachKids](#).

## FAMILY FORUMS

Family Forums provide an opportunity to educate and engage families, while providing access to valuable information, resources and support. Family Forums can be implemented as a stand-alone event, or in conjunction with practice sessions.

### PLANNING A FAMILY FORUM

A Family Forum should occur once per month or once per quarter. Families can gather to hear guest speakers while coaches and volunteers conduct sports practices.

### POTENTIAL TOPICS

A Family Forum should address the questions and concerns of family members. It should also be sensitive to the cultural and religious needs of the community. **Below are some suggestions for relevant Family Forum topics. It is a good idea to meet with family members and get their input before deciding on final topics.**

- Advocating for your child's rights and access to services
- Your child's medical and dental care
- Accessing follow-up care – how to identify the right professional for your child
- School opportunities – what is available for children with intellectual disabilities in the community?
- Nutrition, healthy eating, and cooking demonstrations
- General health topics related to the overall community, such as malaria prevention
- Learning through play
- Healthy sibling relationships
- Promoting independence at an early age
- Supporting children toward engagement in lifelong sports activity
- Understanding Special Olympics sports and competitions
- Your role as a sports parent

## GUEST PRESENTERS

Community partners, university professors or industry experts can present on the Family Forum topics. **For example, a pediatrician could lead a discussion about ways that parents or guardians can work with their child's doctor. A nutritionist can talk about healthy eating.** Alternatively, coaches from traditional and Unified Sports teams for older children and adults can be invited to talk about how they can support athletes transitioning to the next phase of Special Olympics.

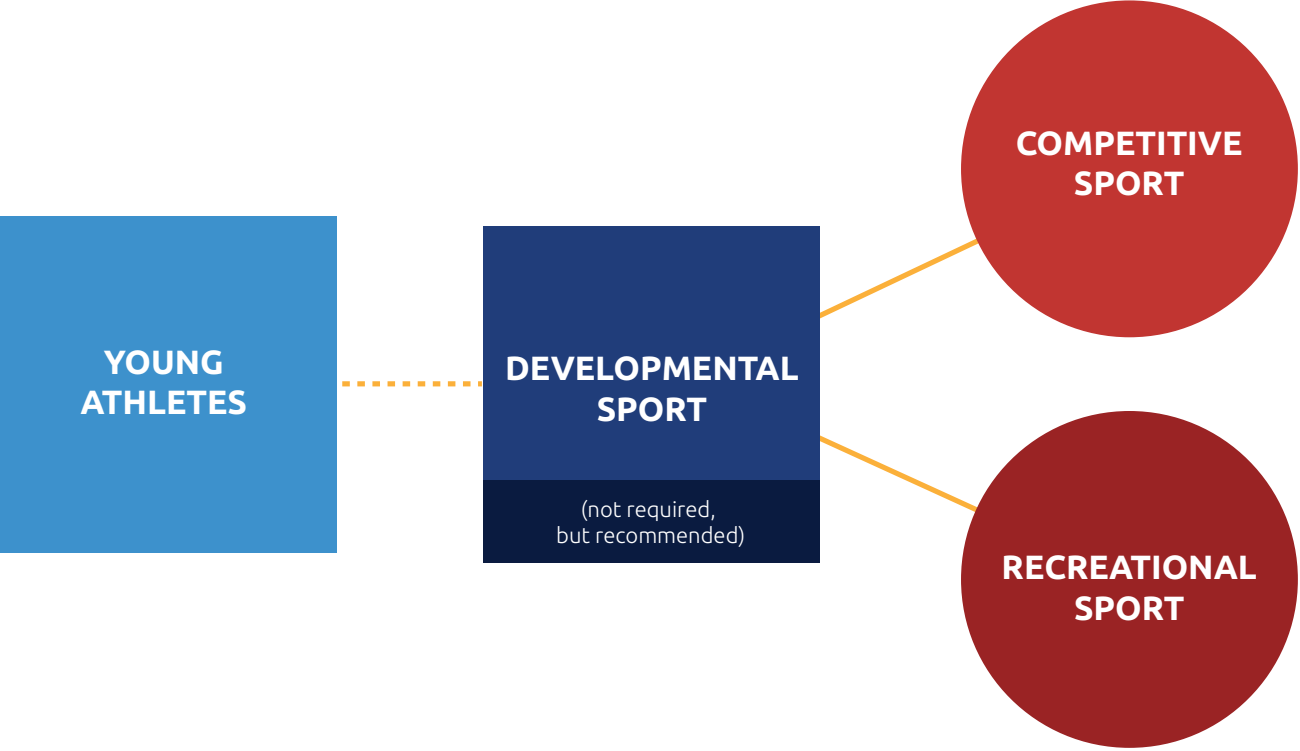


# WHAT COMES AFTER DEVELOPMENTAL SPORTS?

Developmental sports activities offer an opportunity for children to increase their sports skills and understanding before they join a competitive Special Olympics team. If a child is ready to be involved in competitive Special Olympics sports programming, their parent or guardian should contact the local Special Olympics office to learn about opportunities available in their community. Special Olympics developmental sports, coaches also play a role in the transition of a child from developmental sports as they can assist with this process by connecting parents with the local Special Olympics Program.

It is important to recognize that, while developmental sports activities have a defined age of 6-12, the transition from Young Athletes to developmental sports to competitive sports will be unique for each child, and must take into account key factors such as age, physical development, skill development, emotional maturity, available programming, and more. The important thing to remember is that every child has a pathway to a lifetime of participation in Special Olympics. While some children may progress to competitive sports or Unified Sports, others may move into a Special Olympics individual sport skills program, the Special Olympics Motor Activities Training Program, or recreation activities. **Each individualized journey is important and valued.**

## ATHLETE PATHWAY



COACHING ATHLETES WITH INTELLECTUAL DISABILITIES

## COACHING CHILDREN

Coaching children is different than coaching adults. Coaching a child is just as much about adapting, responding and nurturing the individual needs of each child as it is about supporting their sports skill development. Below are tips and techniques for coaching children, including children with disabilities. Additional coaching materials can be found through [iCoachKids](#) and [Aspen's Project Play](#).

### USING POSITIVE COACHING TECHNIQUES

Consider the following points, from the iCoachKids Pledge, to create positive sports experiences for children through quality coaching practices:<sup>6</sup>

#### BE CHILD-CENTERED

Always have the best interest of children at heart, and listen to them. It is about what children want and what they need, not about the adults!

#### BE HOLISTIC

Develop children as people first and foremost, not only as athletes. Aim to develop their psychosocial skills and capabilities, not just their physical ones.

#### BE INCLUSIVE

Cater to all levels of abilities and motivations. Coaching is far from a one-size-fits-all endeavor. Coaches should get to know the children they are coaching, and should dare to coach them differently.

#### MAKE IT FUN AND SAFE

Children want to have fun, and to learn, they need to feel safe. Build positive relationships, and enjoyable and caring climates that allow children to thrive, and that keep them coming back.

#### PRIORITIZE THE LOVE FOR SPORT ABOVE LEARNING SPORT

A very small proportion of children will become elite athletes, yet all of them have the potential to become healthy active adults. Creating that fantastic legacy is part of a coach's job. Remember, children are not mini-adults!

#### FOCUS ON FOUNDATIONAL SKILLS

Do not be overly concerned with the specific skills of a sport. At a younger age, children need to gain essential motor skills and learn the basics of how to play games. Using generic tactical principles will yield the greatest chance for success.

#### ENGAGE PARENTS POSITIVELY

Parents are not the enemy, but the biggest resource at a coach's disposal. They want the best for their children, and so do the coaches. Partnership is the key word. Talk to parents to know what they can offer.

#### PLAN PROGRESSIVE PROGRAMS

Coaches take their athletes on a learning journey, and need to have a good idea of the destination point, with short-, mid- and long-term goals and plans that will help the children get there. Coaches should not take a peak-by-Saturday approach, nor should they improvise a session off the cuff. Failing to plan is planning to fail!

#### USE DIFFERENT METHODS TO ENHANCE LEARNING

Learning is a complex process and it doesn't happen overnight. Different coaching and teaching strategies can serve different purposes at different stages of learning and development. They can complement each other, and can help to achieve the desired results.

#### USE COMPETITION IN A DEVELOPMENTAL WAY

There is nothing wrong with competition. When the format and atmosphere around competition are built around the developmental stage of the athletes, and are considerate of their needs, competition is an amazing motivator and a lot of fun. A win-at-all-cost mentality can really spoil the party though.

<sup>6</sup> "The iCoachKids Pledge: 10 Guidance Points to Create Positive Sport Experiences for Kids," iCoachKids, accessed April 7, 2020, <https://www.icoachkids.eu/ick-pledge.html>.



# DEFINITION OF SPORTS ADAPTATIONS

According to the American Association on Intellectual and Developmental Disabilities (AAIDD), intellectual disability is characterized by significant limitations both in intellectual functioning (reasoning, learning, problem solving) and adaptive behavior, which can cover a range of everyday social and practical skills. These disabilities originate before age 18.

**When coaching athletes with intellectual disabilities, it is important to keep an open mind about the wide range of abilities.** Some athletes may also have a physical disability, a profound cognitive disability, or multiple disabilities. With such a vast difference in abilities, coaches may be unsure of the best coaching methods, but should not become discouraged. Some athletes need more considerations and adaptations to participate. Coaches should progress slowly, getting to know the athletes, and always considering safety first. Efforts should be made to adapt different skills or offer alternative activities for different athletes. This can include adjusting equipment, trying different equipment, or instructing in a different way. It may take several attempts to determine an activity in which an athlete can meaningfully participate, but being able to provide sport skill or movement opportunities can have a positive effect on an athlete and their family. This section will provide a broad overview about intellectual disabilities, and a general introduction to sport-specific adaptations. These resources can be used in conjunction with sports curricula from Special Olympics federation partners to ensure meaningful participation for all athletes.

## A NOTE ON PEOPLE-FIRST LANGUAGE

Communicating respectfully with and about athletes is the first step in gaining their trust and creating a mutually respectful team. Using people-first language means putting the athlete first, and leaving the disability behind. **For example, an athlete should be referred to as a person with an intellectual disability rather than an intellectually disabled person.** Athletes should not be labeled in any negative way. It is OK to respectfully ask an athlete questions about their disability. When in doubt, coaches should ask an athlete if and how they prefer to talk about the disability. It is important to understand the athletes fully, and understanding their disability is part of that.

## SPORTS ADAPTATIONS

Adaptations are ways in which the environment, equipment, and other aspects of participation can be changed to help an athlete be successful in sports practice. When making adaptations, it is important to look at the individual abilities of each athlete, both physical and cognitive. If an athlete has limited physical mobility, then the coach may need to adjust equipment or distance. If an athlete has low cognitive function, then it may be important to adapt communication styles and rules.

### ADAPTATIONS WILL BE UNIQUE FOR EACH ATHLETE; THERE IS NOT A ONE-SIZE-FITS-ALL APPROACH.

While adaptations are meant to be used as a tool to help an athlete progress, there are some basic principles for determining which adaptations are appropriate:

- **Adaptations can be temporary or long term.** Some athletes will only need adaptations as they learn new skills, while others may need more long-term modifications to meaningfully participate.
- **Be flexible and individualized.** Adaptation may work immediately for some, but not at all for others. Focus on helping each athlete find the right method of play that works best for them.
- **Be goal oriented.** Regardless of the adaptation, focus the athlete's attention on the outcome of the action, like making a goal.
- **Don't be afraid to ask questions.** Talk to the athlete, their family, or their teachers to learn more about their learning style and what might work best for them.
- **Use the minimal adaptations necessary to allow an athlete to participate.**
- **Attempt to decrease adaptations over time.**

#### IMPORTANT NOTE ON ADAPTATIONS IN DEVELOPMENTAL SPORTS:

**Adaptations in developmental sports increase sports skill development for athletes ages 6-12.** These adaptations are meant to be used in practice sessions for developmental sports and are not likely to be used once an athlete moves on to competitive Special Olympics participation.

## IDEAS FOR COACHING ATHLETES WITH PROFOUND OR MULTIPLE DISABILITIES:



Reference Young Athletes resources.



Make adaptations to stations or equipment to allow participation.



Create an alternative for stations or group games.

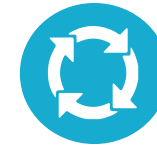


Respect limitations, and assist athletes after getting to know them and their abilities





## TIPS FOR SUPPORTING ATHLETES WITH AUTISM:



Use a lot of **repetition** for each skill taught.



**Prepare the athlete** as much as possible for what they will experience during practice or competition.



The athlete should have a **clear understanding** of the objective of the event, and what they are being asked to do before performing a task. They should have opportunities for skill practice.



The athlete needs to have an opportunity to **express any anxieties** or ask questions (to the best of their ability) ahead of time.



Create a **communication board** or visual support to provide language models throughout the practice or event.



Create a social story or **visual aid** to teach the rules.



If the child is apt to run away, make sure that the practice or event takes place in a **securely enclosed area**. Care should be taken to ensure all children are aware of any boundaries and the need to stay within them.



Waiting may be difficult for children during practice drills, so, when possible, **give them something to do** while they wait.



Use headphones or another **noise-reducing device**. This can filter out much of the extraneous sound that accompanies the practice or event.



Let children know ahead of time when **loud noises** may be expected.

## ADAPTATIONS USING STEP

Adaptations to most sports activities can be made using the STEP principle. Widely used in adapted physical education settings, STEP is defined as the following:

### SPACE

Changing the space where an activity takes place, depending on the activity.

**Example:** Modifying a field of play to be smaller to accommodate athlete needs.

### TASK

Increasing participation through individualization of activities during a sports practice session.

**Example:** Depending on individual needs, allowing athletes to either walk or run while dribbling a ball during basketball practice.

### EQUIPMENT

Changing the equipment used, so that success is increased during sport skills practice and game play.

**Example:** Using a balloon instead of a shuttlecock during badminton practice to increase a player's hand-eye coordination.

### PEOPLE

Changing the number of children in a sports skills practice and game play session to allow a better experience for everyone.

**Example:** Allowing athletes to work alone or in smaller groups. Have athletes and partners work as leaders and followers depending on ability.

## ADAPTATIONS IN UNIFIED SPORTS EXPERIENCES

Developmental sports resources can be used to support Unified Sports activities for children with and without intellectual disabilities. **While this guide provides adaptations for children with intellectual disabilities, the adaptations may be relevant for all children.** When working in an inclusive setting, coaches should focus on creating an environment where all children are valued, recognized and encouraged. No child should be singled out or highlighted as having an intellectual disability. Adaptations can be made easily, while still ensuring a child can participate as part of the broader group. While children are naturally welcoming and inclusive, inclusion may need to be supported through opportunities designed to bring groups together.

### STRATEGIES FOR CREATING AN ATMOSPHERE OF INCLUSION:

- After identifying athletes participating in developmental sports, **consult with their teachers and parents to understand the type of inclusion the child experiences in school and community settings.** This will aid in planning the first practice, and determining the level of "getting to know you" activities needed.
- Prior to the first practice, **share information on Special Olympics and Unified Sports via email.**
- During the first practice, allow children to spend time playing cooperative games and participating in **activities that are not sport related** and allow the children to get to know one another before practicing the sport.
- Throughout practice sessions, continue using **cooperative games** to allow athletes the opportunity to get to know one another better.
- Encourage all athletes to communicate with their teammates using their **first name.**
- **Create opportunities for communication** among athletes before, during, and after practice or competition.  
*Example: Have children share with the team something fun they did since the last practice, or what they are looking forward to doing in practice.*
- **Take the time to recognize specific athletes** for good performance, sportsmanship, and leadership to encourage teammates to do the same.

To effectively offer developmental sports inclusively, a coach may need to learn a little bit more about the background of participating athletes ahead of time. These tips should help to kick off the first practice successfully!

## GENERAL ADAPTATIONS

THE FOLLOWING CAN BE USED IN MOST SPORTS.



### SKILL LEVEL

- Create the opportunity for athletes to participate at different skill levels. Allow athletes to self-select their level of participation with some guidance.
- Modify rules as needed (e.g., allow walking instead of running).



### EQUIPMENT AND ENVIRONMENT

- Change the color or texture of the equipment:  
*Some athletes will be engaged by bright colors or textures that add a unique sensory feel (like a soft velvet or Velcro). Other athletes may be overstimulated by excessive color, texture or patterns.*
- Use of Velcro:  
*This will help athletes who lack good fine motor skills. It can be used during activities that require catching or grasping. Velcro can also be effective when used on targets, as it helps maximize the success of an athlete hitting the target.*
- Larger goals/targets:  
*The use of a larger target or goal makes the target easier to see, and improves accessibility. The use of larger goals/targets can also help maximize athlete success.*
- Mark positions on the playing field:  
*Mark positions so that athletes can visualize where they should stand when playing certain positions.*
- Adjust the position of goals/target (i.e., lower the basketball goal):  
*Positional adjustments improve accessibility for athletes of all ability levels.*
- Decrease size/distance of boundaries:  
*Decreasing size/distance of boundaries maximizes athlete success during participation.*
- Simplify patterns:  
*Simple tasks, patterns and instructions assist an athlete when learning a task or sports skill.*
- Remove obstacles:  
*By removing obstacles, a coach will improve overall accessibility. This may also help to prevent slips, falls, or other mishaps.*
- Provide breaks from noise:  
*This can allow a child to regroup if the stimulation of the group is too intense. If an athlete is given time to regroup, it will allow them to be more successful for the duration of the practice.*

# SPORT SPECIFIC ADAPTATIONS AND RESOURCES

*These documents can be printed off and used during your sports practices for reference.*

## GENERAL ADAPTATIONS



### TIME

- Vary pace and practice time, and include breaks for athletes.
- Practice time should be held the same day and time each week for consistency.
- Slow the pace of an activity.
- Lengthen or shorten the duration of the activity.
- Provide frequent water breaks and rest periods.



### COMMUNICATION

- Use concise simple language.
- Provide simple verbal cues.
- Break activities into small steps.
- Provide continuous feedback.
- Demonstrate activities.
- Provide verbal and non-verbal cues.
- Use the buddy system or small groups.
- Demonstrate/model activities.
- Provide more space between athletes.
- Use a lot of repetition for each skill.
- Vary the purpose or goal of the game. Some athletes may play to learn complex strategies, while others play to work on simple motor skills.
- Vary the number of turns each athlete receives.
- Use a song or movement to indicate when it is time to transition from one activity to another.

- Don't be afraid to use combinations of cues. Playing a bell, for example, might be helpful for children who need an auditory cue. Turning the lights on and off or developing a picture cue for transition time might be effective for a child who needs a visual cue.
- Enhance the verbal cues used to tell children where to go next. Use gestures, pictures or objects for children who need more than just speech.
- Allow many opportunities for repetition and practice.

The purpose of developmental sports activities is to provide a safe, fun and inclusive environment where children can develop sports skills. The best way to assess a child's enjoyment, fears and concerns is to speak with them often; check in with each child frequently during practice. If possible, speak with parents or caregivers to understand their perceptions of the child's experience.



# BADMINTON



Badminton coaching guides and lesson plans can be found by accessing *Shuttle Time*, a teaching resource created by the Badminton World Federation. Download the *Shuttle Time* app or find the resources [here](#).

## GENERAL ADAPTATIONS

- Create a larger target area, or eliminate areas altogether. Points are earned each time the shuttlecock is served over the net.
- Reduce the size of the playing area.
- Allow partners to facilitate meaningful involvement. Have children work with a partner to see how many consecutive clears they can hit during a rally.
- Lower the net, use a line or cones on the floor to represent the net, or do not use a net.
- Stand closer to the net on serve.
- Have the children go through the skill in slow motion, without using a shuttlecock.
- Vary the size of shuttlecocks—use different sizes, weights, colors, or balloons.
- Have a horn, bell, or flashing lights go off to reward athletes for achieving a goal.
- Use a racket with a larger head or a longer handle.



## ADAPTATIONS FOR MOTOR CHALLENGES

- Allow for use of adaptive devices to support a child who uses a wheelchair.
- Allow athletes to sit in a safe area of play while practicing a skill.
- Eliminate serving positions or lines.
- Use a strap-on racket or a lighter racket, depending on strength.

## ADAPTATIONS FOR HEARING IMPAIRMENTS

- When giving instructions, stand closer to a child who has a hearing impairment.
- Before responding to comments or questions raised by others, repeat what is said to make sure all children hear and understand what is being communicated.
- Use hand signals, flags, and lights in addition to verbal cues and whistles. These can be used throughout game play.
- Face the children and make eye contact when speaking. Clearly enunciate speech.
- Prior to speaking, make sure children are paying attention.
- If possible, reduce background noise and other auditory distractions.
- Use visual supplements (predetermined visual signals or signs, whiteboards, or visual charts).

## ADAPTATIONS FOR VISUAL IMPAIRMENTS

- Account for color blindness and use appropriate colored equipment.
- Use brighter boundary lines.
- To prevent injury, remove any unnecessary obstacles.
- Use a beeping shuttlecock or a balloon with a bell in it for easier tracking.
- Use larger and/or softer materials as appropriate.
- Use brightly colored markers and equipment.
- If appropriate, assign a partner for support in group activities.
- Allow time for a child who is visually impaired to explore the site and be comfortable with using the equipment.
- Keep frequently used equipment in the same accessible place.
- Provide children with verbal directions about all parts of the activity. Encourage partners to make noise when a child needs to pass the shuttlecock, or when passing the shuttlecock to the child.
- Call the child's name before passing to them.
- Use lighted equipment to make it more visual.
- If using tactile guidance, ask the child's permission before touching them or moving them.

BASKETBALL





Basketball coaching guides and sport-specific curricula can be found by accessing *Mini Basketball*, a coaching resource created by FIBA and the World Association of Basketball Coaches. Find the resources [here](#).

GENERAL ADAPTATIONS

- Use a hoop with a larger circumference.
- Reduce the size of the playing area.
- Allow partners to facilitate meaningful involvement.
- Allow traveling or two-handed dribbling.
- Slow the pace, especially when children are first learning the sport.
- Use a lower hoop.
- Vary the types of balls used (different sizes, weights, textures, colors, or beeper balls).
- Have a horn, bell, or flashing lights go off to reward athletes for achieving a goal.

ADAPTATIONS FOR MOTOR CHALLENGES

- Allow for use of adaptive devices to support a child who uses a wheelchair.
- Allow athletes to sit in a safe area of play while practicing a skill.
- Allow children to catch by trapping the ball on their lap.
- Focus on balance, range of motion, and repetition of activities.

ADAPTATIONS FOR HEARING IMPAIRMENTS

- When giving instructions, stand closer to a child who has a hearing impairment.
- Before responding to comments or questions raised by others, repeat what is said to make sure all children hear and understand what is being communicated.
- Use hand signals, flags, and lights in addition to verbal cues and whistles. Other visual aids may be used also, such as predetermined signals or signs, whiteboards, or charts. These may be used throughout game play.
- Face the children and make eye contact when speaking. Clearly enunciate speech.
- Prior to speaking, make sure children are paying attention.
- If possible, reduce background noise and other auditory distractions.

ADAPTATIONS FOR VISUAL IMPAIRMENTS

- Account for color blindness and use appropriate colored equipment.
- Use brighter boundary lines.
- To prevent injury, remove any unnecessary obstacles.
- Use a basketball bell or a beeper ball for easier tracking.
- Use larger and/or softer materials as appropriate.
- Use brightly colored markers and equipment.
- If appropriate, assign a partner for support in group activities.
- Allow time for a child who is visually impaired to explore the site and be comfortable with using the equipment.
- Keep frequently used equipment in the same accessible place.
- Provide children with verbal directions about all parts of the activity. Encourage partners to make noise when a child needs to pass the ball, or when passing the ball to the child.
- Use a sound-making device under the basket.
- Call the child's name before passing to them.
- Use a ball-retrieving device.
- Encourage bounce passes since they are easier to track, and are a slower pace.
- Encourage the child to catch the ball with arms extended so that they can feel the ball and bring it in to the body.
- Use lighted equipment to make it more visual.
- If using tactile guidance, ask the child's permission before touching them or moving them.



# FLOORBALL



Floorball coaching guides and sport-specific curricula are available for coaches use from the International Floorball Federation. Find the resources [here](#).

## GENERAL ADAPTATIONS

- Increase the size of the goal.
- Reduce the size of the playing area.
- Allow partners to facilitate meaningful involvement.
- Use cones instead of goals.
- Vary the types of balls used (different sizes, weights, textures, colors, or beeper balls).
- Use a straw broom.
- Do not use goalies.
- Have a horn, bell, or flashing lights go off to reward athletes for achieving a goal.
- Adapt equipment for the size of the athletes participating.

## ADAPTATIONS FOR MOTOR CHALLENGES

- Allow for use of adaptive devices to support an individual who uses a wheelchair.
- Focus on balance, range of motion, and repetition of activities.



## ADAPTATIONS FOR HEARING IMPAIRMENTS

- When giving instructions, stand closer to a child who has a hearing impairment.
- Before responding to comments or questions raised by others, repeat what is said to make sure all children hear and understand what is being communicated.
- Use hand signals, flags, and lights in addition to verbal cues and whistles. Other visual aids may be used also, such as predetermined signals or signs, whiteboards, or charts. These may be used throughout game play.
- Face the children and make eye contact when speaking. Clearly enunciate speech.
- Prior to speaking, make sure children are paying attention.
- If possible, reduce background noise and other auditory distractions.

## ADAPTATIONS FOR VISUAL IMPAIRMENTS

- Account for color blindness and use appropriate colored equipment.
- Use brighter boundary lines.
- To prevent injury, remove any unnecessary obstacles.
- Use a beeper ball or ball with bells for easier tracking.
- Use larger and/or softer materials as appropriate.
- Use brightly colored markers and equipment.
- If appropriate, assign a partner for support in group activities.
- Allow time for a child who is visually impaired to explore the site and be comfortable with using the equipment.
- Keep frequently used equipment in the same accessible place.
- Provide children with verbal directions about all parts of the activity. Encourage partners to make noise when a child needs to pass the ball, or when passing the ball to the child.
- Use a target that makes noise when hit.
- Call the child's name before passing to them.
- Use lighted equipment to make it more visual
- If using tactile guidance, ask the child's permission before touching them or moving them.

# FOOTBALL



Football coaching guides and sport-specific curricula have been collected from the Union of European Football Associations. Find the resources [here](#).

## GENERAL ADAPTATIONS

- Reduce the size of the goal.
- Reduce the size of the playing area.
- Allow partners to facilitate meaningful involvement.
- Vary the types of balls used (different sizes, weights, textures, colors, or beeper balls).
- Utilize a deflated soccer ball.
- Do not use goalies.
- Have a horn, bell, or flashing lights go off to reward athletes for achieving a goal.



## ADAPTATIONS FOR MOTOR CHALLENGES

- Allow for use of adaptive devices to support a child who uses a wheelchair
- Practice sports indoors or on dirt ground for easier maneuvering (avoid grass).
- Slow the pace of the game for children who use assistive devices to walk (i.e. gait-trainers, walkers, etc.).
- Focus on balance, range of motion, and repetition of activities.

## ADAPTATIONS FOR HEARING IMPAIRMENTS

- When giving instructions, stand closer to a child who has a hearing impairment.
- Before responding to comments or questions raised by others, repeat what is said to make sure all children hear and understand what is being communicated.
- Use hand signals, flags, and lights in addition to verbal cues and whistles. Other visual aids may be used also, such as predetermined signals or signs, whiteboards, or charts. These may be used throughout game play.
- Face the children and make eye contact when speaking. Clearly enunciate speech.
- Prior to speaking, make sure children are paying attention.
- If possible, reduce background noise and other auditory distractions.

## ADAPTATIONS FOR VISUAL IMPAIRMENTS

- Account for color blindness and use appropriate colored equipment.
- Use brighter boundary lines.
- To prevent injury, remove any unnecessary obstacles.
- Use a beeper ball or ball with bells for easier tracking.
- Use larger and/or softer materials as appropriate.
- Use brightly colored markers and equipment.
- If appropriate, assign a partner for support in group activities.
- Allow time for a child who is visually impaired to explore the site and be comfortable with using the equipment.
- Keep frequently used equipment in the same accessible place.
- Provide children with verbal directions about all parts of the activity. Encourage partners to make noise when a child needs to pass the ball, or when passing the ball to the child.
- Use a target that makes noise when hit.
- Call the child's name before passing to them.
- Use lighted equipment to make it more visual.
- If using tactile guidance, ask the child's permission before touching them or moving them.

# SWIMMING



Swimming coaching guides and sport-specific curricula have been collected from the Michael Phelps Foundation. Find the resources [here](#).

## GENERAL ADAPTATIONS

- Increase child's level of comfort with water slowly over time
  - Have the child sit by the edge of the pool.
  - Use a sponge or water bottle to gently wet the child's arms and legs.
  - If the child accepts this, wet their back and stomach.
  - If the child accepts this, carefully wet their face.
- If the child accepts this, prepare them to enter the water, feet first, with verbal, visual or tactile cues. Make it very clear to the child that they are entering the pool, feet first.
- Gently lower the child so that their feet enter the water first.
  - If the child accepts this, gently and gradually lower the child into the pool.
  - Encourage the child to relax and enjoy the water.
  - For the first few times, keep the amount of time spent in the water brief (5-10 minutes).
  - If a flotation aid is used, the coach should be familiar with how the device works and how to use and remove it safely.
  - Gradually increase the time the athlete spends in the water.
  - Repeat the adjustment activities as needed.
  - Use a variety of flotation devices and kickboards as needed.
  - Use parallel bars in the pool as needed.
  - Use peers to model pool walking and floating and to serve as assistants.
  - Maintain a minimum of one coach for every athlete in the water.
  - Allow the athlete to rest frequently during training sessions if needed.
  - Use ear plugs and webbed swimming gloves if needed.



## ADAPTATIONS FOR MOTOR CHALLENGES

- Partially or totally assist an athlete in the water as needed.

## ADAPTATIONS FOR HEARING IMPAIRMENTS

- When giving instructions, move closer to a child who has a hearing impairment.
- Before responding to comments or questions raised by others, repeat what is said to make sure all children hear and understand what is being communicated.
- Use hand signals, flags, and lights in addition to verbal cues and whistles.
- Face the child and make eye contact when speaking. Clearly enunciate speech.
- Prior to speaking, make sure the child is paying attention.
- If possible, reduce background noise and other auditory distractions.

## ADAPTATIONS FOR VISUAL IMPAIRMENTS

- Account for color blindness and use appropriate colored equipment.
- Use brightly colored flotation devices or swim ropes for lane markers.
- Place a brightly colored marker such as a beach towel, or an audio device such as a radio or beeping transmitter, at the end of the lane to help with turns and orientation to the pool.
- If appropriate, assign a partner for support in group activities.
- Allow time for a child who is visually impaired to explore the site and be comfortable with using the equipment.
- Keep frequently used equipment in the same accessible place.
- Provide children with verbal directions about all parts of the activity.
- If asking the child to swim to a certain point, a coach or partner may place themselves at that point and offer words of encouragement, acting as a voice guide, rather than just giving directions.
- If using tactile guidance, ask the child's permission before touching them or moving them.

# TENNIS



Tennis coaching guides and sport-specific curricula have been collected from the International Tennis Federation. Find the resources [here](#).

## GENERAL ADAPTATIONS

- Allow any type of serve (hit off tee, bounce serve, overhead serve).
- Reduce the size of the playing area.
- Allow partners to facilitate meaningful involvement.
- Allow the ball to bounce more than once before hitting.
- Lower the net, use a line or cones on the floor to represent the net, or do not use a net.
- Stand closer to the net on serve.
- Vary the types of balls used (different sizes, weights, textures, colors, beeper balls or balloons).
- Have a horn, bell, or flashing lights go off to reward athletes for achieving a goal.
- Use rackets with a larger face
- Allow more than one try when serving.



## ADAPTATIONS FOR VISUAL IMPAIRMENTS

- Account for color blindness and use appropriate colored equipment.
- Use brighter boundary lines.
- To prevent injury, remove any unnecessary obstacles.
- [Use a beeper ball or ball with bells for easier tracking.](#)
- Use larger and/or softer materials as appropriate.
- Use brightly colored markers and equipment.
- If appropriate, assign a partner for support in group activities.
- Allow time for a child who is visually impaired to explore the site and be comfortable with using the equipment.
- Keep frequently used equipment in the same accessible place.
- Provide children with verbal directions about all parts of the activity. Encourage partners to make noise when a child needs to pass the ball, or when passing the ball to the child.
- Use a target that makes noise when hit.
- Call the child's name before passing to them.
- Use lighted equipment to make it more visual.
- If using tactile guidance, ask the child's permission before touching them or moving them.

## ADAPTATIONS FOR HEARING IMPAIRMENTS

- When giving instructions, stand closer to a child who has a hearing impairment.
- Before responding to comments or questions raised by others, repeat what is said to make sure all children hear and understand what is being communicated.
- Use hand signals, flags, and lights in addition to verbal cues and whistles. Other visual aids may be used also, such as predetermined signals or signs, whiteboards, or charts. These may be used throughout game play.
- Face the children and make eye contact when speaking. Clearly enunciate speech.
- Prior to speaking, make sure children are paying attention.
- If possible, reduce background noise and other auditory distractions.

## ADAPTATIONS FOR MOTOR CHALLENGES

- Allow for use of adaptive devices to support a child who uses a wheelchair.
- Use a strap-on racket or a lighter racket depending on strength.
- Focus on balance, range of motion, and repetition of activities.

# VOLLEYBALL



Volleyball coaching guides and sport-specific curricula have been collected from Confédération Européenne de Volleyball (CEV): *Mini Volleyball*. Find the resources [here](#).

## GENERAL ADAPTATIONS

- Allow any type of serve (hit off tee, bounce serve, overhead serve).
- Reduce the size of playing area.
- Allow partners to facilitate meaningful involvement.
- Allow the ball to bounce more than once before hitting.
- Lower the net, use a line or cones on the floor to represent the net, or do not use a net.
- Stand closer to the net on serve.
- Allow players to catch the ball instead of volleying.
- Vary the types of balls used (different sizes, weights, textures, colors, beeper balls or balloons).
- Have a horn, bell, or flashing lights go off to reward athletes for achieving a goal.
- Allow more than one try when serving.
- Allow an unlimited number of hits.



## ADAPTATIONS FOR MOTOR CHALLENGES

- Allow for use of adaptive devices to support a child who uses a wheelchair.
- Allow athletes to sit in a safe area of play while practicing a skill.
- Focus on balance, range of motion, and repetition of activities.

## ADAPTATIONS FOR HEARING IMPAIRMENTS

- When giving instructions, stand closer to a child who has a hearing impairment.
- Before responding to comments or questions raised by others, repeat what is said to make sure all children hear and understand what is being communicated.
- Use hand signals, flags, and lights in addition to verbal cues and whistles. Other visual aids may be used also, such as predetermined signals or signs, whiteboards, or charts. These may be used throughout game play.
- Face the children and make eye contact when speaking. Clearly enunciate speech.
- Prior to speaking, make sure children are paying attention.
- If possible, reduce background noise and other auditory distractions.

## ADAPTATIONS FOR VISUAL IMPAIRMENTS

- Account for color blindness and use appropriate colored equipment.
- Use brighter boundary lines.
- To prevent injury, remove any unnecessary obstacles.
- [Use a beeper ball or ball with bells for easier tracking.](#)
- Use larger and/or softer materials as appropriate.
- Use brightly colored markers and equipment.
- If appropriate, assign a partner for support in group activities.
- Allow time for a child who is visually impaired to explore the site and be comfortable with using the equipment.
- Keep frequently used equipment in the same accessible place.
- Provide children with verbal directions about all parts of the activity. Encourage partners to make noise when a child needs to pass the ball, or when passing the ball to the child.
- Use a target that makes noise when hit.
- Call the child's name before passing to them.
- Use lighted equipment to make it more visual.
- If using tactile guidance, ask the child's permission before touching them or moving them.

# SAMPLE SPORT LESSON PLAN

## BASKETBALL

DURATION

45 minutes

SKILL FOCUS

Dribbling

The following is an example of a lesson plan that can be built using the outlined practice plan structure, coupled with the [International Basketball Federation's \(FIBA\) Mini Basketball activity guide](#).

### ATHLETE WELCOME: 5 min

Each practice, allow time for athletes to greet and welcome one another. Encourage them to share one thing they did since the last practice.

### WARM-UP: 5 min

Each movement should be done to half court and back. Activities should be adapted to the needs of the athletes.

- **Jog:** Call out an animal and have the athletes run as that animal up and down the court.
- **Skip:** Have the athletes work as partners skipping up and down the court together.
- **High Knees:** Split the team into groups, and have them cheer each other on during this exercise.
- **Walking Quad Stretch, Torso Twists (10 times standing), Arm Circles (10 times):** Select an athlete to lead the team in stretches.

### SKILLS: 20 min

#### Dribbling

##### Music Dribble (5 minutes)

- Athletes walk or run, dribbling the ball in the middle of the court while music is playing.
- When the music stops, each athlete must stop. When the music starts up again, athletes should continue dribbling while the music is playing.
- Athletes may dribble with one hand or two (players with more advanced skills should be encouraged to dribble using only one hand).

##### Dribble Tag (10 minutes)

- Designate three or four players to be taggers.
- Taggers must dribble around the court, chasing other players, and try to tag them.
- Proceed for a set amount of time to determine how many tags they get, or have players that are tagged stand still, moving again only if another player runs between their legs.
- Proceed until all players dribbling!

### GROUP ACTIVITY: 10 min

#### The Four Corners Game

- Have four players each hold a ball and stand in a corner of the half court. One player should stand in the middle.
- When the coach says, "Go," the players in the corners must sprint dribble to the next corner (the coach determines whether they move clockwise or counter-clockwise).
- The objective of the player in the middle is to get to one corner before the other player does.
- If the player is successful, they will occupy the corner and the other player must move into the middle.

### COOLDOWN : 5 min

- **Slowly Jog:** Call out an animal and have the athletes run as that animal up and down the court.
- **Walk:** Have the athletes walk up and down the court in slow motion, moving as slowly as they can across the court.
- **Quad Stretch, Hamstring Stretch, Side Stretch:** Select an athlete to lead the team in stretches.
- **Complete the practice by providing each athlete with one thing they did well during the practice.**
- **Finish with team cheer.**

### HEALTH AND FITNESS TIPS

If drills are done in lines, form multiple lines with fewer athletes in each to reduce time waiting for turns. Play small-sided games/scrimmages that increase activity time and maximize ball touches.

## ADDITIONAL RESOURCES

### CYCLING



Strider has collaborated with Special Olympics to provide dynamic learn to ride lessons and curricula with adaptations built into the lessons. For these resources visit [here](#).

### COACHING RESOURCES

Special Olympics offers the following trainings and education to support the growth and development of coaches:

1. [Coaching Special Olympics Athletes](#)
2. [Coaching Special Olympics Unified Sports](#)
3. [Online Learning Portal](#)
  - Young Athletes Coach Course
  - Heads Up Concussions in Youth Sports
  - Sport – Coaching: Level 1 Sport Assistant
  - Sport – Coaching: Level 2 Coaching Assistant
  - Unified Sports Coaching Course
4. [Unified Champion Schools Elementary Playbook](#)

### SPECIAL OLYMPICS HEALTH AND FITNESS RESOURCES

For Special Olympics athletes to be fit, practicing healthy habits must be a year-round, lifelong endeavor. Fitness programming empowers athletes, with the support of their caregivers, to take charge of their own health and fitness using available education, social support, fitness opportunities, and progress tracking.

To access Special Olympics health and fitness resources, visit [Special Olympics Health and Fitness Resources](#).



For a complete list of resources, visit our [Special Olympics Developmental Sports resources](#) page.