

# Inclusive Healthy Lifestyle Groups in Schools

## – School and Teacher/Coach Handbook –

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# Inclusive Healthy Lifestyle Groups in Schools

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## 1 Introducing Healthy Lifestyle Groups in Schools (IHLGiS)

### 1.1 Why: Physical and emotional well-being of youth is important

Health has a substantial impact on the quality of life of people with and without intellectual disabilities (ID). It affects Special Olympics (SO) athletes'<sup>1</sup> like Unified partners'<sup>2</sup> ability to train and compete in sports. A Healthy Lifestyle education enables the state of optimal health and performance through adequate physical activity, nutrition, and hydration. It is currently of crucial importance that young people get the opportunity to learn about living a physically, emotionally, and socially healthy life.

Schools and universities are the perfect platform for introducing a healthy lifestyle to students with and without ID and encouraging healthy habits that can positively impact the students' quality of life. Special Olympics IHLGiS empowers students with and without ID to take action, lead and learn about physical and social-emotional well-being and a healthy lifestyle together.

### 1.2 What: IHLGiS

Inclusive Healthy Lifestyle groups fall under the Unified Sports Recreation model<sup>3</sup> which is an inclusive recreation sports activity for SO athletes and Unified partners.

The Inclusive Healthy Lifestyle Groups in Schools (IHLGiS) was developed by Special Olympics Europe Eurasia as a 3 year project which aligns with the focus areas of the EU "HealthyLifestyle4All" initiative aiming to promote healthy lifestyle in the Union, in particular among children and students with an emphasis on vulnerable groups such as persons with intellectual disabilities (ID). From 2022 – 2025, Special Olympics Estonia, Berlin, Poland, and Hellas will work in their respective countries to reach 100 school, 200 Youth Leaders and 4.000 Students with and without ID through this project.

IHLGiS aim is to provide a fun, social environment that encourages year-round physical activity led by youth with and without ID. The sessions ideally shall happen once a week **(A)** during and after Special Olympics Unified Sports Training or Sport Season, **(B)** during or after schooling hours, **(C)** as virtual activities through social media or other virtual platforms or **(D)** as part of engagement activities for the whole school.

The model of IHLGiS

- IHLGiS follow the Unified Sports® Recreation Model
- IHLGiS must meet at least once per week for a minimum of 8 weeks. (We recommend to encourage youth to continue the IHLGiS for the after the 8 weeks and do activities year-round)

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<sup>1</sup> Special Olympics Unified Sports® athlete is a person with an intellectual disability age 8 years and older who is involved in Special Olympics Unified Sports model (Recreation, Player Development, and/or Competitive) at any level (local, state, national, regional, or world).

<sup>2</sup> A Special Olympics Unified Sports® partner is a person without an intellectual disability age 8 years and older who is involved in Special Olympics Unified Sports model (Recreation, Player Development, and/or Competitive) at any level (local, state, national, regional, or world).

<sup>3</sup> A minimum of 25% of participants in a Unified Sports Recreation group should be individuals with an ID and a minimum of 25% should be individuals without any disabilities. The remaining 50% may be made up of individuals with and without ID.

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- IHLGis activities/ sessions must include a physical activity or fitness component **and** an educational component on a healthy lifestyle topic.
- Youth Leaders are encouraged to develop content for their group sessions, with the help of mentors and the vast educational resources available. Please work together to ensure the potentially necessary adaptation to meaningfully include students of all ability levels in the sessions. The resources available will be introduced in point 4 of this guide.

### 1.3 Who: Youth taking the lead of IHLGis groups

Inclusive Youth Leader teams are youth with and without ID who will collaboratively set up and implement inclusive Healthy Lifestyle Groups for other students with and without ID in their school or university. Youth Leaders are young people aged 14-25 who are trained by SO in standardized Youth Leadership training workshops. These Youth Leader teams make sure all participants meet on a regular base, prepare the IHLGis sessions and raise awareness about areas of a healthy lifestyle: including the aspects of regular health enhancing physical activity, nutrition, hydration, emotional health and social-emotional well-being.

A teacher, coach or local SO Coordinator (= mentor) will support the IHLGis group leaders and provides guidance and education for youth leaders, if help is needed to ensure the standards of this project are met and all exercises are implemented accordingly.

Teachers or Coaches (=mentors) and/or Youth Leaders work together on the IHLGis Youth Leader Session booklet, which can be found in the "IHLGis- toolkit". Support the Youth Leaders to prepare the outline of the sessions before the start of the inclusive healthy lifestyle groups and guide them during the implementation phase for updating the booklet accordingly.

Additionally, inclusive healthy lifestyle groups are great platforms for either inviting trained Health Messengers<sup>4</sup> to lead, guide and advise the inclusive groups on how to perform the physical exercises, or train the group themselves to become Health Messengers, live a healthy lifestyle and cultivate a Strong Mind.

## 2 How to set up Healthy Lifestyle groups in schools or universities

### 2.1 Setting the stage: First steps for Special Olympics Program Consortium Members

For getting started with an Inclusive Healthy Lifestyle Group in a school or University and for joining the EU Project, it is suggested to:

- Contact your SO Program for an initial introduction call to the project
- Contact local SO Program and schools you'd like to engage and introduce the project
- Find and train an adult mentor that is willing to support and supervise the Youth Leaders
- Work with your SO contact person to find and train youths which lead the project as an inclusive Youth Leader team

### 2.2 Getting fit: Start an Inclusive Healthy Lifestyle group – Options for implementation

Whether Youth Leaders choose option A, B, C or D to set up a group, we recommend to encourage or guide Youth Leaders to ensure safety when conducting physical exercises and to ensure topics on social-emotional well-being and healthy lifestyle education are part of the sessions (examples of time tables for each options can be found under 4.9).

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<sup>4</sup> A Health Messenger is an athlete leader in your Program who is trained to lead in the areas of Health and Fitness.

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IHLGiS sessions shall be offered for a minimum of 8 weeks; offering the sessions (school-)year-round group is encouraged.

#### 2.2.1 *Option A: Inclusive Healthy Lifestyle Group during and after Unified Sports Training or Sport Season*

- IHLGiS leaders work with Unified Sports coaches to explore ways of how to include physical activities & educational topics on healthy lifestyle habits into the training schedule; also explore how Youth Leaders can assist the coach.
- The healthy lifestyle and fitness activities can happen during a Unified Sports training (“Warm-up” and “Cool-Down”) as well as pre the sport season or before the preparation phase of competitions

#### 2.2.2 *Option B: Inclusive Healthy Lifestyle Group activities during or after school hours*

- IHLGiS leaders can connect with the PE teacher and ask to include and/or run healthy lifestyle or fitness exercises during PE lessons
- IHLGiS group leaders can set up IHLGiS-based sessions after school, choosing different physical activities according to the ability level of students with and without ID.
- Besides the physical component, IHLGiS group session shall include education around social and emotional well-being, healthy habits, nutrition, hydration stress release, coping strategies etc.

#### 2.2.3 *Option C: Virtual IHLGiS focusing on non-Unified Sports activities*

- Inclusive Healthy Lifestyle group leaders can connect with students via a virtual platform, to do physical activity and healthy lifestyle exercises with everyone at home (For example: Facebook / Instagram live, Zoom...)
- IHLGiS leaders can set up fitness-based sessions, choosing different physical activities according to the ability level of students with and without ID
- The sessions need to be suitable for virtual trainings (For example: High 5 for Fitness, Healthy Habits, Yoga ...)
- Besides the physical component, IHLGiS group sessions shall include education around social and emotional well-being, healthy habits, nutrition, hydration stress release, coping strategies etc.

#### 2.2.4 *Option D: Whole School engagement activities*

- IHLGiS can also be spread out to include and impact the whole school. Educational information and potential nutritional changes to create Healthy Canteens, more active breaks during the school day, healthy lifestyle habits in breaks etc. can be encouraged and presented by the Youth Leaders.

### 2.3 **Awarding achievements: Recognizing efforts of Youth and Athlete Leaders**

We recommend that mentors connect with SO Program staff to award Youth Leaders and Health Messengers for successfully implementing the IHLGiS groups. Certificates can be handed out after IHLGiS run at least 8 weeks. It is recommended though, to offer the group activities ongoing throughout the year (templates of certificates can be found in the “IHLGiS – toolkit”).

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### 3 Objectives of this EU4Health Project and respective collaboration areas

This EU4Health Project has the following outcomes & objectives:

**-5 PROJECT PARTNERS - 4 EU COUNTRIES -  
100 SCHOOLS - 200 YOUTH LEADERS - 4.000 STUDENTS WITH AND WITHOUT ID -**

- Develop and implement accessible, inclusive health promotion, fitness and well-being programs in special schools and institutions adapted to the needs of students with ID led by peer-to-peer groups with and without ID supported by mentors and health experts with focus on healthy nutrition and hydration, regular health enhancing physical activity, mental health and health literacy.
- Include community health services, families, local education establishments and other organizations to support inclusive and healthy school environment and improve awareness of healthy lifestyle needs of persons with ID.
- Promote and raise awareness about the project activities in conjunction with the European Week of Sport, Special Olympics Events and other EU health initiatives.
- Evaluation of project activities with focus on health outcomes of the participants. Disseminate project outcomes, best practices and results through social media, conferences and publications to key stakeholders and decision makers.

Teachers, Coaches, Youth Leaders, Health Messengers, IHLGiS participants, Schools, Special Olympics Programs will moreover collaborate with Healthy Athletes Clinical Directors to participate in free health screenings and education in the Strong Minds, Health Promotion and FUNfitness discipline. Furthermore parents and caregivers shall be included and invited to Special Olympics led Family Health Forums, where the Youth Leaders can present their projects and all participants get educated on physical and mental healthy lifestyle habits and the importance of modelling healthy behavior.

The National Kapodistrian University of Athens, which is also a consortium member of this project, is responsible for the scientific evaluation of this project. If requested, please support them with data collection.

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### 4 IHLGiS Resources

This last section of the School & Teacher/Coach Handbook contains a short description of available resources to support mentors and youths to implement Inclusive Healthy Lifestyle Groups in Schools. All resources in this appendix can be accessed by scanning the respective QR-codes or downloading it from the “IHLGiS – Toolkit”.

#### 4.1 Fit5



Fit 5 is a Special Olympics Resource package, consisting of a guide, cards and videos. It is based on the three simple goals of exercising 5 days per week, eating 5 total fruits and vegetables per day and drinking 5 big glasses of water per day. We recommend that mentors, youth leaders and Health Messengers familiarize themselves with the Fit5 materials and its usage. These existing tools are very useful to incorporate into any IHLGiS session, for example as a warm-up part during a Unified Sports training.

<https://resources.specialolympics.org/health/fitness/fit-5-page>

*Recommendation: If your IHLGiS uses the Fit 5 guide as core resource for the physical activity and education sessions, individuals can track their progress via the “Weekly Exercise, Nutrition and Hydration tracking” tool and the group’s overall outcomes can be documented via the “Optional – Fit 5 tracking tool”. Both resources are located in the “IHLGiS – toolkit”.*

#### 4.2 High 5 for Fitness



High 5 for Fitness is a set of resources (guide, cards, videos) for youth ages 8 – 21 to help you take control of your own fitness by making healthy choices. Being fit means that you eat well, drink plenty of water, and move a lot every day. Fit kids feel good and have lots of energy because their bodies are strong and healthy. A guide for educators and caregivers to use High 5.

<https://resources.specialolympics.org/health/fitness/high-5?locale=en>

#### 4.3 Strong Minds Activity Cards



Strong Minds is a Healthy Athlete discipline that focusses on teaching adaptive coping skills and active strategies for maintaining emotional wellness. It is important that IHLGiS discuss the importance of strong minds in sport and daily life together.

See “Strong Minds Activity Cards” on:

[Strong-Minds-YA-Activity-Cards-08-2020.pdf \(specialolympics.org\)](https://resources.specialolympics.org/strong-minds-ya-activity-cards-08-2020.pdf)

#### 4.4 Health Messenger Training



This site leads you to the Health Messenger training resources from Special Olympics. Health Messenger training is a 8 h training for Athletes (and Youth Leaders) to learn about Special Olympics Health Programming and their role as Health Messenger, Health disparities of people with intellectual disabilities, Physical Activity, Nutrition, Emotional health, Communications and Advocacy. There are ready resources and presentations for all topics.

<https://resources.specialolympics.org/health/health-messenger?locale=en>

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#### 4.5 Health Promotion Education Posters



The Health Promotion Education Posters contain information on healthy Nutrition, Hydration, Sun Safety, Physical Activity, Strong Bones and Handwashing.

[HP Education Posters for Social Media \(PPTX\)](#)

#### 4.6 Alle machen mit!



Special Olympics Germany has launched an inclusive project called "Everyone join in!" As part of the Unified Generation program, it is one of the largest sustainability projects of the Special Olympics World Games Berlin 2023. The guide is a comprehensive tool enabling schools to learn about Special Olympics and Unified Sport while practically providing session plans in Unified Sport.

[https://specialolympics.de/fileadmin/Mitmachen/Fuer\\_Schulen/1\\_Alle\\_machen\\_mit.pdf](https://specialolympics.de/fileadmin/Mitmachen/Fuer_Schulen/1_Alle_machen_mit.pdf)

#### 4.7 SONA Unified Fitness Kit Cards



SONA has created Unified Fitness Kit Cards as resource for SO's Unified Champion Schools programming. Check out the different activities and pictures as additional inspiration for the Youth Leaders to run Fitness Classes.

[Special-Olympics-Unified-Fitness-Kits-and-Cards.pdf \(specialolympics.org\)](#)

#### 4.8 Healthy lifestyle tips



Building positive, healthy habits is one of the most powerful tools youth and athletes can use to be happy and productive in all parts of their lives. Each session should contain a short part to talk about healthy lifestyle habits and a reflection on how to maintain or establish these habits into the daily life.

See "Building Positive Healthy Habits" on:

<https://lmy.de/tBfbKYAR>

#### 4.9 Timetables of session examples

Depending how your Inclusive Healthy Lifestyle group is set up, you will have a slightly different time table. Please see below two examples and a recommendation of the session breakdown.

**Option A: 60min** (time shall be adjusted according to the schooling hours or training hours)

TIME	SESSION PART	EXAMPLE	LEAD
10 min	Warm Up	Sport specific warm up + any additional suitable Fit5 exercise	Youth Leaders/ Health Messengers
40 min	Main Part	Unified Sports training part: any individual <sup>5</sup> or team sport <sup>6</sup> discipline	Coach with assistance from Youth Leaders

<sup>5</sup> The following is a selection of typical individual and double sports in the schools Unified athletics, Unified badminton, Unified bocce, Unified bowling, Unified table tennis, Unified tennis

<sup>6</sup> The following is a selection of typical team sports: Unified basketball, Unified floorball, Unified football, Unified handball, Unified volleyball and Unified beach volleyball

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5 min	Cool Down	Sport specific cool down + any additional suitable Fit5 exercise	Youth Leaders/ Health Messengers
5 min	Healthy Lifestyle chat	Discussion on new topic around social-emotional well-being or healthy lifestyle (e.g., the importance of drinking enough water, ...)	Youth Leaders/ Health Messengers

**Option B and/or C: 45min** (time shall be adjusted according to the schooling hours)

TIME	SESSION PART	EXAMPLE	LEAD
5 min	Warm Up	Any additional suitable Fit5 exercise	Youth Leaders/ Health Messengers
30 min	Main Part	Unified Physical activity/IHLGiS during or after (PE) lesson/schooling hours. (e.g. High5for Fitness, Walking, Yoga, ...)	Youth Leaders/ Health Messengers with support from mentor
5 min	Cool Down	Any additional suitable Fit5 exercise	Youth Leaders/ Health Messengers
5 min	Healthy Lifestyle chat	Discussion on new topic around social-emotional well-being or healthy lifestyle (e.g. Strong Mind strategies on coping with stress, ...)	Youth Leaders/ Health Messengers

#### 4.10 Link to additional resources



If you interested in learning more around Sport, Leadership, Health and Fitness register on the Special Olympics portal for free online learning courses.

<https://learn.specialolympics.org/>

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