



Special Olympics
Texas

FAMILIES INFORMATION





DEAR FAMILY MEMBERS,

Welcome! Special Olympics Texas (SOTX) is excited to have you involved in the Special Olympics movement. Your energy, enthusiasm, and dedication are crucial to the success and the fulfillment of dreams for many Special Olympics athletes across our state. It is our hope that you will feel welcome and become involved as supporters, cheerleaders, volunteers, committee members, coaches, and in all other components of the program.

Our focus is on the athlete, ensuring that each athlete participates in the movement at a level that is both meaningful and challenging. We know that family members are often the greatest supporters of athletes, and are essential to having a successful program. We welcome you and encourage you to make a difference in the life of your family member involved in our program, as well as the countless others who benefit from their involvement with Special Olympics Texas.

If you have any questions or would like additional information, please contact the Director of Outreach and Families at 512.491.2958 or via email at dir_familyoutr.chp@sotx.org.

Sincerely,
State Families Committee
Special Olympics Texas



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.

WHAT IS SPECIAL OLYMPICS?

Special Olympics is a world-wide movement that provides year-round sports training and competition opportunities for children and adults with intellectual disabilities.

Special Olympics began in 1968 when Eunice Kennedy Shriver organized the first International Special Olympics Games at Soldier Field in Chicago. The idea began in the early 1960s when Mrs. Shriver started a day camp for people with intellectual disabilities. She saw that people with intellectual disabilities were far more capable in sports and physical activities than many experts thought. Since 1968, millions of children and adults have participated in Special Olympics.

Special Olympics is based on the belief that people with intellectual disabilities can enjoy a better quality of life through participation in individual and team sports.

Regular training, which includes physical conditioning, nutrition and wellness activities, is important to the development of sports skills. Competition among athletes of the same ability level is a great way to test those skills, measure progress and provide encouragement for personal growth.

Through sports training and competition, people with intellectual disabilities benefit physically, mentally and socially. Families and communities are strengthened through their participation and involvement. Special Olympics creates a program where people with intellectual disabilities can practice and compete in an environment of equality, respect and acceptance.

HOW IS THE ORGANIZATION STRUCTURED?

Around the world there are accredited Special Olympics programs in more than 180 countries. Special Olympics programs are continually being developed around the world. The global organization is divided into six regions that are each supported by regional offices that work with Special Olympics, Inc. The offices for Special Olympics, Inc. are located in Washington, D.C. and are governed by a Board of Directors.

In the United States, Special Olympics chapters are established in all 50 states, the District of Columbia, Guam, the Virgin Islands and American Samoa. About 25,000 communities in the United States have Special Olympics programs.

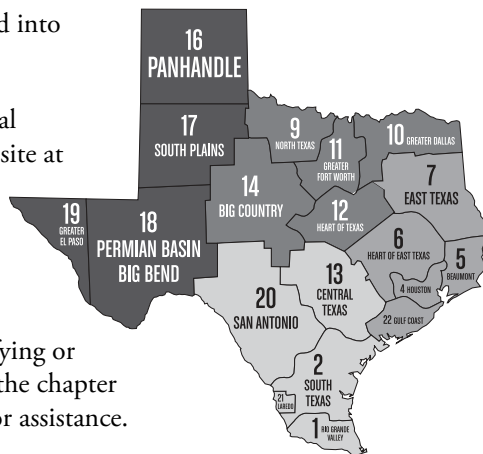
Texas is part of the North American region, and is an accredited program. A Board of Directors governs Special Olympics Texas. The Board of Directors sets policy for the organization, and staff and volunteers are responsible for operating the program. Within Texas, the state is divided into 19 area programs. Each area runs local competitions and events for the athletes in that area. In addition to local and area competitions, Texas holds three chapter (statewide) competitions each year: Summer Games, Fall Classic and Winter Games.

HOW DO I CONTACT MY LOCAL SOTX OFFICE?

Special Olympics Texas is divided into four regions with 19 area offices.

The best way to contact your local SOTX office is to check our website at www.specialolympicstexas.org and go to SOTX Area Offices for the most up-to-date area information.

If you have any problems identifying or contacting your area, please call the chapter headquarters at 800.876.5646 for assistance.



WHY BE INVOLVED WITH SOTX?

Involvement in sporting teams and activities is a favorite past time for millions of people across the world. Special Olympics athletes and their family members enjoy an opportunity for athletes to participate in a sports environment that encourages individuals to reach their personal best and to feel like winners!

Some of these benefits of participation are:

- Promotes positive self-esteem and self-confidence.
- Encourages a healthy, active lifestyle.
- Provides opportunities for social interaction and social skills development. Teaches responsibility and self-discipline.
- Gives athletes opportunities to develop life skills and travel. Provides inclusive activities for athletes to interact with their friends and family members through Unified Sports™.
- Develops employment skills through involvement and teamwork.
- Provides opportunities to make new friends and have a lot of fun playing, competing and socializing.

For family members of athletes, there are also many benefits including:

- Social interaction and support networks with other families who can relate to issues you face.
- Opportunities to see your athlete excel in a sport and as a person.
- Unified Sports™ provides opportunities for family members to participate with their Special Olympics athlete.
- Opportunities to get more involved and impact the lives of other athletes and family members.
- Chances to get involved in community activities.
- Participating in sports provides your family with endless opportunities for fun and recreation.
- Resources for service and support.
- Area networking directories for family member communication.

ELIGIBILITY

Individuals of all ages and ability levels are welcome to participate in Special Olympics. There are a variety of programs for children and adults. To be eligible to participate as a Special Olympics athlete, the individual must be identified as having intellectual disabilities. They must be at least six years old to practice, eight years old to compete at local competitions and 12 years old to compete at chapter (state) level competitions. Children ages two to seven are eligible to participate in the Young Athletes™ program. Each athlete must have a current medical form signed by a doctor on file to be able to participate in practices or competitions. You can call your area director or the state office to get a medical form.

Definition of Intellectual Disabilities

In the context of Special Olympics, the term “intellectual disabilities” is a synonym for mental retardation. Therefore, Special Olympics uses the definition of intellectual disabilities provided by the World Health Organization (WHO), the United Nations’ specialized agency for health. According to the WHO, intellectual disability is a condition of arrested or incomplete development of the mind characterized by impairment of skills and overall intelligence in areas such as cognition, language, and motor and social abilities. Intellectual disability can occur with or without any other physical or mental disorders. Although reduced levels of intellectual functioning is the characteristic feature of this disorder, the diagnosis is made on if it is associated with a diminished ability to adapt to the daily demands of the normal social environment.

GETTING STARTED

Getting started with Special Olympics is fairly simple. You first need to get in contact with your local area director to find out what programs are already in place in your area.

Every athlete participating in traditional Special Olympics is required to have a medical form signed by a physician, physician’s assistant or advanced practice nurse. This requirement ensures it is safe for the athlete to participate. The area director will give you a medical form to get completed. Once the medical form is submitted, the athlete can be placed with an existing team, if there is one that is appropriate for the athlete. For those participating in Young Athletes™, parents will need to sign a parent release form.

SOTX OFFERS 22 SPORTS:

Summer:

Athletics
Basketball
Cycling
Equestrian
Gymnastics
Kayaking
Soccer
Tennis

Fall:

Aquatics
Bocce
Flag Football
Golf
Sailing
Softball
Triathlon

Winter:

Bowling
Figure Skating
Powerlifting
Roller Skating
Speed Skating
Table Tennis
Volleyball

What if there isn’t a team available in my area?

To be able to compete, athletes must have a certified coach in the sport in which they are participating. If there is not a team currently active in your area, you may become a certified coach by attending a free coaches training in your area. There are trainings available for people with and without a sports background so that you will have the confidence to be able to coach a team in the sport you choose. Talk to your area director for the trainings available in your area.

EVOLVING LEVELS IN COMPETITION

Athletes need to compete in a sport at the area level to be eligible to compete at the chapter (state) level in that sport. If there are no local competitions in that particular sport due to low numbers, the athlete can compete in a regional competition to qualify to compete at the chapter Games. Special Olympics Texas holds three chapter competitions each year.

Special Olympics, Inc. holds World Games every two years, alternating Summer Games and Winter Games. Only a limited number of athletes can attend World Games. Athletes have to apply to compete at World Games. Their applications are reviewed by the Sports Management Team to ensure that the athletes meet eligibility requirements. Athletes must participate at the chapter level in the year of application and in the sport in which they are applying to compete. They also must demonstrate appropriate sportsmanship and life skills due to the amount of time they are required to spend away from home. World Games athletes are then chosen via a weighted draw from all the athletes who met eligibility requirements. Eligibility for National Games, which are held every four years, are the same as World Games.

SOTX SPORTS PROGRAMS

Special Olympics offers a broad spectrum of sports programs for athletes of all ability levels. These programs enable every athlete to develop skills, and they encourage participation and competition in an appropriate and meaningful manner. This continuum of programs includes:

Young Athletes™ (YA)

The Young Athletes program is for athletes ages two to seven. YA focuses on developing fundamental motor tracking and eye-hand coordination through physical play. This participation-based program also introduces the child to the world of sports and begins to prepare them for competition, which can start at age eight. Families are invited to attend a Future Stars Sports Day, where the athletes demonstrate the skills they have learned.

Unified Programs

Unified Programs are designed to integrate athletes with and without intellectual disabilities in training and competition programs, as well as social activities. They give Special Olympics athletes the opportunity to participate in sports side by side with their peers without disabilities. These programs can be implemented in the schools, intramural leagues or other community events.

Sports Partnerships

The Special Olympics Sports Partnerships pairs teams of athletes with intellectual disabilities with athletes who do not have disabilities on existing interscholastic sports teams or leagues.

Partners Clubs™

Special Olympics Partners Clubs are sanctioned school clubs formed to provide peer coaching and support to Special Olympics athletes on an individual basis.

Official Team and Individual Sports

The official team and individual sports include those sports that are officially approved by Special Olympics, Inc. (SOI). SOI is the sanctioning body for all Special Olympics programs worldwide. Texas offers 22 official Special Olympics sports. Special Olympics athletes train and compete in these individual sports or team sports with other Special Olympics athletes with similar age and performance capabilities.

Modified Teams

The modified team events are designed to provide meaningful competition for the athletes with lower ability levels or for those individuals with physical limitations. The events and sports are modified so that these athletes' special needs can be accommodated. An example of a modified event in track is the 10-meter assisted walk. During this event, athletes provide their own walking aids and are given two lanes in order to accommodate for their assistive devices. In addition, for those athletes who are visually impaired, guidelines or bells may be used.

Individual Skills

The Special Olympics Individual Skills is a program designed for lower ability athletes who have not yet developed the skills necessary to participate meaningfully in a particular team sport. This program's ultimate goal is to have the athlete work toward and prepare for team participation. The purpose of each event is to develop and measure an athlete's skill in the particular task that is required to progress to the team sport.

Motor Activities Training Program (MATP)

The Special Olympics Motor Activities Training Program is designed for people with severe disabilities whose physical and/or behavioral limitations preclude participation in team or individual sports in traditional Special Olympics competitions. Emphasis is on training and participation, rather than competition. The program is set up so people with severe disabilities can participate in appropriate recreational activities geared to their ability level.

Athlete Leadership Programs (ALPs)

The Athlete Leadership Programs are a series of programs created to get Special Olympics athletes involved in the Special Olympics movement beyond sport training and competition. The programs are designed to help athletes participate meaningfully in the leadership of the organization by becoming public speakers, coaches, officials, committee members, board members and volunteers. Athletes and volunteers are offered training and opportunities to prepare and support them in becoming effective leaders, and to create an environment that welcomes and values the contributions these individuals are making to the organization.

RIGHTS/LAWS

What are my family member's rights in regards to recreation?

As a parent or family member, it is important for you to understand the rights that your family member with a disability has in school and in the community. There are several laws that impact the quality of education and services that are provided to individuals with intellectual disabilities. Sometimes those laws seem rather overwhelming to understand, but armed with the knowledge of what your rights are, you can ensure that your family member receives the care and services that they deserve. There are several organizations that will help you understand these laws and know your rights. See the resource list at the end of the handbook for contact information. Below is an overview of two important laws that you should familiarize yourself with.

Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA)

The IDEA is a federal law that ensures that all children with disabilities receive a free and appropriate education. IDEA sets guidelines and rules that schools have to follow to ensure that children are tested and placed appropriately, develop an educational plan to suit their needs, are evaluated regularly, and are educated in the least restrictive environment (LRE).

The Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA)

The ADA is federal law that requires all qualified people with disabilities not be denied participation in or be denied benefits of the services, programs, or activities of a public entity, or be subject to discrimination by such public entity because of reasons related to their disability. This law is very broad and addresses physical accessibility, employment rights, and many other rights for people with disabilities. In the public schools it mandates that a person with a disability cannot be denied access to school programs, that facilities need to be accessible, and that the schools need to make reasonable modifications to meet the needs of students with disabilities. These laws were intended to prohibit exclusion and segregation and the denial of equal opportunities enjoyed by others.

Are there laws that require schools to provide Special Olympics programs?

There is no law that mandates that a child has to be involved in Special Olympics. IDEA, however, ensures that children with disabilities should have access to physical education, extracurricular and related services. Many schools find that Special Olympics is a great program that can provide them with appropriate opportunities for their students with intellectual disabilities.

There are some laws that support the issue of providing athletic opportunities for all students beyond what IDEA requires. Title IX of the Education Amendments of 1972 mandates equality of athletic opportunities between boys and girls, but were followed by laws that were similar for individuals with disabilities. One of these laws, PL 93-112, Section 504 of the Civil Rights Act for the Handicapped states, "No otherwise qualified handicapped individual in the United States shall, solely by reason of his handicap, be excluded from participation in, be denied the benefits of, or be subjected to discrimination under any program or activity receiving federal financial assistance."

This law (Section 504) specifically addresses physical education: "A recipient that offers physical education courses or that operates or sponsors intercollegiate, club or intramural athletics shall provide to qualified handicapped students equal opportunities for comparable participation in these activities."

You will see a wide range in athletic services that schools provide for their students with disabilities. Special Olympics is a ready-made opportunity for school districts to be able to provide equal services for their students with intellectual disabilities.

GROUP HOME ELIGIBILITY

Individuals in residential facilities should have a variety of recreational opportunities that are provided to them. The quality of programming depends on the facility in which they are housed. Many group homes are actively involved in Special Olympics, and this opportunity provides meaningful recreational and social activities for individuals living in these homes. Family members are still encouraged to be involved with the program, and often find that Special Olympics events are great opportunities to continue a positive relationship with their family members.

GETTING MORE INVOLVED

As a family member, we encourage you to support your athlete by attending practices, competitions and events to cheer for the athlete and encourage growth and development. There are also many other volunteer opportunities for you to be involved with to support Special Olympics.

The impact of volunteering for Special Olympics Texas is immediate - your contribution, whether it is time, expertise, goods and services, or money, directly affects our athletes, coaches and families.

Your volunteering increases integration and socialization opportunities for Special Olympics athletes. The dedication of Special Olympics families and volunteers provides inclusive experiences for athletes with intellectual disabilities.

VOLUNTEER OPPORTUNITIES

Coaching Opportunities

- Become a certified coach or assistant coach.
- Organize, coach or play on a Unified Sports™ team.
- Use specific sports expertise to help set up sports clinics or Special Olympics Texas training schools.
- Train individuals with more severe handicaps through the Motor Activities Training Program.
- Become a trainer and hold training schools to instruct coaches and individuals interested in Special Olympics Texas.
- Help a certified coach with transportation, chaperoning, or other needs they have.

The coaching certification requires that you:

- Attend a Special Olympics general session in person or online and an approved eight-hour sports-specific clinic conducted by a certified area training director/manager.
- Complete 10 hours of practicum with a Special Olympics athlete or team.
- Submit the certification/practicum form to the area office or training director/manager for approval.
- Maintain certification by attending the annual area conference and remaining active in the sport.

Competitions

- Serve as competition director, venue supervisor or certified official at Special Olympics competitions.
- Organize special events, such as Athlete Village and Opening Ceremonies.
- Act as a day-of-event volunteer in multiple capacities, such as greeter, timer, stager, escort, statistics recorder, measurer, line judge, pit crew, ball shagger, spotter and more.
- Set up and support the event area for competition (making lines, putting up tents and tables, filling water coolers, etc.).

Schools

- Encourage schools to include Special Olympics sports training programs in an existing adapted physical education curriculum.
- Utilize the Special Olympics Sports Skills Program Guides to start an after-school sports program.

- Volunteer to help start Special Olympics Unified Sports™ teams.
- Encourage schools to open school facilities to Special Olympics events.
- Help start Special Olympics Partners Clubs®.
- Create a booster club to support your Special Olympics team.

Professional

- Establish a Special Olympics program in workplaces employing individuals with intellectual disabilities.
- Provide medical support including free physicals and X-rays or provide pro-bono legal or accounting services.
- Sponsor or adopt Special Olympics teams.
- Make donations of goods, services or vital office supplies to local Special Olympics programs.
- Help plan and organize a fund raising event in your area.

Public Relations and Marketing

- Assist with implementing public relations and marketing initiatives.
- Assist with building media contacts statewide.
- Write articles for the Special Olympics Texas Summer Games, Fall Classic and Winter Games Torch newsletters or area eNews.
- Volunteer photography and graphic design skills.

Administration

- Serve on the board of directors, or on an area or state committee.
- Contribute typing, filing and computer skills in Special Olympics offices.
- Distribute materials for Special Olympics events.
- Help Special Olympics with mass-mailing projects.

Friends of Special Olympics Athletes

- Serve as greeters, escorts and cheerleaders at Special Olympics Games.
- Transport athletes to practices and competitions.
- Work as a volunteer at a group home.

Family Committee Involvement

- Participate in local and state families activities to meet other families and give input to the local and state programs.
- Create support and service resources for area and state families to access.
- Provide area networking directories to area directors to enhance communication opportunities within SOTX areas.

SOTX SUPPORT FOR FAMILIES

Special Olympics Texas supports family members in a variety of ways. Families are encouraged to participate at every level of our movement. Our Board of Directors has designated family positions, and family members participate on state and area level committees. Family members are an essential component of the movement and are valued for their contributions. Special Olympics Texas has a State Families Committee, with representatives from each of our areas. They serve in a variety of capacities, including providing a family reception area at all chapter games.

Each area also has a families committee, which plans a variety of local activities that might include: reception area at area competitions, family picnics, educational workshops, and other activities. All families are invited and encouraged to participate in activities in their area.

RESOURCES FOR FAMILIES

For additional resources, please contact your area director to obtain the **State Families Committee Family Resource Guide**. If you do not know your area director's contact information, contact the Director of Outreach and Families at 512.491.2958 or via email at dir_familyoutr.chp@sotx.org.

The ARC of Texas/ Texas Advocates

8001 Centre Park Dr., Suite 100
Austin, Texas 78754
512.454.6694
800.252.9729
www.thearcoftexas.org
www.txadvocates.org

Best Buddies Texas

Three Allen Center
333 Clay Street, Suite 3298
Houston, TX 77002
713.646.7294
www.bestbuddies.org

Disability Rights Texas (formerly Advocacy, Inc.)

7800 Shoal Creek Blvd. #171-E
Austin, TX 78757
512.454.4816 Voice/TDD
800.252.9108
www.disabilityrightstx.org

Down Syndrome Association of Central Texas (DSACT)

3710 Cedar Street, Box #2
Austin, TX 78705
512.323.0808
www.dsact.com

E-Parent Magazine (Exceptional Parent)

555 Kinderkamack Road
Oradell, NJ 07649-1517
201.634.6550
www.eparent.com

National Information Center For Children and Youth with Disabilities (NICHCY)

P.O. Box 1492
Washington, DC 20013
800.695.0285
www.nichcy.org

Private Providers Association of Texas (PPAT)

8711 Burnet Road, Suite E53
Austin, TX 78757
512.452.8188
www.ppat100.com

Providers Alliance for Community Services of Texas (PACSTX)

1122 S. Capital of Texas Hwy #350
Austin, TX 78746
512.479.0425
www.pacstx.org

Special Education Resources on the Internet (SERI)

www.seriweb.com

Texas Council of Community MHMR Centers, Inc.

8140 N. Mopac Expressway
Westpark Bldg 3, Suite 240
Austin, TX 78759
512.794.9268
www.txcouncil.com

Texas Council for Developmental Disabilities

4900 N. Lamar Blvd.
Austin, TX 78751-2399
512.424.4080
512.424.4099 TDD
800.262.0334
www.txddc.state.tx.us

Texas Department of Aging and Disabilities

701 W. 1st. Street
Austin, TX 78714
512.438.4293
www.dads.state.tx.us

Texas Education Agency

1701 North Congress Avenue
Austin, Texas 78701
512.463.9734
www.tea.state.tx.us

Texas Parent to Parent (TXP2P)

3710 Cedar Street, Box 12
Austin, TX 78705
512.458.8600
www.txp2p.org

University of Texas Center for Disability Studies

The University of Texas at Austin
Commons Learning Center
10100 Burnet Road
Austin, Texas 78758
512.232.0740
800.828.7839
<http://tcds.edb.utexas.edu>



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