

A Guide for Parents and Care Givers to Keep Our Athletes Safe

Here at Special Olympics, we believe that EVERYONE, including staff, volunteers, parents, caregivers and coaches has a role to play in ensuring the safety of Special Olympics athletes. We take this responsibility seriously and have implemented a number of steps to help make participating in Special Olympics not only rewarding, but also safe.

This Guide for Parents and Caregivers to Keep our Athletes Safe is for parents and caregivers to review for detailed information. Parents and caregivers are also encouraged to discuss the content of this guide with their athletes to help their athletes distinguish appropriate behavior from inappropriate behavior.

We know that we cannot safeguard our athletes without YOUR help! We need the involvement of others, including parents and caregivers in order to be successful.

What is Special Olympics Doing?

- **Volunteer Screening:** Registered Volunteers who meet certain criteria, including having close contact with athletes, are screened using a national criminal background check vendor.
- **Protective Behaviors Training:** Registered Volunteers who have close contact with Special Olympics athletes are required to complete the Protective Behaviors training, which highlights possible signs of physical, sexual and emotional abuse so that all volunteers are active in helping us achieve our ultimate goal of protecting Special Olympics athletes from harm or abuse.
- **Dating Policy:** Special Olympics prohibits any staff member or volunteer (excluding spouses of Special Olympics athletes and Special Olympics athletes who are "day of event" volunteers) from dating or having a sexual relationship with any Special Olympics athlete.
- **Housing Policy:** Special Olympics prohibits athletes and volunteers from sharing a room with an athlete or volunteer of the opposite gender with exception of a parent/guardian rooming with a child. Minimum Housing Standards are enforced at each overnight event and implemented by the Area Director.
- **Code of Conduct for Coaches and Athletes** are required and if found in violation of the Code of Conduct the Coach and Athlete can be suspended from participating or volunteering.

How Can I Help?

(1) Know what to expect from Special Olympics. The following is a very brief overview of some of the types of official activities that are available to Special Olympics athletes (please consult your local Special Olympics Program for a full list):

- **Area Level Team Practices Competitions:** your local Special Olympics Program or coach (individual one-on-one practices fall outside the normal scope of Special Olympics activities) organizes these practices and competitions. Athletes are expected to arrive at the practice location at the appointed practice time and leave immediately following the conclusion of the practice, as volunteers/coaches are only present during the appointed practice times.
- **State/National/Regional/World Games:** Larger events organized by your Special Olympics Program, State office or Special Olympics, Inc. may require travel and/or an overnight

stay(s). Parents and caregivers should request details regarding travel and housing accommodations, when applicable, and address any concerns prior to the event with their Area Program Director.

- **Healthy Athletes®:** Special Olympics athletes receive a variety of health screenings and services in a series of clinics conducted in a welcoming, fun environment. Parents/caregivers/athletes will be required to consent to such screening, if interested.
- **Unified Sports®:** This initiative combines approximately equal numbers of Special Olympics athletes and athletes without intellectual disabilities (Partners) on sports teams for training and competition. One outcome of Unified Sports activities may be new friendships that extend beyond official Special Olympics activities. Parents and caregivers should use their own discretion in determining an appropriate friendship level outside of official Special Olympics activities.
- **Unified Champion Schools®:** This initiative is an education-based project that uses sports and education programs to activate young people to develop school communities where all youth are agents of change; fostering respect, dignity and advocacy for people with intellectual disabilities. Parents and caregivers should use their own discretion in determining an appropriate level of participation/friendships outside of official Special Olympics activities.
- **Athlete Leadership Programs:** These programs allow athletes to explore opportunities for participation in various leadership roles such as the Global Messenger Program, Athlete Input Council Members, Coaches, Officials and Board Members. Parents and caregivers should use their own discretion in determining appropriate roles/activities outside of official Special Olympics activities.
- **Fundraising Activities and Events:** It is difficult to define "typical" fundraising involvement that parents or care providers should anticipate. It is not a requirement of Special Olympics that athletes participate in fundraising, and athletes/parents/care givers must use their own discretion in determining if and how an athlete decides to become involved in these efforts or events.

(2) Watch for “Red Flag” Behaviors:

While we cannot make a generalization that will address every possible scenario, there are certain behaviors that should raise a red flag. These include, but are not limited to:

- Inappropriate gifts, trips, outings, or other gestures of affection from a volunteer;
- Invitations for sleepovers at a volunteer’s house;
- Invitations for social events at a volunteer’s house that do not include, or specifically exclude, parents or caregivers;
- Excessive displays of interest in a particular athlete or group of athletes; and
- A Volunteer’s interest in an athlete outside the normal scope of a Special Olympics activity.

Note: Each situation is different, so it is important for parents/guardians to evaluate the proposed activity on a case-by-case basis, which may include a call to your Special Olympics office to confirm the validity of the activity, and determine whether it is appropriate for the athlete.

(3) Report Suspicious Behavior.

How do I Identify a Sexual Predator?

Identifying a sexual predator is very difficult and therefore, parents/guardians should be extremely cautious of those “red flag” activities, behaviors and characteristics outlined in this brochure.

Special Olympics has undertaken steps to check the backgrounds of certain volunteers and to educate registered volunteers, staff and parents/caregivers of “red flag” behaviors, but everyone should be on the lookout for inappropriate behavior. Special Olympics fosters friendships and creates opportunities for athletes to become involved in activities that may extend outside of Special Olympics. It is important for parents and caregivers to be aware of two important facts:

- (1) Only activities organized, conducted and sponsored by Special Olympics qualify as official Special Olympics activities (not those activities outside of Special Olympics that may result from friendships made through Special Olympics).
- (2) Sexual predators often target vulnerable populations, can come from any background, can be male or female, are often generally “likeable” with warm personalities, and may have limited relationships with other adults. In other words, pay attention and notify Special Olympics if you think a behavior is a “red flag” or inappropriate because there is no one way to identify a person with bad intentions.

What if I have a Concern?

If you believe a Special Olympics volunteer is engaging in activities that do not fit within the expected scope of Special Olympics, contact your Special Olympics State Program office to discuss the situation.

If you believe that a Special Olympics athlete has been abused, contact law enforcement in addition to the Special Olympics office, as law enforcement has the expertise to investigate such allegations.

You can contact the Special Olympic Office:

State Headquarters 1-800-644-6404
Director of Field Services

Southeast Region Office 1-248-688-9603
Field Service Staff

Southwest Region Office 1-616-583-1202
Field Service Staff

Protective Services/Michigan Department of Health and Human Services: 1-855-444-3911 is available 24 hours.