

# Guide for Volunteers to Keep Participants Safe

As a Special Olympics volunteer, your efforts are critical to achieve the Special Olympics mission and ensure that all athletes have a positive, safe and rewarding experience in Special Olympics.

These guidelines are designed to protect athletes and volunteers by providing information on how to prevent emotional, sexual and physical abuse of athletes. Please take a moment to review this information carefully and ask SOMI staff if you have any questions.

## Preventing Physical Abuse of Athletes

- Do not use corporal punishment including spanking, hitting, slapping or other forms of physical discipline. Any discipline techniques used should be constructive and positive.
- Do not withhold water or food from athletes as a form of punishment. To avoid dehydration, water should be available for athletes during practice sessions, especially strenuous ones, and during competition.
- Only medications that have been prescribed by the athlete's physician should be dispensed to that athlete, and then only as indicated on his or her athlete medical form signed by either a parent or legal guardian.
- Check to make sure water for bathing is not too hot.

## Preventing Emotional Abuse of Athletes

- Do not use profanity or otherwise curse at athletes for their performance or behavior.
- Athletes are not to be threatened or intimidated for any purpose including attempts at improving athletic performance or for controlling behavior.
- Treat all athletes with courtesy and respect.
- Do not use demeaning nicknames or other negative or abusive language.

## Preventing Sexual Abuse of Athletes

- **It is recommended** to have at least two volunteers present to supervise activities such as changing into team uniforms, showering and using toilet facilities.
- When speaking privately to an athlete, volunteers should find a place out of earshot but within sight of others.
- Hugs between Special Olympics athletes and volunteers should be open to observation (not secretive) and be respectful of limits set by the athlete.
- Avoid touching areas normally covered by swimsuits: breasts, buttocks and groin. Kissing on the lips and seductive massaging is not permitted (massaging pursuant to an injury or strain is permitted, but should be open to observation by others).
- If an athlete attempts to initiate inappropriate physical contact with a volunteer, that volunteer should identify the objectionable behavior; explain that it makes him/her feel uncomfortable; and suggest more appropriate ways to communicate feelings such as "high fives" or handshakes.
- When Special Olympics events require athletes to stay overnight, the gender, age and developmental levels of the athletes should be taken into consideration when making room assignments. Athletes should also be assigned sleeping rooms with athletes of similar size

and intellectual functioning. In addition, male and female athletes require separate accommodations and should be housed with chaperones of their own gender.

- For all events the SOMI ratio of four athletes to one adult is required and any minor Unified Sports® partners (17 years old or younger) need to be counted with the athletes. For example, if a delegation has six male athletes, three male minor Unified Sports® partners, and five female athletes, four chaperones are needed – three male chaperones and two female chaperones.
- Delegation chaperones should be assigned to protect athletes anytime they are in the sleeping quarters, by ensuring that the athletes are in their assigned rooms and that any unauthorized individuals are kept out of the athletes' sleeping quarters. A copy of housing assignments must be available for all chaperones.
- Volunteers can assist Special Olympics staff by knowing where athletes are at all times when the athletes are in the care and custody of Special Olympics.
- All the rules of behavior should be clearly explained to the athletes before each road trip, no matter the length of the trip. Language used should be simple, but explicit. An Athlete Code of Conduct is available at [www.somi.org/resources](http://www.somi.org/resources).
- Information regarding trip (itinerary, hotel info, cell phone numbers for delegation leads, etc.) should be provided to all parents, guardians or caregivers prior to departing on the trip.

## Identifying Signs of Abuse

In addition to statements by the athlete, there may be physical or behavioral indicators of abuse.

Physical indicators include questionable injuries such as bruises, burns or lacerations in the soft tissue areas of an athlete's body. Bruises change color during the healing process, thereby indicating that the injuries happened on more than one occasion. Injuries to genital areas may indicate sexual abuse: for example, cigarette burns on the inside of the upper leg or on the buttocks. Tether marks or rope burns and abrasions caused by tying wrists, ankles, or neck are also indicators of probable abuse.

Some athletes' injuries are a consequence of athletic competition and the location of the injury may indicate whether the injury was due to abuse or competition. Injuries that happen during competition are most likely to be on the shins, knees, elbows, etc. They are less likely to be on the abdomen, across the back, on the backs of the legs or on facial cheeks.

If you notice that any athlete has been injured (regardless of the delegation), please ask how the injury happened. Could the incident described by the athlete have resulted in the injury you observed?

## Reporting Suspected Abuse

The priority is to protect the athlete from further abuse.

When an athlete discloses possible abuse to you or you have reasonable grounds to suspect that an athlete has been abused, you must take two steps to protect the athlete:

### **Step One: Contact the Authorities – IMMEDIATELY**

Abuse, neglect and exploitation are against the law in Michigan and so is failure to report it by mandated reporters. All Special Olympics Michigan staff, registered coaches and Class A volunteers are mandated reporters; however, any person may make a report. If you suspect a child, a person 65 years or older, or an adult with disabilities has been abused or mistreated, you

are required to report it to the Michigan Department of Health and Human Services at (855) 444-3911 or to a law enforcement agency, 911. Failure to do so could result in legal consequences.

Mandated reporters are required to make an immediate verbal report to Child Protective Services and a written report with 72 hours when they suspect child abuse or neglect. The verbal report can be completed by calling 1-855-444-3911, and provide as much detail as possible. The Report of Actual or Suspected Child Abuse or Neglect form (DHS-3200), can be found at [http://www.michigan.gov/mdhhs/0,5885,7-339-73971\\_7119\\_50648\\_44443---,00.html](http://www.michigan.gov/mdhhs/0,5885,7-339-73971_7119_50648_44443---,00.html) , and is also attached.

## **Step Two: Contact Special Olympics Michigan**

Please notify Special Olympics Michigan **within 24 hours of reporting** at 1-800-644-6404. During the call, please inform the person you notify of the actions you have taken to protect the athlete. In addition, the athlete should be encouraged to report the abuse to the proper authorities as well. A Misconduct or Inappropriate Behavior Incident Form must be completed and submitted to the SOMI Staff for follow up. (Attached)

## **Code of Conduct Violation Reporting**

It is critical that behavior deemed inappropriate by an athlete or volunteer is disclosed to SOMI staff as soon as the behavior is witnessed or when there is an awareness that it has occurred. Below is a chart that will identify some guidelines for which behaviors are important to disclose and what steps SOMI will take related to the level of severity. Use the Disclosure of Misconduct or Inappropriate Behavior Incident Form to divulge information.

By following these guidelines, we are able to protect not only our participants but also the integrity of the umbrella insurance coverage that is in place for all Special Olympics programs. The coverage is tied together such that one situation can jeopardize the coverage for every state.

The below referenced behaviors occurring outside a SOMI event can also be taken into consideration with regards to disciplinary action.

Form: Misconduct or Inappropriate Behavior Incident Report must be completed and reported to the Area Director and to the Special Olympics Michigan State Office. If an Accident/Injury occurs, the Special Olympics Michigan First Report of Accident/Incident Form must be completed for reporting to American Specialty Insurance Company and faxed to Special Olympics Michigan (989) 774-3034. (Attached).

<u>Level</u>	<u>Examples of Behaviors</u>	<u>Disclose or Not</u>	<u>Action Taken by SOMI</u>
1	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Not following directions</li> <li>• Stealing from a coach or an athlete</li> <li>• Leaving the premises</li> <li>• Verbal abusiveness towards a coach or another athlete</li> </ul>	<p>Incident needs to be documented and filed by the Area Director. Continued behavior should result in progressive discipline.</p>	<p>This will be handled at the Area level and reported to SOMI. Could result in one on one participation or suspension.</p>
2	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Destruction of property</li> <li>• Consensual sexual contact during a Special Olympics training or competition</li> <li>• Aggressive behavior</li> <li>• Slapping or hitting another athlete or coach, no injury</li> </ul>	<p>Incident must be reported on the Misconduct or Inappropriate Behavior Incident Form.</p>	<p>SOMI may notify American Specialty depending on the issue. Athlete may be suspended until an investigation is completed. Area Director and Coach will meet with SOMI staff and determine consequences associated with the behavior.</p>
3	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Indecency with no physical contact</li> <li>• Repeated overt sexual contact at a Special Olympics training or competition which is deemed consensual or not, showing a pattern of behavior.</li> </ul>	<p>Must immediately disclose regardless of when and where the incident occurs. Incident must be reported on the Misconduct or Inappropriate Behavior Form. Go directly to the Area Director and call the SOMI Director of Field Services at 1-800-644-6404.</p>	<p>SOMI will notify American Specialty and will investigate. Athlete is automatically suspended pending the outcome of the investigation. The Area Director and SOMI Director of Field Services will meet and determine the consequences associated with the behavior.</p>
4	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Sexual Assault</li> <li>• Bodily assault that results in serious injury</li> <li>• Arson</li> </ul>	<p>Must immediately disclose regardless of when or where the incident occurs. Incident should be reported on the Misconduct or Inappropriate Behavior Form. If incident happens at an official Special Olympic event, call 911 and report directly to the Area Director and call SOMI at 1-800-644-6404. If abuse of a child is suspected, you must contact Department of Health and Human Services at 855-444-3911</p>	<p>SOMI will notify American Specialty and will investigate. Athlete is automatically suspended pending the outcome of the investigation. A letter will come directly from the State office. Consequences associated with the behavior will be handled directly by the State office.</p>