

## **SPECIAL OLYMPICS PROTECTIVE BEHAVIORS PROGRAM GUIDE FOR PARENTS AND CARE PROVIDERS**

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. To fulfill this mission, Special Olympics strives to provide an environment where athletes are secure and protected.

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

We know that we cannot safeguard our athletes without your help. We need the involvement of others, including parents and caregivers if we are going to be successful. This brochure provides you with information on what we are already doing and also gives you some ideas of how you can support our efforts.

### **WHAT SPECIAL OLYMPICS IS DOING**

#### **Protective Behaviors Training**

Volunteers in the United States who have close contact with Special Olympics athletes are required to participate in Protective Behaviors Training. This training teaches volunteers about physical, sexual and emotional abuse so that all volunteers are active in achieving our ultimate goal of protecting Special Olympics athletes from harm or abuse.

#### **Volunteer Screening**

As of January 1, 2005, in order to volunteer for Special Olympics in the United States, new volunteers who meet the following criteria are screened using a national vendor that checks the sex offender registries of all states (where the sex offender registry is available electronically):

1. Volunteers who have regular, close physical contact with athletes
2. Volunteers in a position of authority or supervision with athletes
3. Volunteers in a position of trust of athletes.

Volunteers who meet one of these criteria and were registered before January 1, 2005, should be screened by January 1, 2008, and many U.S. Programs are on track to have all existing volunteers screened prior to that date.

By using a national vendor Special Olympics receives data on any criminal records that appear in the vendor's database for the prospective volunteer. An individual is disqualified from serving as a volunteer if that individual appears on a sex offender registry or has been convicted for a crime of child abuse, sexual abuse of a minor/adult, causing a child's death, neglect of a child or any other individual for whom the potential volunteer had/has responsibility, kidnapping, murder, manslaughter, felony assault, arson and criminal sexual conduct.

While we believe screening is an important tool for Special Olympics, we recognize its inherent limitations and are using a multi-faceted approach to address the issue that includes protective behaviors training, communicating to volunteers a zero-tolerance position on abuse, notifying potential volunteers that they will be screened and utilizing this educational guide for parents and care providers.

## WHAT YOU CAN DO

### Know what to expect from Special Olympics

Special Olympics programs offer a broad array of opportunities for athletes in sports, fitness, and leadership. Programs like Special Olympics Unified Sports® provide opportunities for athletes to socialize with peers and to form friendships, participate in their communities, and have choices outside Special Olympics. A parent or care provider may find it difficult to discern what is an official Special Olympics activity and what is not. However, it is important that you have a general understanding of what constitutes an official Special Olympics activity, because Special Olympics' safeguards and quality controls are only in place at Special Olympics official activities. Special Olympics does not have the ability to control what happens at activities that are not identified as official Special Olympics activities. ***Just as with any other activity, parents, care providers, and athletes must use their own discretion to determine whether or not to participate in non-Special Olympics activities even if the opportunities arise as a result of relationships formed at Special Olympics.***

Official Special Olympics activities are as follows:

- 1. Local Level Practices and Competitions** - These are organized by your local Special Olympics Program or coach. The Protective Behavior training stresses that interactions between volunteers and athletes generally should not be one-on-one. While certain circumstances may legitimately require one-on-one interaction, athletes, care providers, and parents should be aware that this should not be a regular occurrence during Special Olympics practices or competitions.

Generally, it would be the responsibility of the athlete, parent, or care provider to arrange transportation to and from local practices and competitions. If a coach or volunteer offers to provide such transportation, the athlete, parent, or care provider must determine whether this is appropriate. As indicated above, providing transportation for athletes to and from local practices and competitions would not be considered within the normal volunteer responsibilities of the coach or volunteer.

- 2. State Games/National/Regional/World Games** - Larger events such as State Games and World Games often require athletes to travel long distances to the site of the event and to stay overnight during the event in housing arranged by Special Olympics. If an athlete is involved in an overnight competition, your Program will provide information on the travel arrangements, supervision, and anticipated activities (in addition to competition). To make sure you understand and are comfortable with the arrangements, we recommend you work with your local

Special Olympics contact to find out what type of housing will be provided, whether rooms will be shared, and plans for supervision. If family members or care providers intend to participate in the event in a non-official capacity and plan to take a side trip or do activities other than Special Olympics, it is extremely important that you work with Special Olympics in advance to understand the policies and procedures so everyone has an understanding of what the expectations are.

3. **Unified Sports** - Special Olympics Unified Sports® is an initiative that combines approximately equal numbers of Special Olympics athletes and athletes without intellectual disabilities (called Partners) on sports teams for training and competition. Unified Sports activities should follow the same general guidelines outlined for local practices and competitions. One outcome of Unified Sports activities may be to foster friendships that extend beyond the official Special Olympics activities. However, as noted above, Special Olympics does not control the quality or safety of activities, events, or outings that are not specifically organized and carried out by Special Olympics, and thus parents, care providers, and similar individuals must use their own discretion in deciding whether a Special Olympics athlete should participate.
4. **Healthy Athletes** ®- Healthy Athletes is designed to help Special Olympics athletes improve their health and fitness, leading to enhanced sports experience and improved well-being. During a Healthy Athletes event, Special Olympics athletes receive a variety of health screenings and services in a series of clinics conducted in a welcoming, fun environment. The clinicians are either licensed in their field or supervised by licensed professionals in accordance with the state laws. Screenings are most often held in conjunction with State Games. Healthy Athletes screenings are generally held in open spaces and do not require a one-on-one setting as the procedures are non-invasive and privacy is generally not required. All screenings are provided free of charge and are not conducted without athlete consent and assent.
5. **Athlete Leadership Programs (ALPs)** - These programs allow athletes to explore opportunities for participation in roles previously considered “non-traditional.” Through ALPs, athletes serve on Boards of Directors or local organizing committees and act as spokespersons, team captains, coaches and officials. Typical activities involved with ALPs will vary depending on the avenue the athlete is pursuing but could include things such as attending board meetings, speaking engagements, or ALPs workshops. If an athlete becomes a Special Olympics coach or official, the expectations are the same as those required for all Special Olympics coaches and officials, such as completion of necessary training and participation at practices, competitions, and official team activities.
6. **Fundraising Events and Activities** - Fundraising is a critical function that enables Special Olympics to offer its programs and services. Athletes can become involved in fundraising initiatives in a number of different capacities, as participants, donors, event organizers, attendees, or volunteers. Given the diverse

array of fundraising opportunities in Special Olympics, it is difficult to define "typical" fundraising involvement parents or care providers should anticipate. However, as a rule, the same policies and principles that apply to sports practice and competition should apply when it comes to fundraising: one-on-one interaction between volunteers and athletes is not required and should be avoided unless first considered carefully by athletes, parents, and care-givers (such as a coach offering to take an athlete to participate in a parade or golf fundraiser) to determine that you are completely comfortable with the situation. It is not a requirement of Special Olympics that athletes participate in fundraising, and athletes, parents, and care givers must use their own discretion in determining if and how an athlete decides to become involved in these efforts or events.

- 7. Young Athletes Program** - Young Athletes is an innovative sports play program for children ages 2 through 7. This innovative program is a series of developmentally appropriate activities designed specifically for young children and their family members. The Young Athletes program seeks to strengthen physical development and self-esteem for children by building skills for future sports participation and socialization prior to Special Olympics competition eligibility. Designed as a versatile program, Young Athletes can work in various learning situations. Families can play with their young athletes at home in a fun atmosphere, using simple-to-follow activities. The program is also appropriate for preschools, schools and playgroups to use with small groups of young children with and without intellectual disabilities. The flexibility of Young Athletes ensures the opportunity to welcome families and their young children into the Special Olympics family.

### **Identify the red flags**

As discussed throughout this guide, Special Olympics fosters friendships and creates opportunities for athletes to become involved in activities that may extend outside Special Olympics. It is important for athletes, parents, and care providers to be aware of two important facts:

- 1. *Only activities organized, conducted and supervised by Special Olympics qualify as Special Olympics activities. In other words, activities that result from relationships formed in Special Olympics are not necessarily Special Olympics activities.*** It is important to evaluate outside opportunities that arise in connection with individuals a Special Olympics athlete meets through Special Olympics activities. When such an opportunity is not part of Special Olympics, Special Olympics is not able to provide resources or help ensure the safety of the event.
- 2. *Be aware of a volunteer's interest in an athlete outside the normal scope of a Special Olympics activity.*** Although 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 to parties at a volunteer's house where parents or care providers are not included;
- Excessive displays of interest in a particular athlete or group of athletes (such as all male athletes or only athletes under the age of 13);
- Parents/guardians should also note that sexual predators:
  - Target vulnerable populations;
  - Come from all backgrounds;
  - Can be male or female;
  - Are generally very likeable and can have warm personalities;
  - May have limited relationships with other adults.

Identifying a sexual predator is very difficult and therefore, parents/guardians should be extremely cautious of those activities/characteristics outlined above. In addition, volunteering for Special Olympics DOES NOT mean that someone is not a sexual predator, it means that Special Olympics has undertaken certain steps (as outlined in this brochure) to check the backgrounds of specified volunteer.

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

### **Learn to recognize the 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 or lacerations in the soft tissue areas of an athlete's body. Bruises change color during the healing process, and bruises of different colors indicate different stages of healing, 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 the neck are also indicators of probable abuse.

Some athletes are prone to injuries as 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 due to athletic 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 an athlete has been injured, ask how the injury happened. Could the incident described by the athlete have resulted in the injury you observed?

Since most bodily injuries heal, an athlete's behavior may offer a valuable clue that an athlete is the victim of abuse. Individuals under stress often reflect that stress in their behavior. Maltreatment often causes stress related behavior such as depression, withdrawal, thoughts of or attempts at suicide and aggression. Uncharacteristic, extended changes in behavior can also be an indicator of abuse. However, the absence of behavioral indicators does not indicate a lack of abuse. Individuals cope differently and some athletes will internalize abuse and display no outward signs.

## **Know who to go to if you have a concern**

### **Reporting Suspicious Activity**

- Suspicious activity should be reported to Special Olympics Leadership
- Reports will be reviewed and reported as appropriate
- Suspensions may be utilized during investigations
- Special Olympics reserves the right to expel athletes or volunteers as a result of suspected or confirmed physical, sexual or emotional abuse of a Special Olympics athlete

### **Be ready to say...**

- What makes you think this activity is suspicious
- When you witnessed the activity – or first suspected it

### **Who to tell...**

- If the activity is during Special Olympics functions, tell local Special Olympics leadership
  - At team practices find the head coach
  - At Area Competitions find an Area Management Team member
  - At State Level Competitions find a Games Management Team member or state staff person
- If you suspect that an athlete is in immediate danger, notify the police, and then Special Olympics staff
  - Adrian DeWendt, Executive Director: 918.346.1423
  - Donna Ham, Public Relations Director: 918.694.4483
- Oklahoma statute requires that **“any person who has reason to believe that a child is a victim of abuse or neglect must report”**. (For state statutes see: [www.childwelfare.gov/systemwide/laws\\_policies/search/index.cfm](http://www.childwelfare.gov/systemwide/laws_policies/search/index.cfm))
- Reporting is NOT the same as accusing. It just alerts professionals to investigate.
- You may be asked to complete an incident report. (Incident report can be found at [www.sook.org](http://www.sook.org), click the forms tab.)

## **Understand Special Olympics policy on volunteers or staff dating athletes**

Special Olympics respects the right of athletes to have the full range of human relationships. The Special Olympics dating policy is designed to protect the wellbeing of, and respect for the dignity of, Special Olympics athletes. The policy applies on a Global basis and shall not be interpreted as a limitation on the rights of athletes, but only as a restriction on Special Olympics staff and volunteers.

Special Olympics prohibits any Special Olympics 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. In the case of a Special Olympics athlete who is also a staff member or volunteer, the Chief Executive Officer of the organization where the athlete competes will evaluate the circumstances on a case-by-case basis and determine if an authority relationship exists between the staff/volunteer athlete and the competing athlete, and if it is determined that there is such a relationship, then the relationship is prohibited.