



Coaching Special Olympics Athletes Course

Participant Guide

March 2015

Special Olympics





Unit 1: The Athlete – Different Abilities and Challenges

Coaching Special Olympics Athletes begins with the athlete and continues to focus on the athlete throughout the course.

This section outlines how the psychological, physical, and social conditions of the Special Olympics athlete influence his or her participation in sport. Coaches need to be aware of these aspects to understand their athletes better and to design appropriate training programs that meet each athlete's needs. The emphasis is on what the athletes can do so that the coach can assist them in building upon their strengths.

1. Psychological Considerations Related to Learning

There are four psychological considerations related to an athlete's ability to learn.

- For challenges in **motivation**, *the goal is helping athletes gain and maintain interest.*
 - Attention span – keep drills short (8-10 minute guideline)
 - Short-term goals are more helpful because they are immediate.
 - Immediately provide positive reinforcement when desired behavior is demonstrated so that the athlete repeats it.
- For challenges in **perception**, *the goal is helping athletes process information about the sport.*
 - If there are impairments in sight or hearing, provide a cue or accommodation with what abilities they do have. For example, if the athlete is visually challenged when playing bocce, ring a bell over the pallina.
 - If there is difficulty in focusing attention because there is too much sensory stimulation, move the athlete to a quiet area or corner of the gymnasium where focus is heightened.
- For challenges in **comprehension**, *the goal is helping athletes understand the sport in which they are participating and perform requisite skills.*
 - Apply the appropriate level of instruction.
 - Utilize 1-2 part instructions when an athlete has difficulty in understanding multi-part actions.
 - Realize that frequent repetition and reinforcement over time will affect their learning curve.
 - Since some athletes have difficulty in generalizing skills, provide a progression of opportunities so that athletes can utilize the skills in appropriate situations.
- For challenges with **memory**, *the goal is helping athletes remember and perform skills at the appropriate time.*
 - Repeat previously learned skills frequently.
 - Provide a progression of situations in which the skills are applied.
 - Provide competition opportunities so that the athlete can apply them appropriately.



2. Medical Considerations

Down syndrome ... is a chromosomal abnormality.

- Persons with Down syndrome have 47 chromosomes rather than 46 causing abnormal fetal growth, which results in fewer body and brain cells than persons without Down syndrome.
- There is **NOT** a typical person with Down syndrome. Persons with DS vary enormously in:
 - personality
 - appearance
 - ability
 - intellectual functioning

RESULT: It is difficult to predict what coaching an athlete with DS will be like without knowing the athlete in person.

Behavioral Awareness:

Many athletes with Down syndrome:

- can communicate perfectly well using the spoken word
- may be extremely mature socially
- may have difficulty expressing themselves
- learn by mimicry
- can be extremely stubborn

Medical considerations include tendencies for:

- short stature
- poor muscle tone
- hypermobility of the joints (loose jointed)
- mild to moderate obesity
- underdeveloped respiratory and cardiovascular system
- short legs/arms in relation to torso
- broad hands/feet with stubby fingers/toes
- poor equilibrium (balance)
- perceptual difficulty (difficulty focusing attention on appropriate object or task)

Children with Down syndrome are increased risk for:

- certain breathing problems
- digestive problems
- childhood leukemia
- hearing loss
- infections
- vision disorders
- type 1 diabetes
- Alzheimer's

Atlanto-axial instability

- Atlanto-axial instability is an orthopedic condition found in approximately 12%-22% of individuals with Down syndrome.
- There is a misalignment of the 1st and 2nd cervical vertebrae which could cause permanent damage to the spinal cord during hyperflexion or hyperextension of the head and neck.
- Contraindicated activities and prohibited sports/events include:
 - Butterfly stroke in aquatics
 - Football (Soccer)
 - Alpine skiing
 - Artistic gymnastics
 - Pentathlon
 - Equestrian sports
 - Diving & diving starts

Obstacles to Gross Motor Development of an Individual with Down Syndrome:

Physical Problems/Characteristics

- Hypotonia: low muscle tone (floppy)
- Increased flexibility in joints (ligaments that hold the bones together have more slack than usual)
 - *Note:* As child gets older and gains strength in his arms, the shoulder joint will become more stable.



- Decreased muscular strength
 - *Note:* Strength can be greatly improved through repetition and practice.
- Short arms and legs relative to the length of their trunks.

Temperament (as defined as a person's characteristic manner of thinking, behaving & reacting)

a. *Motor Driven*

- Love to move from place to place and spend limited time in one position
- Tolerate new positions and movements and take risks
- Enjoy very brief periods of “rest” and then prefer to be moving
- Love to move fast
- Like motor skills involving “gymnastics-type” activity
- Initially resist stationary type activities involving standing/waiting, etc.

b. *Observers*

- Like to stay in one place and are content to watch, socialize ... need a reason to move ... motivation
- Are cautious, careful and tend to avoid new movements and/or positions
- Prefer to be involved slower moving activity so they can feel balanced and in control
- Initially resist fast moving activity or moving in and out of postures and/or positions needed to improve sports and athletic skill

Autism Spectrum Disorders

Definition ... the developmental disability significantly affecting verbal and nonverbal communication and social interactions that may adversely affect the “coach-ability” of the athlete:

- Engagement in repetitive activity
- Resistance to environmental change or change in routine
- Unusual response to sensory experiences
- May exhibit self-stimulatory behaviors (coach needs to become aware; control; may need to block this behavior.)
- May exhibit obsessive compulsive behaviors (coach needs to become aware; control or block; set up behavior support plan.)

Orthopedic Impairments

Definition ... is a group of permanent disabling symptoms resulting from damage to the motor control areas of the brain. Examples include, but are not limited to, the following:

- Abnormal reflex development
- Difficulty in coordinating and integrating basic movement patterns
- Intellectual disability
- Seizures
- Speech and language disorders
- Sensory impairments (visual motor control)

Attention Deficit Hyperactivity Disorder (ADHD)



Definition ... is a condition that describes athletes who display hyperactive behaviors, have difficulty attending to a task at hand and tend to be impulsive.

Characteristics:

- Inattention
- Poor listening skills
- Restlessness
- Impulsive
- Hyperactive
- Onset before age 7
- Excessive motor activity

ADHD

Definition . . . is characterized by a discrepancy between academic potential and achievement that is not caused by intellectual disability, emotional disturbance or environmental disadvantage.

- Distractibility
- Difficulty attending to and following directions
- Difficulty focusing and concentrating
- Inconsistent performance in learning
- Disorganization
- Inconsistent work habits
- Difficulty working independently
- High activity level, constant motion, fidgeting, squirming, restlessness
- Impulsiveness and lack of self-control

ADHD Characteristics:

- Impatient
- Intrusive or pushy
- Risk taking behavior leading to a high incidence of injury
- Difficulty with transitions
- Aggressive behavior
- Social immaturity
- Low self esteem and high frustration

Social/Emotional Considerations Associated with ADHD:

- Inappropriate responses to new or challenging social/emotional situations that they may not be prepared to handle
- Difficulty in selecting appropriate responses
- Inadequate pragmatic social skills
- May have limited social opportunities – athletics, clubs, exposure to extended family activities
- May lack financial resources for access/participation
- May lack transportation
- May avoid participation
- May be verbally disruptive
- May seek constant reassurance
- May exhibit tantrums

Intellectual Disability

Definition by the American Association on Intellectual and Developmental Disabilities (AAIDD): Intellectual disability is characterized by significant limitations both in intellectual functioning and adaptive behavior as expressed in conceptual, social, and practical skills. This disability originates before age 18.

Assumptions: Assumptions are an explicit part of the definition because they clarify the context from which the definition arises and indicate how the definition must be applied. Thus, the definition of intellectual disability cannot stand alone. The following five assumptions are essential to the application of the definition of intellectual disability:



- (1) Limitations in present functioning must be considered within the context of community environments typical of the individual's age peers and culture;
- (2) Valid assessment considers cultural and linguistic diversity as well as differences in communication, sensory, motor, and behavioral factors;
- (3) Within an individual, limitations often coexist with strengths;
- (4) An important purpose of describing limitations is to develop a profile of needed supports; and
- (5) With appropriate personalized supports over a sustained period, the life functioning of the person with intellectual disability generally will improve.

Relation of 2010 definition of intellectual disability to 2002 definition of mental retardation. The term intellectual disability covers the same population of individuals who were diagnosed previously with mental retardation in number, kind, level, type, and duration of the disability, and the need of people with this disability for individualized services and supports. Furthermore, every individual who is or was eligible for a diagnosis of mental retardation is eligible for a diagnosis of intellectual disability.

Characteristics of Intellectual Disability:

1. Cognitive Learning
 - Area where persons differ most
 - Learn at a slower rate
 - Achieve less academically
2. Social/Emotional/Physical
 - Frequently exhibit inappropriate responses to social/emotional situations
 - Do not fully comprehend what is expected of them in social situations
 - Have delayed development of motor skills
 - May be overweight because of low activity level
3. Characteristics Affecting Athlete Performance in Training and Competition:
 - Confidence level (low)
 - Communication barriers (overload)
 - Performance expectation (unrealistic)
 - View each learning experience a new one
 - Game Strategies: (lack appropriate ones to handle info and situations)
 - Response produced feedback (lack knowledge of when and how to use)
 - Attentive to too many cues (selective)
 - Expend too much unnecessary energy
 - Worry about too much about too many things
4. Observation of Athlete's Behavior During Training or Competition

When coaching, specific athlete behaviors are observed in order to determine coaching strategies and structure needed to deal with behaviors that may inhibit the athlete's participation, or the participation of other athletes in the training or competitive environment:

- a) Environmental entrance (behavior of the athlete when he/she comes to the training site or competition venue): Is the athlete in control?
- b) Environmental exit: (behavior of the athlete as he/she leaves the training or competition site): Is the athlete in control? (Calm – relaxed)
- c) Active participation: Is the athlete in control, attentive, focusing on the task, persistent in completing the task and handles feedback without incident.
- d) Non-active behavior (behavior that emerges as the athlete waits for a turn or needs to watch a demonstration): Is the athlete in control and able to inhibit negative impulse behavior?
- e) Competitive attitude: A negative mental position or feeling an athlete has regarding any activity that takes the form of being a "contest" between the individual athletes or team of athletes.
- f) Positive participation feedback: While engaged in a task or immediately following completion of a task the athlete exhibits positive feedback, i.e., smiling, expression of joy, laughter, cheering, high-fiving, etc.



- g) Negative participation feedback: While engaged in a task or immediately following completion of a task the athlete exhibits negative feedback, i.e., cries, screams, swears, tantrums, runs away, strikes out at a coach/official/another athlete/spectator, etc.
- h) Reinforced participation: Athlete performs satisfactorily when continually reinforced by the coach, another athlete, parent, etc. but performance is significantly affected negatively when reinforcement is not given.
- i) Intrinsic participation: The athlete performs tasks without reinforcement and appears to be self-motivated to perform.
- j) Social interaction with peers: Is either positive or negative.
- k) Social interaction with coach: Is either positive or negative.

Medications

- Side effects of various medications
- Knowing what medications athletes are taking

Seizures

- Seizure incidence
- Recommended procedures for coaches

Physical disabilities

- Physical strength, coordination, and muscle tone
- Special training considerations
- Special Olympics approved modifications

Fetal alcohol syndrome (FAS) and fetal alcohol effect (FAE)

- Birth defect caused by prenatal alcohol exposure
- Consistently functions better on concrete performance tasks
- Tend to have poor verbal comprehension skills and attention and memory deficits

3. Social Considerations

Typical social skills

- May lack social or adaptive skills due to lack of opportunity

Physical recreation at home

- May be very inactive in the home
- May not have been exposed to any type of recreation

Economic status

- May lack financial means
- May be unable to access to independent transportation



Unit 2: Teaching and Training the Athlete

To maximize time, it is vital that written plans and programs be developed. They are necessary to chart developments and to keep on target. In addition, they are necessary for the center or school or in the unlikely event of an accident.

There are a variety of levels of instruction and assistance that can be provided to athletes to facilitate learning, skill development, and competition success. Each coach needs to address each athlete individually.

Organizing a Training Program

- **Assessment of athletes' level of fitness and skills**

- Appropriate sport selection
- Appropriate goals
- Means of following progress of athlete and training program - record
- Examples of assessment tests

- **Goal setting and seasonal planning**

- Goals: readily attainable, short-term, concrete, and individual
- Athlete involvement in individual and team goal setting
- Goals incorporated into a preliminary "Season Plan"

- **Planning a training session**

- Medical information on each athlete at every practice
- Effective use of limited time; planning and prioritizing
- Components: warm-up and stretching, skills instruction, competition experience, and cool-down
- Familiar and comfortable training "routine"

Conducting a Training Session

There are many ways to conduct a training session for Special Olympics athletes. Because of comprehension and memory challenges for the athlete, there is considerable value in a developing a consistent training "routine" that provides familiarity, stability, and comfort.

There are four essential components of a typical training session: warm-up and stretching, skills instruction, competition experience, and cool-down and stretching. (Fitness training or conditioning can also be included following competition experience and prior to cool-down.) The following techniques and tips will provide the most successful learning opportunities.

1. Warm-up and Stretching

- Time is precious and skills repetition vital. Warm up in a way specific to the sport. For example in soccer, dribble a ball while jogging as opposed to just running.
- When athletes have difficulties with balance, use stretching activities that can be done while sitting, lying down, or leaning against a wall or partner.
- Involve athletes in leading the exercises; coaches are then free to circulate and directly assist others who need help. The coaches must insure that each athlete is performing the warm-up and stretching activities correctly so that injuries are prevented.
- Teach a simple routine involving the major muscle groups, which athletes can repeat at home and at competition. Warm-up by walking or jogging 5 minutes. Then perform the following stretches: 1) calf stretch against wall, 2) hamstring stretch or toe touch, 3) quad stretch holding onto wall for balance (both directions), 4) groin stretch while sitting or lunging to each side, 5)

shoulder stretch (grasping hands behind body and leaning forward, and 6) triceps stretch (reaching to sky with one arm, bending elbow which points forward, and pulling elbow straight back with opposite hand; performing stretch with other arm).



- For stretching, what to do and not to do:

Do	Do Not
Perform warm-up activity for 5 minutes (walk or run slowly).	Do not begin practice by stretching or playing; can tear muscle fibers.
Perform held stretches for 10-30 seconds each.	Do not bounce when stretching; can also tear muscle fibers.
Start with the large muscle groups such as the legs then move to the shoulders, etc.	Do not start with the smaller muscles. Go from large to small.
Perform each stretch to the point of tension.	Do not put strain on the joints, back or neck.
Breathe while stretching.	Do not hold breath.
Perform stretches in a “safe” position and through range of motion.	Avoid the hurdler’s stretch, deep knee bends, straight-leg sit-ups, sit-ups pulling on the neck, and lying on the back and moving legs overhead as if riding a bicycle.

2. Skills Instruction

Training Sequence (tasks → skills → application in game/event → implementation in competition)

- The key is to break down skills into small tasks or steps; tasks are then put together to form skills. *(Addresses difficulty in performing multi-step tasks)*
 - Drills are developed so that skills can be applied in a game or an event situation. The result is skills applied and performed in competition.

COMMUNICATION WHEN TEACHING AND COACHING

- Communicate effectively.
 - **Be clear:** Use words that an athlete can understand or that an athlete has a point of reference such as “see the ball” as opposed to “find the target”. *(Addresses an athlete’s need to understand what he or she is asked to do)*
 - **Be concrete:** Use words that are specific to something physical and/or real. Since athletes have a cognitive delay in processing information (especially words), the challenge is to make concepts concrete. For example, when teaching the 3-second lane in basketball, a coach can use the physical words of “hot” and “cold” to assist an athlete learning the concept. “Hot” refers to the lane on offense; the athlete will burn up if he stops in the lane and not move through it. “Cold” refers to the lane at the defensive end of the court. The lane is cool and the athlete’s friend. *(Addresses difficulty in understanding concepts and desired actions)*
 - **Be concise:** Use a few descriptive “key words” or cues. Do not use long sentences or multi-part instructions. For example: “Reach for the sky.” *(Addresses an athlete’s difficulty in understanding verbal instructions and desired actions)*
 - **Be consistent:** Use the same word or words for the same action. *(Addresses an athlete’s need for repetition and reinforcement)*
 - **Words are command-oriented:** Verbally reinforce the athlete immediately after a desired action. Make the reinforcement action-oriented and specific to the skill. *(Addresses an athlete’s need for frequent motivation and words associated with a physical action)*
- Make sure an athlete is looking at you when making a coaching point. When needed, physically prompt an athlete to look at you. *(Addresses difficulty in maintaining attention)*
- Ask athletes questions rather than always provide directions. Lead them to think for themselves. Verify athlete responses. *(Addresses independence because they are not always asked to think)*



Providing Appropriate Level of Assistance

- Assess what an athlete is ready to do; build upon strengths.
- Use appropriate levels of assistance for each athlete - verbal, visual (demonstration), physical prompt, physical assistance. Gradually reduce physical assistance in favor of simple cues and eventually no prompting at all. (*Addresses difficulty in learning and improving*)
 - The lower the ability athlete, the more assistance may be required.
 - Verbal cues should always be accompanied by demonstration.
 - Physical prompts may be needed to help the athlete get positioned properly.
 - When all else fails, move the athlete through the complete skill.
- Practice skills in situations that are related to the game or event. (*Addresses difficulty in generalizing to new situations*)
- Use drills and activities that involve many athletes at all times. (*Addresses slower rate of learning and the need for motivation and repetition*)
- Decide on the best method of teaching what is required in terms of game or event strategies. For example in team sports, build from skills to offense to defense. Concerning an offense in basketball:
 - Evaluate player strengths.
 - Design an offense based on those strengths.
 - Place people on the court where they can be successful.
 - Evaluate who can best play with whom.
 - Design a substitution schedule so that all players on the court contribute to the team and that each line up is effective.

MANAGING ATHLETE BEHAVIORAL CHALLENGES

- The goal is for coaches to teach and coach Special Olympics athletes more effectively. However, a coach may have certain expectations of an athlete that may not be realistic...not because the coach does not care, but because the coach does not understand or appreciate the differences that may exist.
- When an athlete exhibits what is generally perceived as inappropriate behavior(s), the inappropriate behavior(s) may not be defiance, acting out or silliness. These behaviors may simply be a reflection or part of the person and/or what is operating in the moment.
- Use the form provided (“Athlete Behavior Characteristics and Strategies to Improve Learning”) on pages 11-12. Identify the athlete’s behavior that is preventing the athlete from learning a skill. Identify a progression of strategies to positively affect learning.

3. Competition Experience

- Provide a realistic competition experience during each practice in order to improve confidence and performance under the pressure of real competition.
- In team sports, help athletes understand game concepts by providing immediate and concrete feedback. During scrimmages or practice games, stop the play to help athletes recognize critical situations and learn how to react successfully.
- Emphasize the value of enforcing the rules during training. Rules enforcement helps prepare athletes for participation in community sports and in life.

4. Cool-down and Stretching

- Having athletes do several light stretching with the major muscle groups will prevent muscle cramps and soreness and increase flexibility.
- Review the main themes of the training session; reward athlete performance, and talk about the next competition or training session.
- Warm-up and stretching
 - Specific rather than general
 - Use of safe stretching techniques
 - Difficulties with balance
 - Appropriate physical assistance
 - Simple and able to duplicate at home and at competition

Athlete Behavior Characteristics & Strategies to Improve Learning



The chart below provides information and strategies regarding different functional and learning behavioral characteristics (not labels) of athletes. The goal is to help you coach Special Olympics athletes more effectively. When possible, talk with parents, providers, teachers, former coaches, etc. about an athlete's characteristics and the successful strategies used to affect learning. Use the characteristics as a checklist to ensure that one or more of the strategies opposite the respective characteristics are employed in each practice.

Characteristics	Strategies to Improve Learning and Performance
Learning occurs at a slower rate	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1) Provide structure & train more frequently. 2) Provide repetition and review. Circle back to previously mastered skills. 3) Break skills down into smaller parts. Don't move on until a skill is mastered. 4) Differentiate learning – teach at level of the athlete; remove supports as skills are mastered. 5) Assign a partner, volunteer or assistant coach to help. Provide additional repetitions without holding up the practice. 6) Present skills in a variety of ways. Explain, demonstrate, and practice. When explaining a skill/drill, it may be necessary to illustrate the skill.
Short attention span	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1) Train for short periods of time; provide numerous activities focusing on same task. 2) Provide repetition & review (key to gaining new skill). 3) Work one-on-one (gain full attention). Do not explain a drill/skill without gaining attention from an athlete. This may be demonstrated by attaining eye contact or having the player repeat after you the directions stated for the drill. (30 seconds is the amount of time that people can retain information in short-term memory.) 4) Use stations. Stations are a great way to circle back to previously learned skills. Depending on the number of volunteers, running 3–5 stations for 30 minutes of practice is appropriate.
Resistance to change	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1) Structure training with clear expectations, consistent routines (follow same format for each practice, i.e. warm-up lap, stretching, review drills for reinforcement of previously learned material, new drills, controlled play situations in which to practice new skills) and a cool down. 2) Players should be made aware when a transition will happen. State the time to be spent on an activity and give a warning of its end 5 minutes prior; two minutes prior and then at the close of the activity. 3) Identify motivating factors; build on successes. If there is a favorite drill, save it for the end of practice when all objectives have been met.
Lack of motivation to push self	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1) Be aware that some athletes might tire easily or lack confidence and therefore be less motivated to continue an activity. 2) Match the athlete with a highly motivated teammate. First, select 2-3 highly motivated teammates; let the athlete choose one of the teammates with whom he or she will work. Then transition to the sport. 3) Reward even small improvements in performance. Charting progress is a great visual motivator. 4) Use incentives that are based on achieving specific goals. For example, once we finish _____ (non-preferred activity), we can do _____ (preferred activity).
Acting out; mood swings	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1) Set clear rules, expectations and limits; specify location for individual to regain self-control. Consistent enforcement of limits is a MUST. Athletes will learn quickly when you mean something and when you do not. 2) Consequences should be enforceable and short term. 3) Reinforce acceptable behaviors. Praising positive behaviors may be enough of a motivator for the athlete. Rewards can also be given in the absence of undesirable behaviors, that is, 5 minutes without cursing earns a check; five checks gets a reward specific to the athlete. 4) Help the athlete find a replacement behavior that serves the same function. All behavior serves a function. If the athlete attends school or lives in a group home, there may be a behavior plan in place. Speak with the caretakers of the athlete and find out what is in place. 5) NOTE: Just because a behavior has not been noted for an extended period of time, does not mean it is gone. Be aware if it re-surfaces. 6) A behavior (intervention) support plan is developed after collecting information about the function of a particular behavior – to get something or avoid something. A similar but acceptable behavior is then taught. The student is rewarded for using the replacement behavior, and the reinforcement schedule is reduced until the replacement behavior has eliminated the inappropriate behavior.
Difficulty communicating	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1) Allow additional time to express thoughts. Don't finish the sentence or thought for the athlete. 2) Use picture boards/other assistive devices. Simple sign language may also work. Speak with caretakers to gain information on how they communicate with the athlete. 3) Ask him or her to demonstrate or show what he/she means. Some athletes have their own communication devices or tools. If so, a conversation with a parent/caregiver might be useful.



Characteristics	Strategies to Improve Learning and Performance
Verbal interpretation difficulties	1) Provide the appropriate level of instruction beginning with demonstration (can be spoken, drawn or demonstrated) followed by the appropriate level of prompting. Each athlete will require different supports at different times for different skills. 2) Keep verbal instructions to a minimum. 3) Use key words/cues, sign language or pictures to communicate.
Prone to seizures	1) Know signs and symptoms of different types of seizures. 2) Control OR MODIFY atmosphere/triggers (heat, sun, sugar, loud noise, etc.) of seizures; respond appropriately. Have a volunteer/parent on sideline watch the athlete, specifically during the practice/game, for any signs that may occur. If the activity cannot be modified, find something else for the athlete to do such as take stats, collect equipment, or hand out scrimmage vests or T-shirts. He/she is still part of the team. 3) Prepare teammates to respond appropriately should a seizure occur; have a plan in place & practice it.
Poor muscle tone	1) Provide specific exercise and strengthening programs. Provide home exercises for motivated athletes. Discuss the importance of a home practice with parents and siblings. You can provide data sheets in which the athlete tracks his/her progress. Rewards can be given for goals met. 2) Stretch within normal range of motion. Each athlete's range of motion will be different on different days. Teach athletes to listen to their bodies, and if it hurts, STOP! 3) Uneven surfaces increase risk of injury. Worn footwear can also contribute to injury.
Lower pain threshold; sensitive to touch	1) When appropriate, establish eye contact when talking. Some athletes may become more upset about maintaining eye contact. Know your athletes. 2) Use softer/adaptive equipment; minimize loud noises like whistles (or gradually introduce them). 3) Forewarn if any touch is necessary; respect wishes.
Difficulty forming social bonds	1) Work in small groups. 2) Have each athlete work in pairs (same 2 people for several weeks). Some athletes will prefer to work by themselves. Find a sport/position which will honor this preference. It may be that the athlete needs to change sports. 3) Provide highly structured social situations when athlete is engaging in a preferred activity with a peer.
Easily over-stimulated	1) Remove or lessen distracting stimuli (dim lights; soften sounds; remove unnecessary objects). 2) Train in separate room or smaller group; gradually add people and other stimuli. 3) Train with athletes who tend to be nonverbal. 4) Planned breaks and quiet time during practice, between activities if possible. This will enable the athlete to "regroup" before moving on to another activity.
Difficulty with balance or stability	1) Provide physical support, as needed, via partner or other assistive device. 2) Broaden base of support such as sitting down or leaning against wall; minimize uneven surfaces. Certain positions on a team lend themselves to being more conducive to athlete success than others. Find the position that fits your athlete's abilities. 3) Allow for extra time to complete a task. Modify the task to fit the athlete's ability level. 4) Speak with physical therapist if possible, brainstorm with other coaches for ideas. Caregivers may also be able to provide information/assistance.
Compulsive eating	1) Remove food from practice/competition sites. 2) Do not use food as reward (especially for individuals with Prader Willi). 3) Provide structure and routine for eating (time and place). If this has been a longstanding issue for your athletes, caregivers can give suggestions on what they have successfully used in the past which you can modify to fit your coaching situation.
Poor coordination	1) Break skills down into sequential tasks; substitute easier movement (walking instead of running). 2) Progress from athlete's current level of performance. Charting improvement is a great motivator. 3) Allow additional time with one-on-one support. 4) Provide a home practice plan. This will help build muscle memory as well as stamina and coordination. Using time at home for reinforcement will allow for more time at practice for exposure to new drills/skills.
Physical limitations or impairments	1) Utilize those skills or parts of skills athlete can perform. 2) For those skills or parts of skills athlete is unable to perform, allow athlete to substitute other skills, have partner execute those skills or use assistive device. 3) Focus on activities that develop mobility and stability. 4) Speak with outside therapists or caregivers for suggestions.



Characteristics	Strategies to Improve Learning and Performance
Visual impairments	1) Use verbal cues, physical prompt and physical assistance as needed. 2) Utilize sound or physical devices such as beep balls, guide rope along lane line, tether when running with partner, etc. and according to the rules. 3) Provide precise and action-specific feedback. 4) Control any environmental factors which you can, i.e. lighting, colors of balls, cones, scrimmage vests or T-shirts, etc. 5) Wireless transmitter may be appropriate and available.
Hearing impairments	1) Establish eye contact when talking. 2) Use signs, pictures or sign language; keep cochlear implants dry. You can even develop sport-specific signs (think third base coach in baseball). 3) Demonstrate what is desired. 4) Use hand signals; remind athletes to look to the coach for directions. You may need to have a parent/coach on other side of field to relay messages if needed or direct athlete to look at coach.
Autism spectrum disorder	1) Minimize verbal communication; emphasize use of visual supports such as pictures (Board Maker application) to identify directions/commands (stop; wait; keep hands to self, etc.). Also use pictures to develop schedules such as warm-up; pass the ball; play the game; clean up the equipment; rest. Visual supports are helpful because of difficulty in processing sensory stimuli (over arousal); provide only one item per picture. 2) Reduce sensory overload like whistles (some athletes are hypersensitive to noise). 3) Individualize schedule with known start & known finish (predictability); use clear, consistent cues & prompts; cue transition from one activity to next. 4) Autism is a "spectrum," so not all athletes with autism will have the same needs. Some will be less severe than others. Individuals with Asperger's can be very bright but have social deficits that may impede them from developing social bonds. Meet with caregivers for specifics concerning your athlete.
Self-stimulatory behaviors	1) Become aware and monitor. Self-stimulatory behaviors are any behaviors that are serving a sensory need for the athlete. Sometimes, these behaviors are sexual in nature. The athlete will need to be taught the "time and place" where these behaviors are acceptable (a practice or a game is NOT one of them). Work with the caregiver to help develop a protocol for the athlete. 2) Control situation. Engage athlete in activities that provide an alternative to self-stimulatory behavior. If an athlete flaps his or her hands/arms when running, practice running with "quiet hands."
Self-injurious behaviors	1) Become aware of cutting skin or banging head against table or wall. Work with medical personnel. 2) Control and prevent behavior. Redirect the athlete to an alternate behavior. Seek support of medical personnel or caretakers, as needed. 3) Provide a behavior support plan to manage (page 20, under Acting Out, number 6).
Obsessive-compulsive behaviors	1) Become aware and monitor. Compulsive behaviors are any behaviors that are ritualized to a point that the athlete is unable to perform other functions, i.e. picking fingers until bleeding, constant eating, or repetitive statements. 2) Control situation and prevent behavior. Redirect the athlete to an alternate behavior. 3) Provide a behavior support plan to manage (page 20, under Acting Out, number 6).
Hyperactivity	1) Set clear rules, consistent routines and smooth transitions with signals for changing activities with motivating reinforcement. 2) Keep directions simple (2-3 steps at the most); minimize information. 3) Have athlete repeat back directions or show what has been asked of him/her to demonstrate an understanding of what has been said. 4) Use stations to shift activities in a short period of time.
Lethargy (due to medication or other causes)	1) Provide frequent rest intervals. 2) Expose to sports that provide natural rest periods such as bocce, bowling, golf, etc. 3) Slowly progress to longer periods of activity. 4) Modify activities for athlete success. 5) Be aware of side effects of medications.

Safety Checklist



The following checklist is offered as a shorthand method of assessing an activity plan and bringing the most critical components into focus.

1. Have enough supervisors been provided? _____ and rigidly enforced? _____
2. Do all personnel possess the necessary skills?
 - Certification % yes
 - Outside training % yes
 - In-house training % yes
3. Have the responsibilities of all supervisory personnel been clearly defined and articulated? _____
4. Has the location of personnel been planned to guarantee effective coverage? _____
5. Do supervisors have clear line of sight over their areas of responsibility? _____
6. Are there areas that are being under or over supervised? _____
7. Is there immediate access to trained first aid and cardiopulmonary resuscitation (CPR)? _____
8. Are there carefully developed plans for medical emergencies to include telephone access, notifications to be made, etc.? _____
9. Are all supervisory personnel familiar with the emergency action plan(s) and procedures? _____
10. Is there an effective means of crisis communication among supervisory personnel? _____
11. Have the participants been made aware to the maximum reasonable degree of their responsibilities and obligations? _____
12. Have provisions been made to provide follow-up and reminders regarding participant responsibilities and obligations? _____
13. Does the supervisor have all necessary medical information on each participant, including special medical problems, names and telephone numbers of persons to be notified, and list of current medications? _____
14. Does all activity planning include specific considerations for safety? _____
15. Have rules of conduct been established, explained,
_____ and rigidly enforced? _____
16. Has there been careful consideration of the matter of participant readiness, to include assessing, ability grouping, etc.? _____
17. Do the participants and their parents understand insofar as is reasonable, the risks inherent in the activity and the safety procedures? _____
18. Within the reasonable limits of their individual capabilities, do the participants recognize and accept responsibility for their own safety? _____
20. Has careful consideration been given to possible activity adaptations to increase safety? _____
21. Has consideration been given to the question of appropriate footwear, clothing, equipment, and safety equipment? _____
22. Are there regularly scheduled inspection and maintenance procedures for all equipment and facilities? _____
23. Are the results of inspections and completed maintenance procedures recorded and maintained? _____
24. Has careful attention been given to the following environmental conditions:
 - Appropriate playing surface? _____
 - Sufficient buffer zones around playing areas? _____
 - Elimination of potholes? _____
 - Removal of obstructions? _____
 - Slippery surface conditions? _____
 - Sufficient quantity of equipment? _____
25. Does all equipment meet or exceed appropriate safety standards? _____
26. Has consideration been given to spectator safety and pedestrian traffic near the event? _____
27. Have equipment and field modifications been considered in light of participant needs (such as scaled down, reduced flight, or lighter weight equipment, shorter fields, thicker mats, etc.)? _____

Special Olympics Athlete Development Plan



Athlete -

First name:	<input type="text"/>	Last :	<input type="text"/>	Date:	<input type="text"/>
Program:	<input type="text"/>	Phone:	<input type="text"/>	Coach:	<input type="text"/>

Athlete's Interests -

Favorite sports:	<input type="text"/>
Favorite sports teams:	<input type="text"/>
Favorite athletes:	<input type="text"/>
Favorite musical groups:	<input type="text"/>
Favorite movies/actors:	<input type="text"/>
Favorite TV shows/actors:	<input type="text"/>
Favorite books:	<input type="text"/>
Favorite food/beverages:	<input type="text"/>
Other interests:	<input type="text"/>

Why athlete is participating in Special Olympics; check all that apply.

Fun:	<input type="checkbox"/>	To be with friends:	<input type="checkbox"/>
Develop skills:	<input type="checkbox"/>	Win medals:	<input type="checkbox"/>
Compete:	<input type="checkbox"/>	Recreation:	<input type="checkbox"/>
		Because someone told me I had to do it:	<input type="checkbox"/>

Other:

Name sports athlete likes to participate in:

Current:	<input type="text"/>
Future:	<input type="text"/>
Why?	<input type="text"/>

Athlete Considerations (tips when working with athletes); check all that apply -

Doesn't like loud noises:	<input type="checkbox"/>	Needs to hydrate:	<input type="checkbox"/>
Doesn't like whistles:	<input type="checkbox"/>	Is prone to seizures:	<input type="checkbox"/>
Doesn't respond well to yelling:	<input type="checkbox"/>	Is easily distracted:	<input type="checkbox"/>
Has limited verbal skills:	<input type="checkbox"/>	Has short attention span:	<input type="checkbox"/>
Has visual impairment:	<input type="checkbox"/>	Is resistant to change:	<input type="checkbox"/>
Has hearing impairment:	<input type="checkbox"/>	Is hyperactive:	<input type="checkbox"/>
Exhibits self-stimulatory behaviors:	<input type="checkbox"/>	Is obsessive-compulsive:	<input type="checkbox"/>
Other:	<input type="text"/>		
Trigger(s) to inappropriate behavior:	<input type="text"/>		

Athlete Assessment -



Interest in the sport:			
Athletic ability:	Speed:	Shuttle run -	
	Endurance:	3-minute step test -	
	Strength:	Push ups -	Chair ups -
	Flexibility:	Sitting reach -	
	Coordination:	Shuttle run w/bean bags -	
Sport-specific athletic ability:	Skill #1		
	Skill #2		
	Skill #3		
Cognitive ability (event understanding):			
Coping skills with environment:			
Ability to work with others:			

Coach Observations and Conclusions -

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Goals -

Individual goals	Long-term:	
	Short-term:	
Team goals	Long-term:	
	Short-term:	

Support Plans -

Individualized "At Home Training Plan":

--

Assistant Coach Support Plan:

--

Family, Guardian, and/or Caregiver Support Plan:

--

Competition Day Plan:

--

Training Session Plan



Sport _____ Date _____ # of athletes ____ # of coaches ____

Goal for session _____

Facility safety check: Equipment Surface Layout Supervision

Time	Session	Specific Objectives	Drills/Activities	Layout
	Warm-up Exercises			
	Stretching Exercises			
	Skills instruction			
	Competition experience			
	Cool-down			
	Team talk			

Training Session Plan



Sport _____ Date _____ # of athletes ____ # of coaches ____

Goal for session _____

Facility safety check: Equipment Surface Layout Supervision

Time	Session	Specific Objectives	Drills/Activities	Layout
	Warm-up Exercises			
	Stretching Exercises			
	Skills instruction			
	Competition experience			
	Cool-down			
	Team talk			

Coaching Special Olympics Athletes



Unit 3: Preparing for and Coaching During Competition

Competitions provide the opportunity for your athletes to show what they've learned in practice. Just as your athletes' focus shifts on competition days from learning and practicing to competing, your focus shifts from teaching skills to coaching athletes as they perform those skills in competitions. Of course, the competition is a teaching opportunity as well, but the focus is on performing what has been learned, participating, and having fun.

In Unit 2 you learned how to teach your athletes techniques and tactics; in this unit you will learn how to coach your athletes as they execute those techniques and tactics in contests. We provide important coaching principles that will guide you before, during, and after the competition.

Before the Competition

Just as you need a practice plan for what you will cover at each practice, you also need a “competition plan” for competition day. Your written competition plan should consist of your best strategies and plays, if applicable. The competition plan should also include the method of substitution or plan for alternating athletes that you'll be using.

Although the competition plan is important, you cannot focus on it only on competition day. Many coaches focus on how they will coach only during the actual competition, when instead preparations should begin well before the competition begins. Let's take a closer look at how you can prepare for competition-day coaching.

Coaching Assignments

Competition-day preparation should begin in the preseason when, as a staff, you decide and agree on the competition-day responsibilities each coach will assume. The staff should decide who will substitute, and who will record any statistics, keep charts, or other sport-specific information. As coaches arrive at the competition, each staff member should know his or her competition-day responsibilities and prepare for the competition just as the athletes do.



Coaching Tip

Every staff member should be assigned a competition-day responsibility and work as one team during the contest. Each member of the coaching staff should then focus on their specific responsibilities and work with the head coach and other staff members to make the competition run smoothly.

Preparations at Practice

A day or two before a contest, you should cover two things—in addition to techniques and tactics—to prepare your athletes for the competition. First, you must decide on specific team tactics you want to use, and second, discuss pre-competition particulars such as what to eat before the competition, what to wear, and when to be at the site where the team will leave together or the competition site. It is also a good idea to walk through the steps for how the team will arrive at the competition area, where the athletes will change into their uniforms, where the athletes will line up for the warm-up and what group and team drills will be used during the warm-up, if applicable.

Deciding Team Tactics

Some coaches see themselves as great strategists guiding their young athletes to victory. These coaches burn the midnight oil as they devise complex plans of attack.

There are several things wrong with this approach, but we'll point out two errors in terms of deciding tactics:

1. The decision on tactics should be made with input from athletes.
2. Tactics at this level don't need to be complex.



Perhaps you guessed right on the second point but were surprised by the first. Why should you include your athletes in deciding tactics? Isn't that the coach's role?

It's the coach's role to help athletes grow through the sport experience. Giving your capable athletes input here helps them to learn about the sport. It gets them involved at a planning level that often is reserved solely for the coach. It gives them a feeling of ownership; they're not just "carrying out orders" of the coach. They're executing the plan of attack that was jointly decided. Athletes who have a say in how they approach a task often respond with more enthusiasm and motivation.

Don't dampen the enthusiasm and motivation by concocting tactics that are too complex. Keep tactics simple. As you become more familiar with your athletes' tendencies and abilities, help them focus on specific tactics that will help them perform better.

It is often best to institute certain tactics that your athletes have practiced. These tactics should take advantage of your athletes' strengths. Again, give the athletes some input into what tactics might be employed during the competition.

Discussing Pregame Particulars

Athletes need to know what to do before a competition: what and when they should eat on competition day, what clothing they should wear to the competition, what equipment they should bring, and where and what time they should meet to leave with the group and when they should arrive at the competition site. Discuss these particulars with them and give them a plan to take home at the last practice before a competition.

- **Pre-competition Meal:** In general, the goal of the pre-competition meal is to fuel the athlete for the upcoming event, to maximize carbohydrate stores, and to provide energy to the brain. Some foods digest more quickly than others, such as carbohydrate and protein, so we suggest that the athlete consume these rather than fat, which digests more slowly. Good carbohydrate foods include spaghetti, rice, and bran. Good protein foods include low-fat yogurt and boneless, skinless chicken. Athletes should eat foods that they are familiar with and that they can digest easily. Big meals should be eaten three to four hours before the contest. Of course, athletes who don't have time for a pregame meal can use sport beverages and replacement meals, although they are not a good replacement for the pre-competition meal.
- **Clothing and Equipment:** At the contest athletes need their team uniform, appropriate shoes, if applicable, and any sport-specific equipment needed for the competition.
- **Time to Arrive:** Your athletes need to adequately warm up before a competition, ensure you leave with ample time to arrive at least one hour before the competition to go through the team warm-up. You can designate where you want the team to gather as they arrive at the competition site. Consider making a team rule stating that athletes must travel with the team and go through the complete team warm-up.

Facilities, Equipment, and Support Personnel

Although the site coordinator and officials have formal responsibilities for facilities and equipment, you should know what to look for to ensure that the contest is safe for all athletes. Download the "Facilities Inspection Checklist" in the Resource section of this course.)

You should arrive at the competition site early enough before the competition begins so you can check the site, check in with the site coordinator and officials, and greet each of your athletes as they arrive. If the officials don't arrive before the competition when they're supposed to, inform the site coordinator.

Unplanned Events

Part of being prepared to coach is to expect the unexpected. What do you do if athletes are late? What if you have an emergency and can't make the competition or will be late? What if the contest is rained out or otherwise postponed? Being prepared to handle out-of-the-ordinary circumstances will help you if unplanned events happen.



If athletes are late or do not come at all, you may have to make adjustments in your line up.

Although this may not be a major inconvenience, stress to your athletes the importance of being on time for two reasons:

1. Part of being a member of a team is being committed to and responsible for the other members. When athletes don't show up or show up late, they break that commitment.
2. Athletes need to go through a warm-up together to physically prepare for the competition and to connect with their teammates. Skipping the warm-up also risks injury.

Communicating With Parents

The groundwork for your communication with parents, guardians and/or caregivers will have been laid in the parent orientation meeting, through which parents learned the best ways to support their children's—and the whole team's—efforts. Help parents define success based not just on the competition outcome, but also on how the athletes are improving their performances and meeting other goals.

If parents yell at their children for mistakes made during the competition, make disparaging remarks about the officials or opponents, or shout instructions for which tactics to use, ask them to refrain and to instead support the team through their comments and actions. These standards of conduct should all be covered in the preseason parent/guardian/caregiver orientation.

When time permits, as parents gather at the competition site before the competition and before the team has come out together, you can let them know in a general sense what the team has been focusing on during the past week and what your goals are for the competition. However, your athletes must come first during this time, so focus on your athletes during the pre-competition warm-up.

After a competition, quickly come together as a staff and decide what to say to the team. Focus on what goals were met, who had outstanding performances, who gave maximum effort, who helped other teammates and what was needed at the next practice. Everyone should receive positive reinforcement for what they achieved even if the team did not win. Any athlete's self-worth should not be tied up in a win or a loss. Then informally assess with parents, as the opportunity arises, how the team did based not on the outcome, but on meeting performance goals and performing to the best of their abilities. Help parents understand competition as a process, not solely as a test that is pass/fail or win/lose. Encourage parents to reinforce that concept at home.

An emergency might cause you, the coach, to be late or miss a competition. In these cases, notify your assistant coach(es), if you have one or more, or the local coordinator. If notified in advance, a parent of an athlete or another volunteer might be able to step in for you or to assist the assistant coach who has become the head coach in your absence.

Sometimes a competition will be postponed because of inclement weather, unsafe field conditions, or for other reasons. If the postponement takes place before competition day, you must call every member of your team to let them know. If it happens while the teams are at the site preparing for the competition, gather your team members and tell them the news and explain why the competition has been postponed. Ensure that all your athletes have a ride are in their designated vehicles before you leave.

Warm-Up & Stretching

Athletes need to both physically and mentally prepare for a competition when they arrive at the site. Physical preparation involves warming up and stretching. Conduct the warm-up similarly to practice warm-ups, focusing on practicing skills and stretching. Ensuring your athletes are properly warmed up before the competition help prepare them mentally and physically so as to build their confidence, provide stability at a new site and reduce the potential for injury during the competition.

Develop the warm-up so that athletes practice techniques and tactics that will occur in the competition. You should also include the drills you use in your daily warm-up, but this doesn't mean that extensive time must be spent on each skill.



During the warm-up, remind your athletes of the following:

- Focus on the techniques and tactics that they've been working on in recent practices, reinforcing the things they've been doing well and their strengths.
- Briefly review the team tactics you focused on in the previous practice in preparation for this competition.
- Perform the tactics and skills to the best of their individual abilities and work together as a team.
- Work hard; be smart, and have fun!

During the Competition

Throughout the competition, you must keep the competition in the proper perspective and help your athletes do the same. You will observe how your athletes execute tactics and skills and how well they work together. You will make tactical decisions in several areas. You will model appropriate behavior, show respect for opponents and officials, and demand the same of your athletes. You will watch out for your athletes' physical safety and psychological welfare in terms of building their self-esteem and helping them manage stress and anxiety. Let's first focus on how you can help your team keep the proper perspective and then we can focus on the tactical decisions for competition-day performance.

Proper Perspective

Winning competitions is the short-term goal of your sport program; helping your athletes learn the tactics, skills, and sport-specific rules ... how to become fit and how to be good sports while participating in sport and in life are the long-term goals. Your athletes are "winning" when they are becoming better human beings through their participation in your sport. Keep that perspective in mind when you coach. You have the privilege of setting the tone for how your team approaches the competition. Keep winning and all aspects of competition in proper perspective, and your athletes will likely follow your lead.



Coaching Tip

During the competition when particular athletes on the team are competing, the focus should be on what is happening within the competition and how to prepare for what may come next.

Tactical Decisions

While you aren't called upon to be a great strategist, you are called upon to make tactical decisions in a couple of areas throughout a competition. You'll make decisions about slight adjustments to your athletes' tactics and about correcting athletes' performance errors or leaving the correction for the next practice.

Starting and Substituting Players

If you're coaching a team sport in which you'll need to be substituting and alternating players during the competition, you will need starting line-up and substitution a plan for how you'll make these changes and decisions.

When considering participation time, make sure that everyone on the team competes at least half of each competition or adjust their participation time, as necessary, based on the organization's rules. This should be your guiding principle as you consider starting and substitution patterns. We suggest you consider two options in substituting athletes:

1. *Substituting individually*

Replace one athlete with another. This offers you a lot of latitude in deciding who goes in when, and it gives you the greatest combination of athletes throughout the competition. It can be hard to keep track of participation time, but this could be made easier by developing a substitution schedule and assigning an assistant or a parent this task. (See Substitution Schedule in the resource area.) Also be aware of your organization's rules concerning participation time.

For example, in volleyball, you have the option of substituting athletes when the ball is dead when you decide to use individual substitution. You may tell players before the game that they will play the front row or the back row and then the substitute will play the back row or the front row, accordingly. Athletes will then know in advance when they should be on the court.



2. *Substituting by quarters in specific sports*

The advantage of substituting athletes after each quarter is that you can easily track participation time and athletes know how long they will be in before they might be replaced.

Adjusting Team Tactics

At the 8-to-9 and 10-to-11 age levels, you probably won't adjust your team tactics significantly during a competition. Rather, you'll focus on the basic tactics, and during breaks in the contest, you'll emphasize the specific tactics your team needs to work on. However, coaches of 12- to 14-year-olds might have reason to make tactical adjustments to improve their team's chances of performing well and winning. As the competition progresses, assess your opponent's style of performance and tactics and make adjustments that are appropriate—that is, those that your athletes are prepared for.

Consider the following examples:

- If coaching basketball or soccer, how do your opponents usually initiate their attack? Do they move the ball to get around, over, or through your defense? This can help you make defensive adjustments.
- If coaching tennis or badminton, will your opponent be an all-court player? Is your opponent quick and athletic, with no major strengths or weaknesses? The opponent's style of play should influence how you prepare an athlete for a match.
- If coaching baseball or softball, is the opposing team's defense shoddy? Do you have trouble in the areas of cutoffs and relays? This might prompt you to gamble on the bases more, trying to take the extra base.

Knowing the answers to these types of questions can help you formulate a competition plan and make adjustments during a competition. However, don't stress tactics too much during a competition. Doing so can take the fun out of the competition for the athletes. If you don't trust your memory, carry a pen and pad to note which team tactics and individual skills need attention in the next practice.

Correcting Errors

There are two types of errors: learning errors and performance errors. Learning errors are those that occur because athletes don't know how to perform a skill. Performance errors are made not because athletes don't know how to execute the skill, but because they make mistakes in carrying out what they do know.

Sometimes it's not easy to tell which type of error athletes are making. Knowing your athletes' capabilities helps you to determine if they know the skill and are simply making mistakes in executing it or if they don't know how to perform it. If they are making learning errors—that is, they don't know how to perform the skills—note this and cover it at the next practice. Competition time is not the time to teach skills.

If they are making performance errors, however, you can help athletes correct them during a competition. Athletes who make performance errors often do so because they have a lapse in concentration or motivation, or they are simply demonstrating human error. Competition and contact can also adversely affect a young athlete's technique and a word of encouragement about concentration may help. If you do correct a performance error during a competition, do so in a quiet, controlled, and positive tone of voice during a break or when the athlete is out of the competition.

For those making performance errors, you must determine if the error is just an occasional error that anyone can make or if it is an expected error for a young athlete at that stage of development. If the latter is the case, then the athlete may appreciate your not commenting on the mistake. The athlete knows it was a mistake and may already know how to correct it. On the other hand, provide an encouraging word and a "coaching cue." (For example in gymnastics, "remember to keep your knees tucked in") may be just what the athlete needs. Knowing the athletes and what to say is very much a part of the "art" of coaching.



Coaching Tip

Designate an area for your sport where athletes gather after they come out of the competition. In this area, you can speak to them either individually or as a group and make necessary adjustments.



Coach and Athlete Behavior

Another aspect of coaching on competition day is managing behavior—both yours and your athletes'. The two are closely connected.

Coach Conduct

You very much influence your athletes' behavior before, during, and after a competition. If you're up, your athletes are more likely to be up. If you're anxious, they'll take notice, and the anxiety can become contagious. If you're negative, they'll respond with worry. If you're positive, they'll compete with more enjoyment. If you're constantly yelling instructions or commenting on mistakes and errors, it will be difficult for athletes to concentrate. Instead, let athletes get into the flow of the competition.

The focus should be on positive competition and on having fun. (Download the Special Olympics Coach Code of Conduct.)

A coach who over organizes everything and dominates a competition is definitely not making it fun. So how should you conduct yourself during the contest?

Here are a few pointers:

- Be calm, in control, and supportive of your athletes.
- Encourage athletes often, but instruct during competition sparingly. Athletes should focus on their performance during competition, not on instructions shouted from the coach off to the side.
- If you need to instruct an athlete, do so when you're both off to the side, in a low-key manner. Never yell at athletes for making mistakes. Instead, briefly demonstrate or remind them of the correct technique and encourage them. Tell them how to correct the problem in the competition.

You should also make certain that you have discussed the appropriate demeanor with your staff and that every coach is in agreement to the way they will conduct themselves and then work to stick to it. Remember, you're not competing in a world championship! Athletic competitions are designed to help athletes develop their skills and themselves—and to have fun. So coach in a manner at competitions that helps your athletes do those things.

Athlete Conduct

You're responsible for keeping your athletes under control. Do so by setting a good example and by disciplining when necessary. Set team rules for good behavior. If athletes attempt to cheat, fight, argue, badger, yell disparaging remarks, and the like, it is your responsibility to confront the misbehavior. Initially, it may mean removing athletes immediately from the competition, letting them calm down, and then speaking to them quietly, explaining that their behavior is not acceptable for your team and if they want to participate, they must not repeat the action. (Download "Special Olympics Athlete Code of Conduct" from the Resources section.)

Consider team rules in these areas of competition conduct:

- Athlete language
- Athlete behavior
- Interactions with officials or judges
- Discipline for misbehavior
- Dress code for competitions

Physical Safety

Safety during competition can be affected by how officials call the rules. If officials aren't calling rules correctly and this risks injury to your athletes, you must intervene. Voice your concern in a respectful manner and in a way that places the emphasis where it should be: on the athletes' safety. One of the officials' main responsibilities is to provide for athletes' safety. Both you and the officials are working together to protect the athletes whenever possible. Don't hesitate to address an issue of safety with an official when the need arises.

Athlete Welfare

All athletes are not the same. Some attach their self-worth to winning and losing. This idea is fueled by coaches, parents, peers, and society, who place great emphasis on winning. Athletes become anxious when



they're uncertain whether they can meet the expectations of others or of themselves—especially when meeting a particular expectation is important to them.

If you place too much importance on the competition or cause your athletes to doubt their abilities, they will become anxious about the outcome and their performance. If your athletes look uptight and anxious during a contest, find ways to reduce both the uncertainties about how their performance will be evaluated and the importance they are attaching to the competition. Help athletes focus on realistic personal goals—goals that are reachable and measurable and that will help them improve their performance all while having fun as they participate. Another way to reduce anxiety on competition day is to stay away from emotional pre-competition pep talks. Instead remind athletes of the tactics and plans they will use and to work hard, to do their best, and to have fun.

When coaching during competition, remember that the most important outcome from sport participation is to **build or enhance athletes' self-worth**. Keep that firmly in mind, and strive to promote this through every coaching decision.

Opponents and Officials

Respect opponents and officials. Without them, there wouldn't be a competition. Officials help provide a fair and safe experience for athletes and, as appropriate, help them learn the sport. Opponents provide opportunities for your team to test itself, improve, and excel.

You and your team should show respect for opponents by giving your best efforts. Showing respect means being civil to your opponents. Don't allow your athletes to "trash talk" or taunt an opponent. This behavior is disrespectful to the spirit of the competition and to the opponent. Immediately remove athletes from a competition if they trash talk or taunt an opponent. When appropriate, request that violations be called. Enforcing the rules and calling violations assists athletes in maintaining a high level of their skills and reinforces their learning the rules. As long as the calls are being made consistently on both sides, most of your officiating concerns will be alleviated.



Coaching Tip

Keep your demeanor even and positive, conduct your responsibilities the same regardless of the score, help correct your athletes' errors in a positive manner, and continue to offer encouragement to each athlete.

After the Competition

When the competition is over, join your team in congratulating the coaches and athletes of the opposing team, then be sure to thank the officials. Check on any injuries athletes may have sustained during the competition and inform athletes of how to care for them. Be prepared to speak with the officials about any problems that occurred during the competition. Then hold a brief meeting—or "team circle"—to ensure that your athletes are on an even keel, whether they won or lost.

Reactions Following the Competition

When celebrating a victory, make sure your team does so in a way that doesn't show disrespect for the opponents. It is okay and appropriate to be happy and celebrate a win, but do not allow your athletes to taunt the opponents or boast about their victory. Keep winning in perspective. Winning and losing are a part of life, not just a part of sport. If athletes can handle both equally well, they'll be successful in whatever they do.

Athletes are competitors, and competitors are disappointed in defeat. If your team has made a winning effort, let them know this. After a loss, help them keep their chins up and maintain a positive attitude that will carry over into the next practice and contest.



Coaching Tip

Immediately following a competition, regardless of the outcome, stay positive. When the athletes return to practice after a competition, make certain that you let the previous competition go, learn from the experience, make needed corrections, and focus on the next opponent and next competition.



Post-Competition Team Meeting

Following the competition, gather your team for a “team circle” in a designated area for a short meeting. The athletes can sit or kneel on one knee, and they may take off any extra equipment, if applicable. Before this meeting, decide as a coaching staff what to say and who will say it. Be sure that the coaching staff speaks with one voice following the competition.

If your athletes have performed well in a contest, compliment them and congratulate them. Tell them specifically what they did well, whether they won or lost. This will reinforce their desire to repeat their good performances. Don't use this time to criticize individual athletes for poor performances in front of teammates. Help athletes improve their skills, but do so in the next practice, not immediately after the competition.

The post- competition team circle isn't the time to go over tactical problems and adjustments. The athletes are either so happy after a win or so dejected after a loss that they won't absorb much tactical information. Your first concern should be your athletes' attitudes and mental well-being. You don't want them to be too high after a win or too low after a loss. This is the time you can be most influential in keeping the outcome in perspective and keeping them on an even keel. Remember, too, that although the final outcome of the competition may be extremely important to you, the staff, and some of the parents, for athletes the biggest concern may be whether they will get pizza or not. Realize that the majority of your athletes are participating to have fun, and understand that their desire to go out together for something to eat rather than reliving the competition is not a reflection on their desire to perform well. Stay positive, allow the athletes to be kids, and avoid making too much over the outcome of the competition.

Finally, gather your athletes, coaches and parents/providers, go to your vehicles and drive home. Ensure your athletes have transportation home; ensure full supervision of your athletes.

Coaching Special Olympics Athletes



Unit 4: The Coach – Managing the Program

In the previous units, we focused on the athlete – what influenced how athletes learn and function; how to effectively teach and train athletes and how to effectively prepare for and coach athletes during competition.

Managing your program is also a critical element in this process. In this concluding unit, we will provide information and tools designed to help you effectively manage your program. Our aim is to help you make a successful Special Olympics program happen!

If you are like most youth league or volunteer coaches, you have probably been recruited from the ranks of concerned parents, sport enthusiasts, or community volunteers. Like many rookie and veteran coaches, you probably have had little formal instruction on how to coach. But when the call went out for coaches to assist with the local Special Olympics sport program, you answered because you liked to help individuals who were learning the sport, enjoyed sports yourself and you wanted to be involved in a worthwhile community activity.

Your initial coaching assignment may be difficult. Like many volunteers, you may not know everything there is to know about the sport, about how to work with children or about how to work with individuals with intellectual disability. To start, we look at your responsibilities and what's involved in being a coach. We also talk about what to do when your child is on the team you coach, and we examine five tools for being an effective coach.

Your Responsibilities As a Coach

Coaching at any level involves much more than scoring points or preventing your opponent from scoring points. Coaching involves accepting the tremendous responsibility you face when parents put their children into your care. As a coach, you'll be called upon to do the following:

1. Know and fulfill the Special Olympics mission and philosophy.

The Special Olympics mission needs to be part of every Special Olympics' coach's philosophy. What a coach does and how a coach communicates must be in line with the mission. For example, Special Olympics views "winning" as achieving, not as coming in first. It is true that athletes train in order to compete, and it is competition that conveys how the athletes or teams are progressing, what is going well and what needs to be reviewed or learned next.

2. Provide a safe physical environment.

Participating in any sport holds inherent risks, but as a coach you're responsible for regularly inspecting the practice and competition facilities and equipment. (Download the "Facilities Inspection Checklist" from the Resources section.)

Make it a priority to explain to the athletes and parents before the start of the season that all sports involve risks. Therefore, during the course of the year, athletes ...

- will get bumps and bruises,
- will be tired and need extra rest, and
- will need to increase their fluid intake to stay hydrated.

Teach athletes and parents the importance of keeping their equipment in good working order. Reassure them that, to avoid injury, they will learn the safest techniques and that you have a safety plan and you will follow it.

3. Communicate in a positive way.

You have a lot to communicate. You'll communicate not only with your athletes and parents but also with the coaching staff, officials, administrators, and others. As you saw in Unit 2 – Teaching and Training the Athlete,

communicate in a way that is positive and that demonstrates that you have the best interests of the athletes at heart.



4. Teach the fundamental skills of your sport.

When teaching the fundamental skills of your sport, you want to be sure that your athletes have fun. Therefore, we ask that you help all athletes be the best they can be by creating a fun, yet productive, practice environment. To help your athletes improve their skills, you need to have a sound understanding of sport-specific skills, which was also emphasized in Unit 2.

5. Teach the rules of the sport.

Also emphasized in Unit 2 was introducing the rules of the sport and incorporating them into individual instruction. Many rules can be taught in the first practice, and at any time an opportunity naturally arises in later practices.

6. Direct athletes in competition.

This includes determining the starting lineup or event assignments and a substitution plan, relating appropriately to officials and to opposing coaches and athletes, and making sound tactical decisions during competitions. As mentioned in Unit 3, Preparing for an Coaching During Competition, it's important to remember that the focus is not on winning at all costs but on coaching your athletes to compete well, do their best, improve their skills, and strive to win within the rules.

7. Effectively plan for all aspects of the season.

This includes practices, competitions, fitness and administrative requirements related to training and competition (such as facilities, equipment and competition registration). Help your athletes become fit and value fitness for a lifetime.

We want you to help your athletes be fit so that they can participate safely and successfully. We also want your athletes to learn to become fit on their own, understand the value of fitness, and enjoy training. Thus, we ask you not to make them do push-ups or run laps as punishment. Make it fun to get fit for their sport, and make it fun to participate in their sport so that they'll stay fit for a lifetime.

Planning each individual practice and sharing the practice plan among assistant coaches allows everyone to be as effective and efficient as possible during the time allotted. Planning also involves fitness, preparing for each competition and taking assignments for supervisory responsibilities as well as crisis management. In essence take into account the technical, tactical, mental and fitness needs and how to address all with a level of quality in a limited amount of time.

8. Help athletes develop character and manage their relationships with parents, guardians and caregivers effectively.

Character development includes learning, caring, being honest and respectful, and taking responsibility. These intangible qualities are no less important to teach than the fundamental skills of the sport. We ask you to teach these values to athletes by demonstrating and encouraging behaviors that express these values at all times. For example, athletes should learn to help their teammates, participate within the rules, and show respect for their opponents. Many coaches ask their athletes to sign a team code of conduct pledge at the beginning of the season. This code of conduct should be based on your team policies. (Download the "Athlete Code of Conduct" from the Resources tab.)



Coaching Tip

Although it may take more thought and may require you to plan ahead, always explain to parents what you are trying to accomplish as a staff, and explain to athletes what you want them to do rather than what they should not do.

These are your responsibilities as a coach. Remember that every athlete is an individual; meet them where they are in development – psychologically, physically and socially, and provide a wholesome environment. Every athlete must have the opportunity to learn without fear while having fun and enjoying the overall experience.

Coaching Your Own Child

Coaching can become even more complicated when your child participates on the team you coach. Many coaches are parents, but the two roles should not be confused. As a parent you are responsible only for



yourself and your child, but as a coach you are also responsible for the organization, all the athletes on the team, and their parents. Because of these additional responsibilities, your behavior with the team will be different from your behavior at home and your son or daughter may not understand why.

For example, imagine the confusion of a young boy who is the center of his parents' attention at home but is barely noticed by his father (who is also the team coach) in the sport setting. Or consider the mixed signals received by a young girl whose skill is constantly evaluated at practice by a coach (who is also her mother) who otherwise rarely comments on her daughter's activities. You need to explain to your child your new responsibilities and how they will affect your relationship when coaching.

Take the following steps to avoid problems when coaching your own child:

- Ask your child if he or she wants you to coach the team.
- Explain why you want to be involved with the team.
- Discuss how your interactions will change when you take on the role of coach at practices or competitions.
- Limit your coaching behavior to when you are in the coaching role.
- Avoid parenting during practice or competition in order to keep your role clear in your child's mind.
- Reaffirm your love for your child, irrespective of his or her performance at practice or during competition.

Five Tools of an Effective Coach

Have you purchased the traditional coaching tools—things like whistles, coaching clothes, sport shoes, and a clipboard? They'll help you in the act of coaching, but to be successful you'll need five other tools that cannot be bought. These tools are available only through self-examination and hard work; they're easy to remember with the acronym COACH:

- C = Comprehension
- O = Outlook
- A = Affection
- C = Character
- H = Humor

COMPREHENSION

Comprehension of the rules, tactics, and skills of your sport is required. You must understand the elements of the sport. To improve your comprehension of the sport, take the following steps:

- Read about the rules of the sport in various resources.
- Read additional coaching books, including those available from the American Sport Education Program (ASEP).
- Contact youth sport organizations.
- Attend coaching clinics.
- Talk with more experienced coaches.
- Observe local college, high school, and youth competitions.
- Watch competitions on television.

In addition to having knowledge about your sport, you must implement proper training and safety methods so that your athletes can participate with little risk of injury. Even then, injuries may occur. And more often than not, you'll be the first person responding to your athletes' injuries, so be sure you understand the basic emergency care procedures at the end of this unit.

OUTLOOK

This coaching tool refers to your perspective and goals—what you seek as a coach. The most common coaching objectives are to (a) have fun, (b) help athletes develop their physical, mental, and social skills, and (c) win (achieving your personal best). Thus, your outlook involves your priorities, your planning, and your vision for the future. "Assessing Your Priorities" is a tool that will enable you to set the priorities you have for yourself as a coach.

The American Sport Education Program (ASEP) has a motto that will help you keep your outlook in line with the best interests of the kids on your team. It summarizes in four words all you need to remember when establishing your coaching priorities: “Athletes First, Winning Second!”



Assessing Your Priorities

Even though all coaches focus on competition, we want you to focus on *positive* competition—keeping the pursuit of victory in perspective by making decisions that, first, are in the best interest of the athletes, and second, will help to win/achieve in competition.

So, how do you know if your outlook and priorities are in order? Here’s a little test:

1. Which situation would you be most proud of?
 - a. *Knowing that each participant enjoyed participating in the sport*
 - b. *Seeing that all athletes improved their skills*
 - c. *Winning the league championship*

2. Which statement best reflects your thoughts about sport?
 - a. *If it isn't fun, don't do it.*
 - b. *Everyone should learn something every day.*
 - c. *Sport isn't fun if you don't win.*

3. How would you like your athletes to remember you?
 - a. *As a coach who was fun*
 - b. *As a coach who provided a good base of fundamental skills*
 - c. *As a coach who had a winning record*

4. Which would you most like to hear a parent of an athlete on your team say?
 - a. *Mike really had a good time participating this year.*
 - b. *Mike learned some important lessons participating this year.*
 - c. *Mike played on the first-place team this year.*

5. Which of the following would be the most rewarding moment of your season?
 - a. *Having your team want to continue participating and competing, even after practice is over*
 - b. *Seeing one of your athletes finally master a skill*
 - c. *Winning the league championship*

Look over your answers. If you most often selected “a” responses, then having fun is most important to you. A majority of “b” answers suggests that skill development is what attracts you to coaching. And if “c” was your most frequent response, winning is tops on your list of coaching priorities. If your priorities are in order, your athletes’ well-being will take precedence over your team’s win-loss record every time.

This motto recognizes that striving to win is an important, even vital, part of sports. But it emphatically states that no efforts in striving to win should be made at the expense of the athletes’ well-being, development, and enjoyment.

Take the following actions to better define your outlook:

- With your coaches, determine your priorities for the season.
- Prepare for situations that challenge your priorities.
- Set goals for yourself and your athletes that are consistent with your priorities.
- Plan how you and your athletes can best attain your goals.
- Review your goals frequently to be sure that you are staying on track.

AFFECTION

Another vital tool you will want to have in your coaching kit is a genuine concern for the individuals you coach. This requires having a passion for your athletes, a desire to share with them your enjoyment and knowledge of the sport, and the patience and understanding that allow each athlete to grow from involvement in sport.

You can demonstrate your care, compassion and patience in many ways, including the following:

- Make an effort to get to know each athlete on your team.
- Treat each athlete as an individual; meet them where they are psychologically, physically and socially.



- Empathize with athletes trying to learn new and difficult skills.
- Treat athletes as you would like to be treated under similar circumstances.
- Control your emotions.
- Show your enthusiasm for being involved with your team.
- Keep an upbeat tempo and positive tone in all of your communications.



Coaching Tip

When athletes know and feel that you care for each of them as individuals, they will care about the team and learn to participate in the sport more effectively.

CHARACTER

The fact that you have decided to coach young athletes probably means that you think participation in sport is important. But whether or not participation develops, character in your athletes depends as much on you as it does on the sport itself. How can you help your athletes build character?

Having good character means modeling appropriate behaviors for sport and life. That means more than just saying the right things. What you say and what you do must match. There is no place in coaching for the “Do as I say, not as I do” philosophy. Challenge, support, encourage, and reward every athlete, and your athletes will be more likely to accept, even celebrate, their differences. Be in control before, during, and after all practices and competitions. And don’t be afraid to admit when you were wrong. No one is perfect!

Each member of your coaching staff should consider the following steps to becoming a good role model:

- Take stock of your strengths and weaknesses.
- Build on your strengths.
- Set goals for yourself to improve on those areas you don’t want to see copied.
- If you slip up, apologize to your team and to yourself. You’ll do better next time.

HUMOR

Humor is an often-overlooked coaching tool. For our use, it means having the ability to laugh at yourself and with your athletes during practices and contests. Nothing helps balance the seriousness of a skill session like a chuckle or two. And a sense of humor puts in perspective the many mistakes your athletes will make. So don’t get upset over each miscue or respond negatively to erring athletes. Allow your athletes and yourself to enjoy the ups, and don’t dwell on the downs.

Here are some tips for injecting humor into your practices:

- Make practices fun by including a variety of activities.
- Keep all athletes involved in games and skill practices.
- Consider laughter by your athletes a sign of enjoyment, not of waning discipline.
- Smile!

Providing for Athletes’ Safety

Take a moment to imagine yourself as a gymnastics coach. One of your athletes is finishing her floor exercise routine when she comes down awkwardly on her left leg. You notice that she is not getting up from the mat and seems to be in pain. What do you do?

No coach wants to see athletes get hurt. But injury remains a reality of sport participation; consequently, you or one of your assistants must be prepared to provide first aid when injuries occur and to protect yourself against unjustified lawsuits. Fortunately, coaches can institute many preventive measures to reduce the risk. In this area, we describe steps you can take to prevent injuries, first aid and emergency responses for when injuries occur, and your legal responsibilities as a coach.

Being Prepared

Being prepared to provide basic emergency care involves many things, including being trained in cardiopulmonary resuscitation (CPR) and first aid and having an emergency action plan.



CPR and First Aid Training

We recommend that all coaches receive CPR and first aid training from a nationally recognized organization such as the National Safety Council, the American Heart Association, the American Red Cross, or the American Sport Education Program (ASEP). You should be certified based on a practical test and a written test of knowledge. CPR training should include pediatric and adult basic life support and obstructed airway procedures.

First Aid Kit

A well-stocked first aid kit should include the following:

- Antibacterial soap or wipes
- Arm sling
- Athletic tape—one and a half inches
- Bandage scissors
- Bandage strips—assorted sizes
- Blood spill kit
- Cell phone
- Contact lens case
- Cotton swabs
- Elastic wraps—3 inches; 4 inches; 6 inches
- Emergency blanket
- Examination gloves—latex free
- Eye patch
- Face mask removal tool
- Foam rubber—1/8 inch; 1/4 inch; 1/2 inch
- Insect sting kit
- List of emergency phone numbers
- Mirror
- Moleskin
- Nail clippers
- Oral thermometer (to determine if an athlete has a fever caused by illness)
- Penlight
- Petroleum jelly
- Plastic bags for crushed ice
- Pre-wrap (underwrap for tape)
- Rescue breathing or CPR face mask
- Safety glasses (for first aiders)
- Safety pins
- Saline solution for eyes
- Sterile gauze pads—3-inch and 4-inch squares (preferably nonstick)
- Sterile gauze rolls
- Sunscreen—sun protection factor (SPF) 30 or greater
- Tape adherent and tape remover
- Tongue depressors
- Tooth saver kit
- Triangular bandages
- Tweezers

Adapted, by permission, from M. Flegel, 2004, *Sport first aid*, 3rd ed. (Champaign, IL: Human Kinetics), 20.

Plan for Safety

You can't prevent all injuries from happening, but you can take preventive measures that give your athletes the best possible chance for injury-free participation. In creating the safest possible environment for your athletes, you must address these areas:

- Preseason physical examination
- Physical conditioning
- Equipment and facilities inspection
- Athlete matchups and inherent risks
- Proper supervision and record keeping
- Environmental conditions

Pre-season Physical Examination

Your athletes must have a physical examination with doctor's completing the "Special Olympics Application for Participation" (which is also the medical form) before they begin to participate in any practices or competitions. The exam should address the most likely areas of medical concern and identify youngsters at high risk. The athlete's parents, guardians or caregivers must also sign this form to allow their children to be treated in case of an emergency. For a sample form, please see "Application for Participation" in the Resources section.

Physical Conditioning

Athletes need to be in or get in shape to participate at the level expected. They must have adequate cardiorespiratory fitness and muscular fitness to fit the sport.

Cardiorespiratory fitness refers to the body's ability to use oxygen and fuels efficiently to power muscle contractions. As athletes get in better shape, their bodies are able to more efficiently deliver oxygen to fuel muscles and carry off carbon dioxide and other wastes. Athletes who aren't as fit as their peers often overextend in trying to keep up, which can result in lightheadedness, nausea, fatigue, and potential injury.



Try to remember that the athletes' goals are to participate, learn, and have fun. Therefore, you must keep the athletes active, attentive, and involved with every phase of practice. If you do, they will attain higher levels of cardiorespiratory fitness as the season progresses simply by taking part in practice. However, watch closely for signs of low cardiorespiratory fitness; assist athletes in developing fitness by providing a home training program and physically challenging each athlete. The Special Olympics TRAIN and FIT programs will allow more interaction at home and provide an opportunity for the family to develop their fitness together. These programs are available via the [SOI Resources website](#).

Muscular fitness encompasses strength, muscular endurance, power, speed, and flexibility. This type of fitness is affected by physical maturity, as well as strength training and other types of training. Your team members will likely exhibit a relatively wide range of muscular fitness. Those who have greater muscular fitness will, for example, be able to run faster, jump higher, and throw farther. They will also sustain fewer muscular injuries, and any injuries that do occur will tend to be minor. And in case of injury, recovery is faster in those with higher levels of muscular fitness.

Two other components of fitness and injury prevention are the warm-up and stretching and the cool-down and stretching phases. Although young bodies are generally very limber, they too can become tight through inactivity. The warm-up should address each muscle group and elevate the heart rate in preparation for strenuous activity. Athletes should warm up for 5 to 10 minutes using a combination of light running, jumping, and stretching. As practice winds down, slow athletes' heart rate with an easy jog or walk. Then have athletes stretch for 5 minutes to help prevent tight muscles before the next practice or contest.

Equipment and Facilities Inspection

Another way to prevent injuries is to check the quality and fit of uniforms, practice attire, and equipment used by your athletes, which was emphasized in Unit 2 – Teaching and Training the Athlete. Make sure your athletes' shoes, if applicable, are the proper size for their feet. Discuss with your athletes the need to double-tie their shoelaces and possibly wear two pairs of socks instead of one to help prevent blisters.

Check the quality of all equipment and uniforms before fitting them to the kids on your team. After distributing properly fitting equipment that is safe and in good condition, show athletes how to put on every part of their uniform. Give your athletes additional tips that may be helpful. For example, when coaching football (soccer), you can advise them to wear high socks that wick-away perspiration beneath their shin guards to reduce the chance of skin irritations.

Remember also to examine regularly the area on which your athletes practice and compete. Remove hazards, report conditions you cannot remedy, and request maintenance as necessary. If unsafe conditions exist, either make adaptations to prevent risk to your athletes' safety or stop the practice or competition until safe conditions have been restored. Refer to the Resources section for the "Facilities Inspection Checklist" for a form to guide you in verifying that the facility and equipment are safe.

Athlete Matchups and Inherent Risks in Contact Sports

For most contact sports, we recommend that you group teams in two-year age increments if possible. You'll encounter fewer mismatches in physical maturation with narrow age ranges. Even so, two 12-year-old boys might differ by 90 pounds in weight, a foot in height, and three or four years in emotional and intellectual maturity. This presents dangers for the less mature. Whenever possible, match athletes against opponents of similar size, speed and physical maturity. This approach gives smaller, less mature athletes a better chance to succeed and avoid injury while providing more mature athletes with a greater challenge. Closely supervise practices so that the more mature athletes do not put the less mature athletes at undue risk.

Although proper matching helps protect you from certain liability concerns, you must also warn athletes of the inherent risks involved in playing contact sport, because "failure to warn" is one of the most successful arguments in lawsuits against coaches. So, thoroughly explain the inherent risks of contact sport and make sure each athlete and their parents know, understand, and appreciate those risks. Some of these inherent risks were outlined in Unit 1 – The Athlete; learn more about them by talking with your Program administrators.

The pre-season parent orientation meeting is a good opportunity to explain the risks of the sport to parents and athletes and then have both the athletes and their parents sign waivers releasing you from liability



should an injury occur. These waivers should be legally reviewed prior to presentation to parents. These waivers do not relieve you of responsibility for your athletes' well-being, but they are recommended by lawyers and may help you in the event of a lawsuit.

Proper Supervision and Record Keeping

To ensure athletes' safety, you must provide both general supervision and specific supervision. General supervision means that you are in the area of activity so that you can see and hear what is happening. You should be ...

- present at the practice site; in position to supervise athletes even before the formal practice begins.
- immediately accessible to the activity and able to oversee the entire activity.
- alert to conditions that may be dangerous to athletes and ready to take action to protect athletes.
- able to react immediately and appropriately to emergencies.
- present at the practice site or competition area until the last athlete has been picked up.

Specific supervision is the direct supervision of an activity at practice. For example, you should provide specific supervision when you teach new skills and continue it until your athletes understand the requirements of the activity, the risks involved, and their own ability to perform in light of these risks. You also must provide specific supervision when you notice either athletes are breaking rules or there is a change in the condition of your athletes. As a general rule, the more dangerous the activity, the more specific the supervision required. This suggests that more specific supervision is required with younger and less experienced athletes.

As part of your supervision duty, you are expected to foresee potentially dangerous situations and to be positioned to help prevent them. This requires that you know the sport you are coaching well, especially the rules that are intended to provide for safety. Prohibit dangerous horseplay, and hold practices only under safe weather conditions. These specific supervisory activities, applied consistently, will make the practice and competition environment safer for your athletes and will help protect you from liability if a mishap occurs.

For further protection, **keep records** of your season plans, practice plans, and athletes' injuries. Season and practice plans come in handy when you need evidence that athletes have been taught certain skills, whereas accurate, detailed injury report forms offer protection against unfounded lawsuits. Special Olympics provides Incident Report Forms a sample of which is provided in the Resources section. Hold onto these records for several years so that you are protected if a parent, guardian or caregiver of a former athlete comes back and complains of an "old sport injury".

Environmental Conditions

Most health problems caused by environmental factors are related to excessive heat or cold, although you should also consider other environmental factors such as severe weather and air pollution. A little thought about potential problems and a little effort to ensure adequate protection for your athletes will prevent most serious emergencies related to environmental conditions.

Heat

On hot, humid days the body has difficulty cooling itself. Because the air is already saturated with water vapor (humidity), sweat doesn't evaporate as easily. Therefore, body sweat is a less effective cooling agent, and the body retains extra heat. Hot, humid environments put athletes at risk of heat exhaustion and heatstroke. And if *you* think it's hot or humid, it's worse for the younger athletes, not only because they're more active, but also because children younger than 12 have more difficulty regulating their body temperature than adults do. To provide for athletes' safety in hot or humid conditions, take the following preventive measures:

- Monitor weather conditions and adjust practices accordingly. Table 4.1 shows the specific air temperatures and humidity percentages that can be hazardous.

Table 4.1 Warm-Weather Precautions

Temperature	Humidity	Precautions
80-90	<70%	Monitor athletes prone to heat illness
80-90	>70%	5-minute rest after 30 minutes of practice
90-100	<70%	5-minute rest after 30 minutes of practice
90-100	>70%	Short practices in evenings or early morning



- Acclimatize athletes exercising in high heat and humidity by beginning slowly with lighter workouts to help reduce the risk of heat illness. Athletes can adjust to high heat and humidity in 7 to 10 days. During this period, hold practices at low to moderate activity levels and give the athletes fluid breaks every 20 minutes.
- If practicing outside, switch to light clothing. Athletes should wear shorts and white T-shirts.
- Identify and monitor athletes who are prone to heat illness. Athletes who are overweight, heavily muscled, or out of shape or athletes who work excessively hard or have suffered previous heat illness are more prone to heat illness. Closely monitor these athletes and give them water breaks every 15 to 20 minutes.
- Make sure athletes replace fluids lost through sweat. Encourage athletes to drink 17 to 20 ounces of fluid two to three hours before practice or competitions, 7 to 10 ounces every 20 minutes during practice and after practice, and to drink 16 to 24 ounces of fluid for every pound lost. Fluids, such as water and sports drinks, are preferable during competitions and practices (suggested intakes are based on NATA [National Athletic Trainers' Association] recommendations).
- Replenish electrolytes, such as sodium (salt) and potassium, which are lost through sweat. The best way to replace these lost nutrients in addition to others such as carbohydrate (energy) and protein (muscle building) is by eating a balanced diet. Experts say that during the most intense training periods in the heat, additional salt intake may be helpful.



Coaching Tip

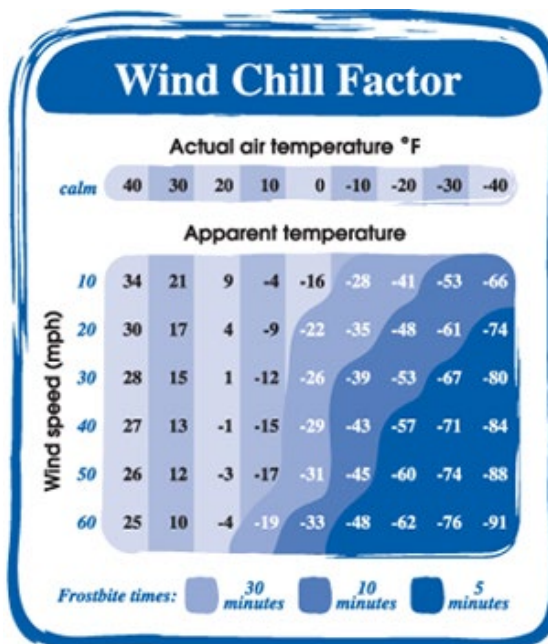
Encourage athletes to drink plenty of water before, during, and after practice. Water makes up 45 to 65 percent of a youngster's body weight, and even a small amount of water loss can cause severe consequences in the body's systems. It doesn't have to be hot and humid for athletes to become dehydrated, nor is thirst an accurate indicator of dehydration. In fact, by the time athletes are aware of their thirst, they are long overdue for a drink.

Cold

When a person is exposed to cold weather, body temperature starts to drop below normal. To counteract this, the body shivers to create heat and reduces blood flow to the extremities to conserve heat in the core of the body. But no matter how effective the body's natural heating mechanism is, the body will better withstand cold temperatures if it is prepared to handle them. To reduce the risk of cold-related illnesses, make sure athletes wear appropriate protective clothing and keep them active to maintain body heat. Also monitor the windchill because it can drastically affect the severity of athletes' responses to the weather. The windchill factor index is shown in table 4.2.

Severe Weather

Severe weather refers to a host of potential dangers, including lightning storms, tornadoes, hail, and heavy rains, which can cause injuries by creating sloppy field conditions for outdoor sports. Lightning is of special concern because it can come up quickly and can cause great harm or even kill. For each 5-second count from the flash of lightning to the bang of thunder, lightning is one mile away. A flash-bang of 10 seconds means lightning is two miles away; a flash-bang of 15 seconds indicates lightning is three miles away. An outdoor practice or competition should be stopped for the day if lightning is three miles away or closer (15 seconds or less from flash to bang). In addition to these suggestions, your school, league, or state association may also have additional rules that you will want to consider in severe weather.



When coaching an outdoor sport you should be aware of safe places in which to take cover when lightning strikes. They include fully enclosed metal vehicles with the windows up, enclosed buildings, and low ground (under cover of bushes, if possible). It's not safe to be near metal objects such as flag poles, fences, light poles, and metal bleachers. Also avoid trees, water, and open fields.



Cancel an outdoor practice when under either a tornado watch or warning. If you are practicing or competing when a tornado is nearby, you should get inside a building if possible. If you cannot get into a building, lie in a ditch or other low-lying area or crouch near a strong building and use your arms to protect your head and neck.

The keys to handling severe weather are caution and carefulness. Don't try to get that last 10 minutes of practice in if lightning is on the horizon. Don't continue a competition in heavy rain. Many storms can strike both quickly and ferociously. Respect the weather and play it safe.

Air Pollution

Poor air quality and smog can present real dangers to your athletes. Both short- and long-term lung damage are possible from participating in unsafe air. Although it's true that participating in clean air is not possible in many areas, restricting activity is recommended when the air-quality ratings are lower than moderate or when there is a smog alert. Your local health department or air-quality control board can inform you of the air-quality ratings for your area and when restricting activities is recommended.

Responding to Athletes' Injuries

No matter how good and thorough your prevention program is, injuries most likely will occur. When injury does strike, chances are you will be the one in charge. The severity and nature of the injury will determine how actively involved you'll be in treating it. But regardless of how seriously an athlete is hurt, it is your responsibility to know what steps to take. Therefore, you must be prepared to take appropriate action and provide basic emergency care when an injury occurs. Also ensure that you or one of your coaches is First Aid and CPR certified.

Emergency Plan

An emergency plan is the final step in being prepared to take appropriate action for severe or serious injuries. The plan calls for three steps:

1. Evaluate the injured athlete.

Use your CPR and first aid training to guide you. Be sure to keep these certifications up to date. Practice your skill frequently to keep them fresh and ready to use when you need them.

2. Call the appropriate medical personnel.

If possible, delegate the responsibility for seeking medical help to another calm and responsible adult who attends all practices and competitions. Write out a list of emergency phone numbers and keep it with you at practices and competitions. Include the following phone numbers:

- Rescue unit
- Hospital
- Physician
- Police
- Fire department

Take each athlete's emergency information to every practice and competition. (Download the "Emergency Information Card" from the Resources section.) This information includes the person to contact in case of an emergency, what types of medications the athlete is using, what types of drugs the athlete is allergic to, and so on.

Give an emergency response card (download the "Emergency Response Card" from the Resources section) to the contact person calling for emergency assistance. Having this information ready should help the contact person remain calm. You also must complete an Incident Report form and keep it on file for all injuries.

3. Provide first aid.

If medical personnel are not on hand at the time of the injury, you should provide first aid care to the extent of your qualifications. Although your CPR and first aid training will guide you, it is important to remember the following:

- Do not move the injured athlete if the injury is to the head, neck, or back; if a large joint (ankle, knee, elbow, shoulder) is dislocated; or if the pelvis, a rib, or an arm or leg is fractured.



- Calm the injured athlete and keep others away from him as much as possible.
- Evaluate whether the athlete's breathing has stopped or is irregular, and if necessary, clear the airway with your fingers.
- Administer artificial respiration if the athlete's breathing has stopped. Administer CPR if the athlete's circulation has stopped.
- Remain with the athlete until medical personnel arrive.

Emergency Steps

It is important that you have a clear, well-rehearsed emergency action plan. You want to be sure you are prepared in case of an emergency because every second counts.

Your emergency action plan should follow this sequence:

- 1) Check the athlete's level of consciousness.
- 2) Send a contact person to call the appropriate medical personnel and to call the athlete's parents.
- 3) Send someone to wait for the rescue team and direct them to the injured athlete.
- 4) Assess the injury.
- 5) Administer first aid.
- 6) Assist emergency medical personnel, as needed, in preparing the athlete for transportation to a medical facility.
- 7) Appoint someone to go with the athlete if the parents are not available. This person should be responsible, calm and familiar with the athlete. Assistant coaches or parents are best to do this.
- 8) Complete an Incident Report Form while the incident is fresh in your mind.

Taking Appropriate Action

Proper CPR and first aid training, a well-stocked first aid kit, and an emergency plan help prepare you to take appropriate action when an injury occurs. We spoke in the previous section about the importance of providing first aid to the extent of your qualifications. Don't attempt to "play doctor" with injuries; sort out minor injuries that you can treat from those that need medical attention. Let's take a look at taking the appropriate action for minor injuries and more serious injuries.

Minor Injuries

Although no injury seems minor to the person experiencing it, most injuries are neither life threatening nor severe enough to restrict participation. When these injuries occur, you can take an active role in their initial treatment.

Scrapes and Cuts

When one of your athletes has an open wound, the first thing you should do is put on a pair of disposable latex-free examination gloves or some other effective blood barrier. Then follow these four steps:

- 1) Stop the bleeding by applying direct pressure with a clean dressing to the wound and elevating it. The athlete may be able to apply this pressure while you put on your gloves. Do not remove the dressing if it becomes soaked with blood. Instead, place an additional dressing on top of the one already in place. If bleeding continues, elevate the injured area above the heart and maintain pressure.
- 2) Cleanse the wound thoroughly once the bleeding is controlled. A good rinsing with a forceful stream of water, and perhaps light scrubbing with soap, will help prevent infection.
- 3) Protect the wound with sterile gauze or a bandage strip. If the athlete continues to participate, apply protective padding over the injured area.
- 4) Remove and dispose of gloves carefully to prevent you or anyone else from coming into contact with blood.

For bloody noses not associated with serious facial injury, have the athlete sit and lean slightly forward. Then pinch the athlete's nostrils shut. If the bleeding continues after several minutes, or if the athlete has a history of nosebleeds, seek medical assistance.



Coaching Tip

You shouldn't let a fear of acquired immune deficiency syndrome (AIDS) and other communicable diseases stop you from helping an athlete. You are only at risk if you allow contaminated blood to come in contact with an open wound on your body, so the disposable examination gloves that you wear will protect you from AIDS should one of your athletes carry this disease. Check with your sport director, your Special Olympics Program, or the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) for more information about protecting yourself and your participants from AIDS.



Strains and Sprains

The physical demands of sport practices and competitions often result in injury to the muscles or tendons (strains) or to the ligaments (sprains). When your athletes suffer minor strains or sprains, immediately apply the PRICE method of injury care:

- P = Protect the athlete and injured body part from further danger or trauma.
- R = Rest the area to avoid further damage and foster healing.
- I = Ice the area to reduce swelling and pain.
- C = Compress the area by securing an ice bag in place with an elastic wrap.
- E = Elevate the injury above heart level to keep the blood from pooling in the area.

Bumps and Bruises

Inevitably, sport-participants make contact with each other and with the ground, especially in contact sports. If the force applied to a body part at impact is great enough, a bump or bruise will result. Many athletes continue practicing and competing with these sore spots, but if the bump or bruise is large and painful, you should act appropriately. Again, use the PRICE method for injury care and monitor the injury. If swelling, discoloration, and pain have lessened, the athlete may resume participation with protective padding; if not, the athlete should be examined by a physician.

Serious Injuries

Head, neck, and back injuries; fractures; and injuries that cause an athlete to lose consciousness are among a class of injuries that you cannot and should not try to treat yourself. In these cases you should follow the emergency action plan. We do want to examine more closely, however, your role in preventing and handling heat exhaustion and heatstroke.

Heat Cramps Tough practices combined with heat stress and substantial fluid loss from sweating can provoke muscle cramps commonly known as heat cramps. Cramping is most common during the early part of the season when weather is the hottest and athletes may be least adapted to heat. The cramp, a severe tightening up of the muscle, can drop athletes and prevent continued participation. Dehydration, electrolyte loss, and fatigue are the contributing factors. The immediate treatment is to have athletes cool off and slowly stretch the contracted muscle. Fluids with electrolytes should also be consumed to rehydrate the athlete. Athletes may return to participation later that day or the next day provided the cramp doesn't cause a muscle strain.

Heat Exhaustion

Heat exhaustion is a shocklike condition caused by dehydration and electrolyte depletion. Symptoms include headache, nausea, dizziness, chills, fatigue, and extreme thirst. Profuse sweating is a key sign of heat exhaustion. Other signs include pale, cool, and clammy skin; rapid, weak pulse; loss of coordination; and dilated pupils.

An athlete suffering from heat exhaustion should rest in a cool area, shaded if outdoors; drink cool fluids, particularly those containing electrolytes; and apply ice to the neck, back, or abdomen to help cool the body. If you believe an athlete is suffering from heat exhaustion, seek medical attention. Under no conditions should the athlete return to activity that day or before regaining all the weight lost through sweat. If the athlete has to see a physician, he shouldn't return to the team until he has a written release from the physician.



Heatstroke

Heatstroke is a life-threatening condition in which the body stops sweating and body temperature rises dangerously high. It occurs when dehydration causes a malfunction in the body's temperature control center in the brain. Symptoms include the feeling of being extremely hot, nausea, confusion, irritability, and fatigue. Signs include hot, dry, and flushed or red skin (this is a key sign); lack of sweat; rapid pulse; rapid breathing; constricted pupils; vomiting; diarrhea; and possibly seizures, unconsciousness, or respiratory or cardiac arrest.

If an athlete experiences heatstroke, send for emergency medical assistance immediately and cool the athlete as quickly as possible. Remove excess clothing and equipment from the athlete, and cool the body with cool, wet towels or by pouring cool water or place in a cold water bath. Apply ice packs to the armpits, neck, back, abdomen, and between the legs. If the athlete is conscious, give cool fluids to drink. If the athlete is unconscious, place on side to allow fluids and vomit to drain from the mouth. An athlete who has suffered heatstroke may not return to the team until getting a written release from a physician.

Protecting Yourself

When one of your athletes is injured, naturally your first concern is the athlete's well-being. Your feelings for youngsters, after all, are what made you decide to coach. Unfortunately, you must consider something else: Can you be held liable for the injury?

From a legal standpoint, a coach must fulfill nine duties. The following is a summary of your legal duties:

- 1) Provide a safe environment.
- 2) Properly plan the activity.
- 3) Provide adequate and proper equipment.
- 4) Match athletes.
- 5) Warn of inherent risks in the sport.
- 6) Supervise the activity closely.
- 7) Evaluate athletes for injury or incapacitation.
- 8) Know emergency procedures, CPR, and first aid.
- 9) Keep adequate records.

In addition to fulfilling these nine legal duties, you should check your organization's insurance coverage and your insurance coverage to make sure these policies will properly protect you from liability



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Created by the Joseph P. Kennedy, Jr. Foundation for the Benefit of Persons with Intellectual Disabilities

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