

Special Olympics Texas Family FAQs

● Who can participate in Special Olympics?

- Special Olympics training and competition are open to every person with intellectual disabilities who are at least eight years of age and who register in Special Olympics.
- There is no maximum age limitation for participation in Special Olympics.
- Participation in Special Olympics training and competition is open to all persons with intellectual disabilities, regardless of the level or degree of that person's disability, and whether or not that person also has other mental or physical disabilities, so long as that person registers to participate in Special Olympics as required by the General Rules.
- Any person wishing to participate must first have:
 - A medical exam
 - A signed SOTX Medical Release
 - If in school, the UIL medical form can be submitted, but it is only good for one year.
 - A signed parent/guardian/individual release
 - Signed Athlete Code of Conduct.
 - Signed Communicative Disease Waiver Form

● Why is the Medical and Release Form necessary?

- Application for Participation (Medical Form) is similar to release forms required for any other sports program. It provides for:
 - Necessary medical information, including health history, health insurance information, and emergency contacts, including physician, parents, or guardians.
 - It makes the athlete eligible to be covered by Special Olympics Inc. medical insurance as a secondary policy.
- The Release Form provides for:
 - Emergency medical treatment is to be provided if a parent or guardian cannot be reached.
 - A media release.
 - Acknowledgment of any restrictions for athletes with Down Syndrome.

● Is there a fee to participate in Special Olympics?

- There is no cost to any athlete to join Special Olympics Texas or to compete in any of the local, area, or regional competitions. Costs associated with state competitions, such as meals, and housing, are shared by Special Olympics Texas, if available.

● What about financial support?

- Athletes are never charged to participate in Special Olympics programs. We need the financial support of people and companies in our communities. Donations are always welcomed.

- **What if we don't have the resources to have a personal physician sign the form, or to have our athlete with Down Syndrome have the x-rays to test for Athlanto-axial Instability?**
 - Contact your local SOTX office for support and possible connections or a list of physicians or hospitals who may provide this service.
 - Some area programs offer health screening, to include "Medfest" that will provide free athlete physicals and the completion of the SOTX Athlete Medical form for participation.

- **How do potential athletes get involved with Special Olympics Texas?**
 - Print and complete the necessary forms listed on the website on How to Become Involved as an Athlete.
 - Return the completed form to the Area Office/Program Director
 - The Area Program Director will assist athletes and families in locating coaches or a team for the sport(s) of choice.
 - Athletes shall attend training sessions (practices) to make themselves eligible to compete at Area, Regional, and/or State Games.

- **How is Special Olympics Structured?**
 - In addition to planning and conducting a series of area sports competitions throughout the year, each local/area Program is responsible for all aspects of the programming including recruitment of new athletes and volunteers; recruiting and training sports coaches; training and preparing athletes for competition; submission of athlete applications for participation (medical form); training materials; development of local public relations efforts; registration of athletes for all levels of competition and conducting local fundraising.
 - Each area has a staff Program Director and a volunteer Games Management Team to manage all aspects of the programs.
 - One of the most important segments of the area program is the local delegations. A local delegation is defined as any group of volunteers; athletes, coaches, or individuals who take part in sports training leading up to the participation in competitions.
 - Local delegations include school-based programs, adult/independent teams, group homes, residential facilities, and activity centers (parks and recreation).
 - For direct services and competition advancement purposes, Special Olympics Texas is divided into 4 Regions or 19 Area Offices. All Regions are staffed by an Executive and Associate Executive Director, each area office is staffed by a Program Director and many have a Program Associate all to support and provide direct services.
 - Special Olympics Texas is governed by a State Board of Directors, each area carries out the directives of the State Board of Directors via their Games Management Teams of volunteers alongside their SOTX Staff. Special Olympics Texas is accredited by Special Olympics Inc. in Washington, D.C.

- **How is Special Olympics Funded?**
 - Special Olympics Texas is a not-for-profit organization that is funded primarily through individual and corporate donations. Special Olympics Texas receives no money from The Kennedy Foundation and is not a United Way Agency.

- **How much does it cost to watch my athlete compete at a local, area, or State competition?**
 - NOTHING! We welcome all spectators to the events and there is never any charge to come and cheer for your athletes.

- **I don't have the time available at this time to coach. How else can I help?**
 - There are many ways families can help: How about volunteering your time at a local competition? If you have an hour or two to spare, there are any number of available volunteer opportunities. Volunteering at a competition is a great way to involve the entire family!
 - Another way to help is to support fundraising events. Special Olympics relies solely on the donations received from individuals, organizations, and corporations in our community.
 - We receive no federal or state funding of any kind so we appreciate any support you can give to our fundraising efforts.

- **What sports does SOTX offer?**
 - We offer 28 different Olympics-type sports. A list of sports can be found on the website www.sotx.org/SIG2.

- **How can I find out what competitions are coming up in my area?**
 - This information can be found in the Calendar on the website. www.sotx.org

- **How are athletes group for competition?**
 - The key to a successful experience for the athletes lies in providing each athlete with a reasonable opportunity to win. This is done by "division," a feature that makes Special Olympics unique among sports organizations. Athletes are divided into competition divisions based on gender, ability, and age. A competition division will ideally consist of a minimum of three athletes and can have no more than eight athletes. Each division is considered a unique sports heat with awards being given based on the results of each heat.

- **Why do Special Olympics Officials at competitions enforce sports rules:**
 - Knowing and learning to play by the rules is one of the most significant benefits Special Olympics offers athletes. Because...
 - Impaired does not mean incapable. Special Olympics athletes are capable of learning and competing with sports rules.
 - Challenging athletes in this manner adds to the pride and sense of accomplishment they experience. It is unfair to athletes who are properly trained and who are following the rules to compete against others who are not.
 - Some Special Olympics athletes eventually move into other sports programs (school, parks & recreation, community leagues, etc.) They will be better prepared for the transition if learning and competing by the rules is one of the skills they take with them from the Special Olympics.

- **Is sports training available for athletes at all levels?**
 - Special Olympics offers training and competition to athletes with varying ability levels. Some sports offer particular opportunities for athletes who function with low ability levels. For example, three events currently offered in swimming include the 10 m assisted swim, the 15 m flotation device (life preserver) race, and the 25 m flotation device race.
 - Each area/regional program selects the sports they will offer. Factors that determine which sports can be offered include the availability of facilities, trained coaches, funds, and athlete's interest. Contact your area/regional office to speak with the Program Director as to the sports and events offered in your area/region.

- **What if my athlete/child does not have the necessary skills to compete?**
 - FUNDamental Sports provides comprehensive motor activity and recreational training for individuals with challenging or severe multiple disabilities and intellectual disabilities, those with challenging sensory processing also participate in this program.
 - FUNDamental Sports emphasizes training and participation rather than competition.
 - FUNDamental Sports enables a participant to take part in a program appropriate to his or her age and ability. After a minimum of eight-week training and participation program, athletes participate in a Challenge Day in which they can demonstrate their personal best ability within the activities.
 - FUNDamental Sports program currently trains in mobility, dexterity, striking, kicking, wheelchair activities, along with swimming. All leading to SOTX Individual Skills or traditional sports activities.
 - Athletes can participate in both FUNDamental Sports and traditional SOTX sports, example: If an athlete can successfully ramp bowl but cannot participate in other SOTX sports due to lack of skill or ability, then FUNDamental Sports is their program to be active in. The overarching goal is for the athlete to be in as many sports as they wish with and without modifications.

- **Can family members coach?**
 - Family members 18 years of age or older can volunteer as coaches. Special Olympics provides volunteers the opportunity to attend certified sports-specific coach's training so that they can learn techniques and skills to work with Special Olympics athletes. Special note, you will also be working with other athletes, not just your child as a volunteer coach.
 - New to Special Olympics is virtual coaches training or education free of charge via CoachTube; links to specific sports virtual training are available on the website.

- **What are Unified Sports?**
 - Unified Sports is a Special Olympics program that brings together individuals with intellectual disabilities (ID) and other (non-ID) members of the community on the same sports team. Non-ID individuals training and competing within Unified Sports teams are called Unified Sports Partners.
 - This is a perfect opportunity for siblings and other family members to participate.
 - To become a Unified Partner, simply become a volunteer A and complete the Unified Partner form if an individual is under 18.

- **My athlete has a non- ID sibling, can they participate?**
 - Non- ID siblings do not qualify as a Special Olympics athlete. HOWEVER, depending on their age and the sport they are interested in, they could participate in the Unified Sports Program and be a Unified Partner with their sibling. Unified Sports brings disabled and non- ID athletes together on the same playing field.

- **Inclusion is a hot topic these days, doesn't Special Olympics separate, and even stigmatize athletes from their peers?**
 - There are several ways to look at this topic, one response is to look at whether the athlete is capable of participating successfully in mainstream sports activities at this time. In some cases, an athlete may feel more stigmatized in a mainstream sports program if he or she is teased or ignored for weaker sports skills or atypical behavior.
 - In many ways, Special Olympics can be a good "training ground" to build an athlete's sports skills, interpersonal abilities, and confidence to prepare him or her to become involved in mainstream sports.

- Special Olympics offers an environment that is safe, positive, and motivational.
 - School-age athletes can participate in UIL Sports by joining or creating a Unified Champion School program on their campus.'
 - Special Olympics Texas has created a partnership with UIL - University Interscholastic League and together are presenting UIL - Track and Basketball programs.
 - Adult athletes can become part of SO College programs now offered in over 20+ Colleges, sports vary based on athletes and campus programming.
 - All sports within Special Olympics Texas, including FUNdamental Sports, offer Unified Sports as an option for participation.
 - We have found that most family members say that their worries about a Special Olympics "stigma" was overcome by their athlete's positive experiences and improved self-confidence.
- **What are Unified Champion Schools? Is this offered at all grade levels?**
 - Special Olympics Unified Champion Schools® is an opportunity for schools pre-K through university-level to intentionally promote meaningful social inclusion. This is accomplished by bringing together students with and without intellectual disabilities to create accepting school environments, utilizing three interconnected components: Special Olympics Unified Sports®, inclusive youth leadership, and whole-school engagement.
- **Who can become a Unified Champion School?**
 - Any school can become a Unified Champion School! Public, private, charter, pre-k, elementary, middle school, high school, college or university, schools with or without special education programs—whatever the setting, if you're ready to leap, we'll work with you, families, and students to make it happen on their campus or school district.
- **Is there a cost to starting a Unified Champion School or SO College Program?**
 - There is no cost. There are often funds available for start-up, and equipment is available for specific sports programs.
- **How could families help us reach more athletes?**
 - Special Olympics Texas is focused on reaching and creating opportunities for engagement in the over 1,000 campuses around the state, engaging adults into SO College opportunities once they leave High School, and re-engaging adults back into the program to continue to build upon self-confidence, leadership abilities, along with strengthening or improving their health.
 - Families are encouraged to reach out to new families in the spirit of “each one reaches one.”
 - Families could contact school principals and offer support to educate the faculty and students on the importance of Unified Champion Schools/Special Olympics programs and to help enroll potential athletes.
 - Families could reach out to Managers of Group Homes, residential programs, and vocational training sites and offer to educate staff and clients about Special Olympics and assist with registering and starting up programs.
 - Parks and Recreation Departments could be approached by parents to provide facilities and resources for local adult delegations to train. Many will create opportunities for league play at zero or nominal costs.
 - Families can coach or serve on Games Management Teams to help provide competitions or activities in the area/region.
 - Families can join the Families Community Liaison Teams to help educate and welcome families to Special Olympics and the Community.

- Families can check with their companies to see if there are opportunities to engage volunteer groups to help with competitions or events, see if companies offer Employee Matching Grant programs to match volunteer time, and donate to Special Olympics.
- Encourage families to register as family members on the website to ensure communications and connections to their Program Director.
- Support and give feedback on Educational Opportunities which the Families Community Liaison team or SOTX could offer to families.