

Special Olympics Young Athletes

Activity Guide



Special Olympics
Young Athletes



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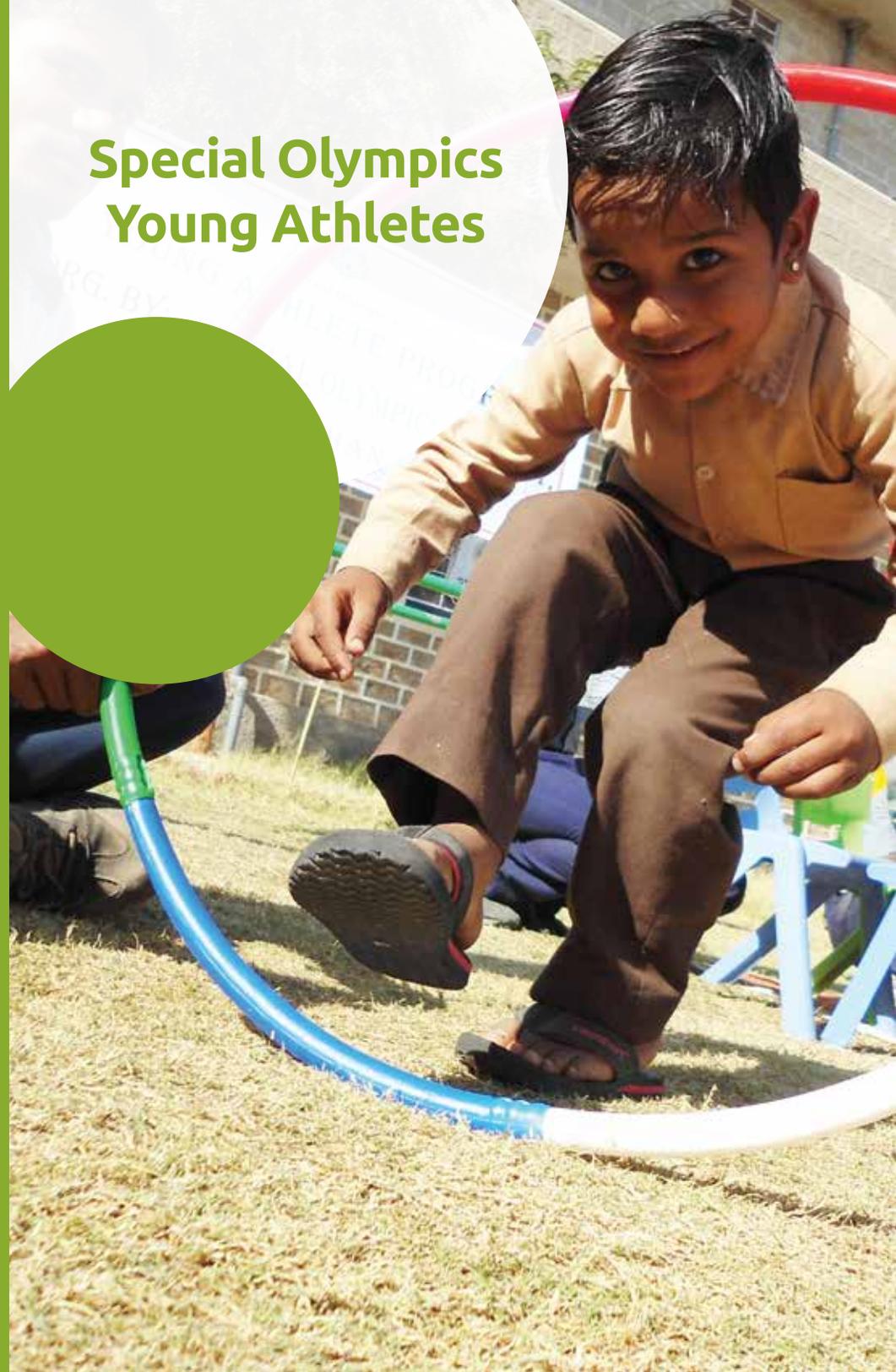
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Special Olympics Young Athletes



Special Olympics Young Athletes

Special Olympics Young Athletes is a sport and play program for children with and without intellectual disabilities (ID), ages 2 to 7 years old. Young Athletes introduces basic sport skills, like running, kicking and throwing. Young Athletes offers families, teachers, caregivers and people from the community the chance to share the joy of sports with all children.

Children of all abilities take part, and they all benefit.

Children learn how to play with others and develop important skills for learning. Children also learn to share, take turns and follow directions. These skills help children in family, community and school activities.

Young Athletes is a fun way for children to get fit. It is important to teach children healthy habits while they are young. This can set the stage for a life of physical activity, friendships and learning.

Young Athletes is easy to do and fun for all. It can be done at home, in schools or in the community using the Young Athletes Activity Guide and basic equipment.

Through Young Athletes, all children, their families and people in the community can be a part of an inclusive team.



“When my baby was born and I found out that he had an intellectual disability, my world fell apart. At Young Athletes, I see him move about, smiling, mixing freely with others and not holding on to the tail end of my skirt. It makes me cry tears of happiness and restores my hope that he can be independent one day. **Now I dare to dream** and plan to play baseball with my son when he grows up.”

- Misae, Japan

Young Athletes welcomes children and their families into the world of Special Olympics. Goals for the program include:

- Let children with and without intellectual disabilities play together to learn about and understand each other;
- Support social inclusion and inclusive play in schools, communities and homes;
- Provide children with activities and games that meet their skill and ability levels;
- Share how Special Olympics can support families;
- Show that all children should be valued for their talents and abilities;
- Promote fitness and teach children about staying active, eating a healthy diet and drinking water.

Everyone benefits from Special Olympics Young Athletes.

- **Motor skills.** Children with ID who took part in an eight-week Young Athletes curriculum saw seven month’s development in motor skills. This is compared to a three-month gain in motor skills for children who did not participate.
- **Social, emotional and learning skills.** Parents and teachers of children who took part in the Young Athletes curriculum said the children learned skills that they will use in pre-primary school. The children were more enthusiastic and confident. They also played better with other children.¹
- **Expectations.** Family members say that Young Athletes raised their hopes for their child’s future.
- **Sport readiness.** Young Athletes helps children develop important movement and sport skills. These skills get them ready to take part in sports when they are older.
- **Acceptance.** Inclusive play has a benefit for children without ID as well. It helps them to better understand and accept others.

¹ Favazza, P. C., Siperstein, G. N., Zeisel, S., Odom, S. L., & Moskowitz, A. L. (2011). Young Athletes intervention: Impact of motor development. Washington, DC: Special Olympics, Inc.

Getting Started

The Activity Guide has all the information to run Young Athletes. It has four sections:

1. Introduction
2. Young Athletes Activities
3. Resources for Implementers
4. Additional Resources

Be sure to read the Introduction and Activities sections. These are for all teachers, coaches and family members. It is also important to think about where activities will take place – in a school, community or home – and review the related section. Then review the activities. Make sure to have the equipment or materials that are needed before starting.

Three Models for Special Olympics Young Athletes



- **School (Page 63):** Led by educators in a school setting. Activities take place during the school day. Activities are done at least once a week, but three times a week is best. It can be part of pre-primary or primary school lessons.
- **Community (Page 73):** Led by Young Athletes coaches and volunteers. It gives parents, siblings and friends a chance to get together. Activities can be done in a sport club, recreation center or other community facility. Activities take place at least one time per week, with families doing at-home play at least twice a week.
- **Home (Page 81):** Parents, siblings and friends play together at home. The Activity Guide is used for tips and suggestions. Family activities take place at least three times per week in the home. The activities can be one-on-one or in small groups.

Using the Young Athletes Activity Guide

The Young Athletes Activity Guide has games and activities that help children learn movements they will use in sports and daily life.

There are eight skill areas in the Activity Guide. Each skill area includes activities that can be done with one child or a group of children. There are tips in the Activity Guide on how to adapt the activities to match the skills or needs of each child.

Within each skill area, activities are listed by ease and difficulty. The activities are in order of normal development, from basic skills to more complex skills. Match each activity to the ability of the child. As a child gets more comfortable with a skill, move on to a more difficult activity.

For example, in Trapping and Catching, the first suggested activity is Rolling and Trapping. In the activity, children are seated on the floor. This allows children to work on hand-eye coordination with a moving object. Because they are seated, they do not have to worry about strength, balance or fear.

The third activity, Bubble Catch, builds on the basic skills needed to catch a ball. Bubbles float slowly so children can easily follow the bubbles as they fall. They can clap or catch a bubble in their hands. In this activity, they do not worry about using their arms or bodies to catch, like in later activities.

Additional resources and videos to support Young Athletes can be found on the Young Athletes web page.

[resources.specialolympics.org/
YoungAthletes](https://resources.specialolympics.org/YoungAthletes)



Young Athletes sessions do not need to follow the order listed in the Activity Guide. It may be best to focus on one skill area for one or more sessions or do basic activities from multiple skill areas. For example:

- **School:** Teachers may want to run Young Athletes sessions with the most basic skills from all skill areas. As children progress in the basic skills, teachers can advance to skills that are more difficult over several sessions.
- **Community:** A program held at a basketball sport club may run Young Athletes sessions that include one activity from Foundational Skills, one from Running and Walking, and all the Throwing activities. Children with different skill levels can all take part and grow in the way that works best for them.
- **Home:** Parents may want to pick activities that their children enjoy the most or ones that allow siblings and friends to participate.

It is key to adapt to the needs of individual children to ensure Young Athletes has the greatest impact on all children.

Key Terminology

There are many helpful tips and suggestions in the Activity Guide to support the needs of each child.

- **Group Play** – Activity variations that get children playing together and support inclusion.
- **Healthy Play** – Variation to the activity that teaches children about nutrition and fitness.
- **Optional Activity** – Additional activity that uses equipment not found in the primary equipment list.
- **Tips for Observation** – Ideas to support adults, coaches or volunteers working with or leading Young Athletes.

Young Athletes Equipment

Young Athletes activities use equipment to help children focus on each skill. Equipment can be substituted for materials that can be found around the house.

Equipment

Suggested Substitutions

Balance Beam

Tape
Rope



Small Foam Ball



Tennis ball
Any small ball

Beanbags



Small, soft toys or figures
Bags filled with rice, sand or beans
Natural items, like flowers or leaves

Sport Cones



Boxes
Plastic soda bottles filled with sand

Large Plastic Blocks



Foam or wood blocks
Bricks

Plastic Dowels



Stick
Paper towel roll

Paddle



Short stick

Equipment

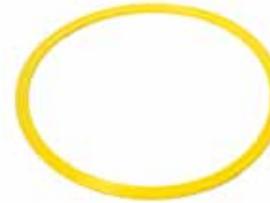
Suggested Substitutions

Floor Markers



Stickers or tape
Carpet squares
Chalk-drawn shapes

Hoops



Hula hoops
Bicycle tubes
Old tires

Scarf



Dish towel
Small piece of cloth

Slow Motion Ball



Beach ball
Any lightweight ball
Balloon

Additional equipment may be used to run Young Athletes:

- Junior sized sports equipment:
 - Stacking cups
 - Agility ladder
 - Tunnels
 - Parachutes
 - Floor markers, beanbags, and balls with food images
 - Play food items
- basketball, plastic golf club, floorball stick, tennis racket, football (soccer ball), plastic bat and baseball tee.
- Playground ball
- Rope

Foundational Skills

Foundational skills help children become aware of themselves and their relationship to their surroundings. They also support basic health and physical fitness.

Body awareness, strength, flexibility, coordination and endurance are important for motor and social skills. Foundational skills promote development in all of these areas, which are essential for mobility at home and in school and the community.

Activities in this section include:

Scarf Games

Children's Songs

I Spy

Obstacle Course

Musical Markers

Tunnels and Bridges

Animal Games

Parachute Games

Magic Carpet Ride

Scarf Games

Encourage children to follow the movement of the scarf with their head and eyes. Drop the scarf and encourage children to “catch” the scarf with their hand, head, foot or other body part.

Group Play: Children can play together by tossing scarves to one another, calling out numbers, colors or names of animals with every toss.

For a greater challenge, encourage children to listen carefully for what to do with the scarf. For example, “If you have a green scarf, pass it to the person next to you” or “pass the scarf behind your back to the person next to you.”

Healthy Play: Have children try to name different fruits, vegetables or other healthy foods each time they toss the scarf.



EQUIPMENT NEEDED: Scarf

Children’s Songs

Encourage children to sing songs that associate words with actions and body awareness, such as “Wheels on the Bus” or other familiar action songs.

A song such as “If You’re Happy and You Know It” can be used to encourage children to perform different activities like clapping, rubbing the belly, tapping the head and more. Have fun and ask children for ideas about what to do and how to move!

Healthy Play: Adapt locally popular songs to teach healthy habits, while also building body awareness. See the “Additional Resources” section for healthy lyrics to “Twinkle, Twinkle Little Star.”

I Spy

Encourage children to look around and notice different items in the space. Ask children to look for certain items and encourage them to run, walk or crawl to those items.

Progress by asking children to identify colors, shapes or healthy food items. Children can work in pairs to promote social skills.

EQUIPMENT NEEDED: Floor markers, beanbags

Obstacle Course

Set up a basic obstacle course with any equipment you have, for example, hoops, beams, chairs or benches. Introduce various concepts as the children complete the course, including:

- On and off
- Over and under
- Fast and slow



EQUIPMENT NEEDED: Cones, floor markers, hoops, dowels, beams

Tips for Observation

Make note of children’s ability to remember lyrics, activities, body parts or other important concepts. Reinforce those areas in other activities or self-help skills.

Musical Markers

While music is playing, ask children to run, walk backwards, crawl or twist. When the music stops, have children find a floor marker to stand on (sharing markers is allowed). Remove markers until there is only one large hoop in the center that all the children can share.

Healthy Play: When using floor markers, consider having floor markers that are shaped like healthy foods (like fruits and vegetables), printing out pictures, or associating various colors with fruits and vegetables. In the activity, when the music stops, ask children to stand on the fruits or vegetables to reinforce making healthy decisions with food.

EQUIPMENT NEEDED: Hoop, floor markers

Tunnels and Bridges

Adults and children make tunnels by touching the ground with their feet and hands, sending their hips into the air. Other children crawl through the tunnels.

Adults and children make bridges by getting down onto hands and knees. Other children try to climb over the bridges.



Animal Games

Ask children to pretend that they are different animals by moving their bodies in different ways. Picture books can help children see the animals and their movements.

- **Bear Crawl:** Have children bend down with their hands and feet on the ground. Encourage them to crawl or walk like a bear. Make sure the knees do not touch the floor. Growl for fun!



- **Crab Walk:** Have children sit on the floor with feet flat on the floor and knees bent. Hands are flat on the floor, slightly behind the body. Ask them to lift their hips off the floor and walk their hands and feet backwards. Then try crawling in different directions.



- **Crabs and Fishes:** Children pretend to be the Crab (see Crab Walk) and a ball is the Fish. The coach begins the game by rolling the ball under children's bottoms so that the fish is swimming through a sea of crabs. The ball can be pushed or kicked by the children to keep the game going.

Optional Activities

Parachute Games

Children and adults hold the edges of a parachute. Working together to move the parachute up and down, have an adult throw a ball or beanbag on top. The children try to keep the parachute moving, while keeping the ball or beanbag from falling off.



Group Play: Parachute games are a great way to end sessions with a group of children. Have children make big waves with the parachute by slowly moving it up and down. Then have children let go of the parachute when their hands are above their head. Have children run to the center while a volunteer collects the parachute as it falls over the children.

EQUIPMENT NEEDED: Parachute (option: flat sheet), ball

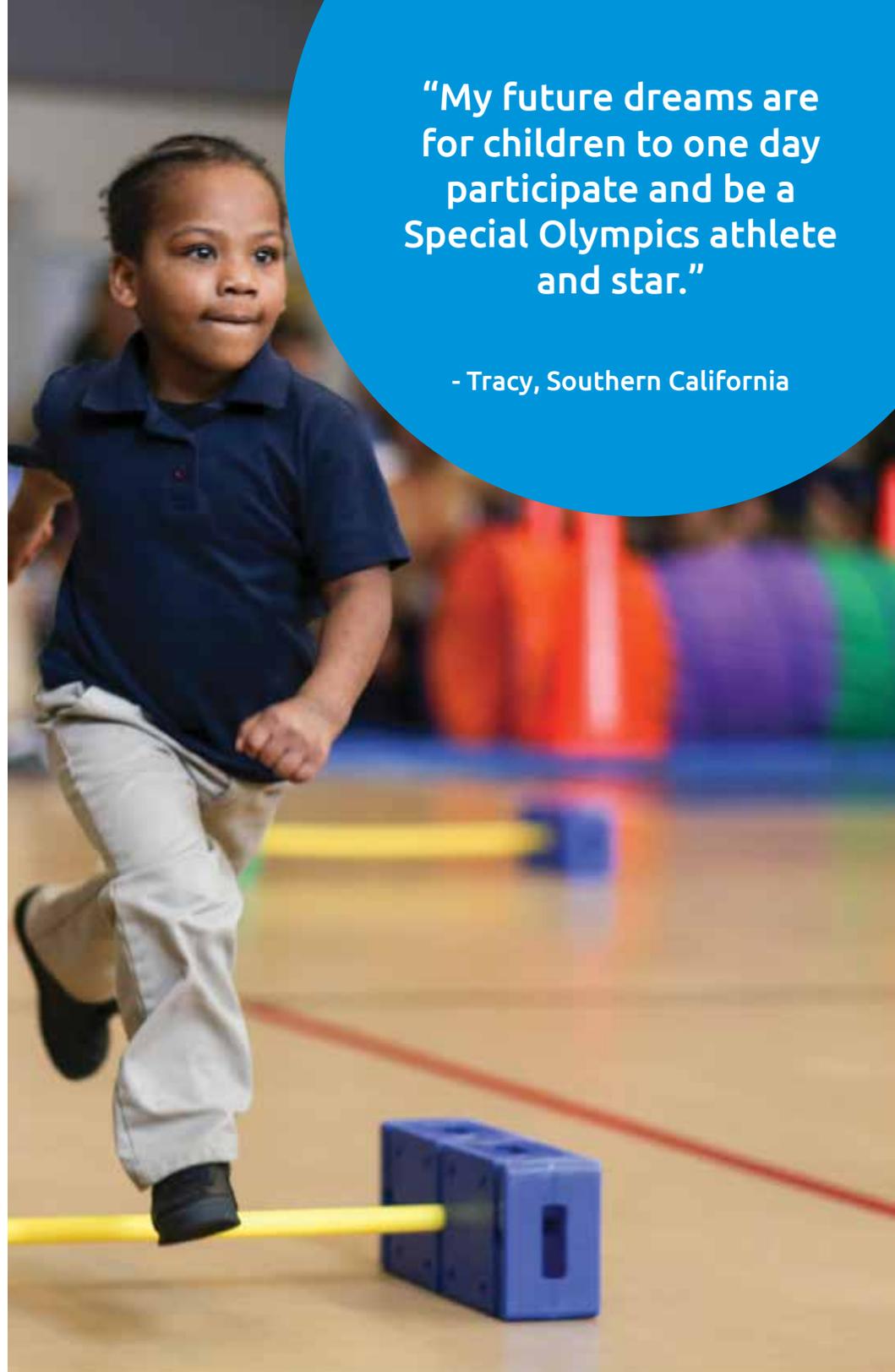
Magic Carpet Ride

The child sits on a blanket, holding the edges.

An adult grasps the other end of the blanket and pulls it so that the child slides along the floor. The adult can pull the blanket faster as the child becomes comfortable.

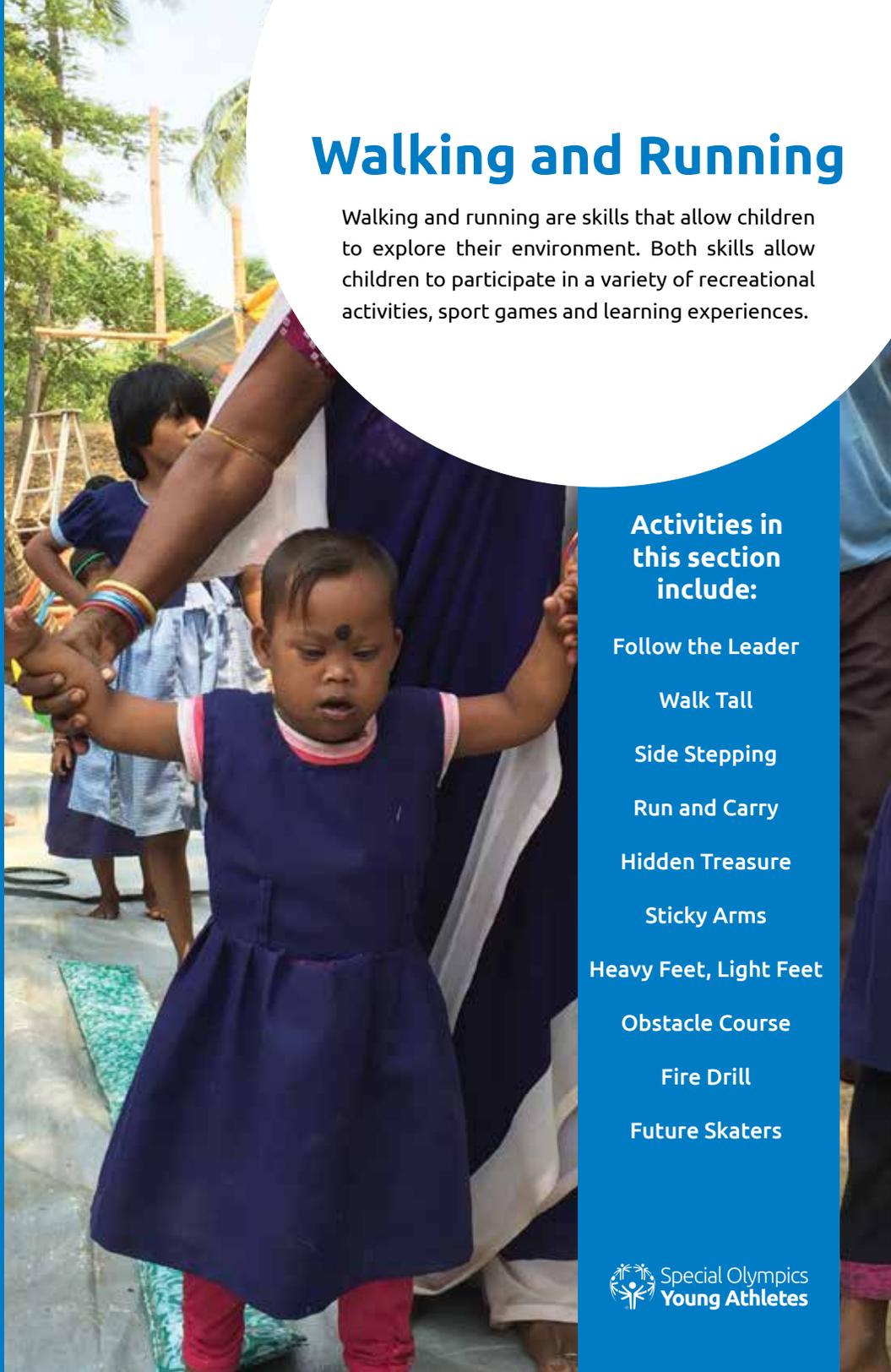
Safety is important with this activity. Demonstrate the activity and ensure the child is able to hold on tight to the blanket to prevent them from falling off.

EQUIPMENT NEEDED: Blanket (option: sheet)



“My future dreams are for children to one day participate and be a Special Olympics athlete and star.”

- Tracy, Southern California



Walking and Running

Walking and running are skills that allow children to explore their environment. Both skills allow children to participate in a variety of recreational activities, sport games and learning experiences.

Activities in this section include:

Follow the Leader

Walk Tall

Side Stepping

Run and Carry

Hidden Treasure

Sticky Arms

Heavy Feet, Light Feet

Obstacle Course

Fire Drill

Future Skaters

Follow the Leader

Encourage children to “follow the leader” as you walk in different ways (like slow, fast or march) and move different parts of your body (like arms up or arms out). Then encourage children to take turns as the leader.

Group Play: Set up a path using hoops, cones, floor markers or other available equipment and encourage children to follow the path.

Walk Tall

Have children walk from one floor marker to another, standing tall with beanbags on their heads. Once children can do this without the beanbag falling, have them jog or run with the same tall posture.

Placing a beanbag on the child’s head while walking or running encourages good posture and balance.



EQUIPMENT NEEDED: Beanbags, floor markers (option: cones)

Side Stepping

Encourage children to face forward and step to the right or left onto a variety of floor markers.

Beanbags can be placed on some markers. Children can pick up the beanbags and move to different markers as they side step from one floor marker to the next.



EQUIPMENT NEEDED: Floor markers, beanbags (option: soft toys)

Run and Carry

Encourage children to run a distance, pick up an object from the ground and run back to the starting point. Repeat several times for endurance. When playing with two or more children, they can pass the object to each other after running a distance. With large numbers of children, try relay teams and races.



Group Play: Have an adult stand in the middle of the space. Have children run by the adult, trying to get beanbags from one side to the other. The adult can only move along a straight line. If the adult tags a child, the child must “freeze”. The child stays frozen until another child tags them. Then both children can run to drop off beanbags on the opposite side.

Healthy Play: Use real, plastic or cloth foods as objects in the activity. Ask children to pick up the object and run with it to a set of baskets labelled “healthy” or “unhealthy”. Ask children to categorize the food item. Use the activity to discuss what makes the food item healthy or unhealthy.

EQUIPMENT NEEDED: Beanbags

Hidden Treasure

Set up cones throughout the space. Under a few of the cones, hide a beanbag treasure.

Ask children one at a time to walk or run (forward, backward or sideways) to a cone and see if there is a hidden treasure. If a treasure is found, it should be placed in the “treasure chest” box. If no treasure is found, the child should run to the end of the line. If all of the items or treasures are found before the last child has gone, the entire group wins.

EQUIPMENT NEEDED: Cones (option: stacking cups), beanbags, box

Sticky Arms

Create a zigzag course with cones. Have children run through the course with their arms “glued” to their sides. Then have children run the course with their elbows bent and arms swinging. Time the children and talk about which way was easier and faster.



EQUIPMENT NEEDED: Cones
(option: floor markers, tape or rope)

Heavy Feet, Light Feet

Have children run from one end of the room to another with “heavy feet”, or lots of stomping noises. Then have children run back with “light feet”, running on their toes and being as quiet as possible.

EQUIPMENT NEEDED: Floor markers

Tips for Observation

Encourage children to look in the direction they are walking or running and to keep their hips and feet facing forward.

Obstacle Course

Set up cones, floor markers, hoops and other equipment, and encourage children to walk, crawl, climb, jump or run through and around a series of obstacles. Begin with a straight course with similar activities at each “station” and progress to including a variety of movements, such as, zigzags or reversals.

Demonstrate different types of running (like slow, fast, backward, and forward) and incorporate them throughout the obstacle course.

EQUIPMENT NEEDED: Cones, floor markers, hoops, dowels

Fire Drill

Ask all but one child to stand in a line. While the children are passing a ball from one end of the line to the other, the one remaining child runs around the line. The child must try to get back to the start before the ball reaches the end. If the child is unsuccessful, give the child another try and make the passing more difficult by passing behind the back or between the legs.

Children should take turns running around the line.

EQUIPMENT NEEDED: Ball (option: beanbag)

Optional Activity

Future Skaters

Encourage children to move around a room without lifting their feet. Have them wear skates made from paper plates.

Skating can be done with music or added to other games.



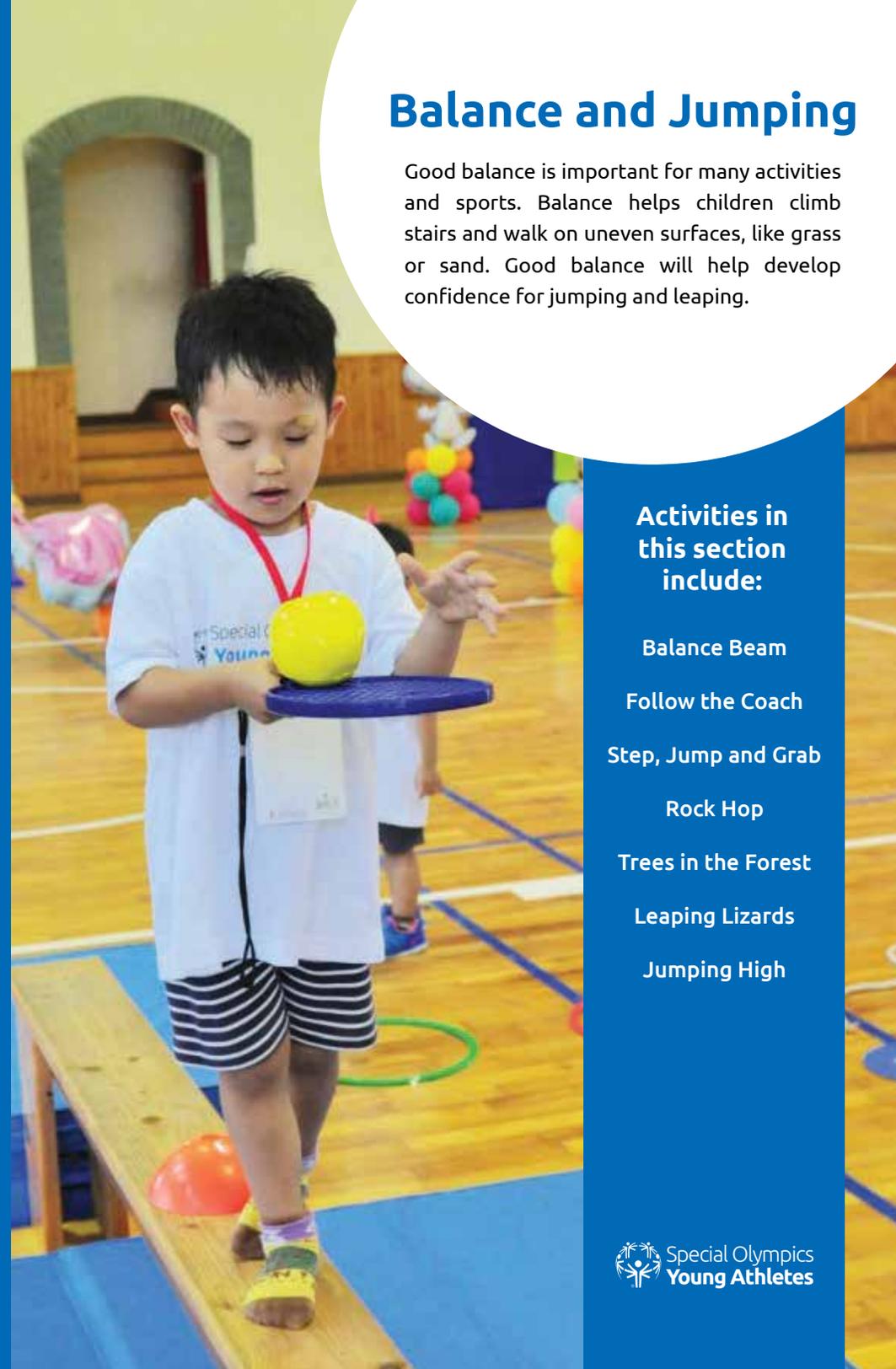
EQUIPMENT NEEDED: Paper plates (option: cardboard cartons cut in half or shoeboxes)

Tips for Observation

If the child’s arms are swinging across the body or not in opposition of the legs, correct this while standing or running in place.

Balance and Jumping

Good balance is important for many activities and sports. Balance helps children climb stairs and walk on uneven surfaces, like grass or sand. Good balance will help develop confidence for jumping and leaping.



Activities in this section include:

Balance Beam

Follow the Coach

Step, Jump and Grab

Rock Hop

Trees in the Forest

Leaping Lizards

Jumping High

Balance Beam



Encourage children to walk heel-to-toe next to a straight, narrow path marked by a chalked line. Progress to having children walk directly on a line and then on a low balance beam.

Group Play: Have children walk heel-to-toe in a straight line and pick up a beanbag. Have them place the beanbag on their head, shoulder, elbow or other body parts, and continue heel-to-toe walking until the beanbag can be placed in a bucket or hoop.

EQUIPMENT NEEDED: Balance beam (option: rope), chalk line (option: line of tape)

Follow the Coach

Ask children to copy your movements and positions. Encourage children to perform actions that require balance, such as:

- Standing on tiptoes or heels
- Standing with one foot directly in front of the other
- Standing on one foot

Tips for Observation

To track a child's progress in an activity, note how they do at the beginning of Young Athletes and then every four weeks to see if the child improves. Use these assessments to know when children need more practice and when they can move on to harder skill areas.

Step, Jump and Grab

Encourage children to step up onto a block or beam and then jump down from it. Use floor markers to keep blocks from moving on slippery surfaces.

Progress by having children:

- Jump from the box to a floor marker placed further out.
- Jump up high and grab a scarf as they jump off the block.
- Jump down from higher surfaces.

EQUIPMENT NEEDED: Block (option: low beam), floor markers, scarf (option: beanbag)

Rock Hop



Set out blocks and/or floor markers and pretend they are rocks in a river. Tell children to pretend there is a crocodile in the river and that they need to get across by stepping on the "rocks" without falling in the water. Increase the difficulty by having the blocks further apart or varying the size and shape of the blocks.

Progress the activity by having two children hold hands and work together to get across the river. Or have children cross the river using only one color of blocks or floor markers.

EQUIPMENT NEEDED: Blocks, floor markers

Trees in the Forest

Have the children pretend to be trees in the forest by having them stand with their feet on two floor markers. Ask one child to be the wind and walk or run through the trees, fanning them with a scarf. Encourage the trees to bend and sway in the breeze.



Increase the difficulty by having the children put both feet on one floor marker, stand on one foot or stand up on a block.

EQUIPMENT NEEDED: Floor markers, scarf

Tips for Observation

Be consistent with verbal cues and demonstrations. Repetition helps children learn and master new skills.

Leaping Lizards

Encourage children to jump forward from one floor marker to the next.

Progress by encouraging children to run forward and leap into the air either over or onto a floor marker.

EQUIPMENT NEEDED: Floor markers

Jumping High

Encourage children to jump over a dowel. Raise the height of the object to increase difficulty.

EQUIPMENT NEEDED: Plastic dowel (option: rope, floor marker), cones



Tips for Observation

New jumpers will push off or land with one foot leading to the other, rather than both feet pushing off and landing at the same time. It will take some time, so encourage children to progress to jump off and land with both feet at the same time.

A young girl in a green and white checkered dress is smiling and holding a red soccer ball. She is standing outdoors on a gravel surface. In the background, there are other children and a building with corrugated metal walls.

Trapping and Catching

Trapping is when children stop a ball with their body and not their hands. Catching is when children use only their hands to stop a ball that is thrown, bounced or rolled. Both skills require children to watch the ball as it moves and hand-eye coordination. Children also need strength and balance to trap and catch.

Activities in this section include:

Rolling and Trapping

Goalie Drill

Bubble Catch

Big Ball Catch

Low Ball Catch

High Ball Catch

Bounce Catch

Circle Ball

Rolling and Trapping

Have children sit opposite each other with legs stretched wide so that their feet touch to form a diamond shape. Encourage children to roll the ball to each other and to catch or stop it with their hands.



Progress this activity by decreasing the size of the ball or rolling it faster. Have children kneel to increase the challenge.

Group Play: Ask children to sit in a circle and roll a ball to each other. As the ball is rolled, have children shout out something that fits into the theme of the day or week (for example, animals, colors, fruits or vegetables).

EQUIPMENT NEEDED: Slow motion ball (option: small foam ball, tennis ball)



Goalie Drill

Have children stand in front of two cones that have been set up to form a goal. Encourage children to stop the ball with their hands so that the ball does not roll between the cones.

EQUIPMENT NEEDED: Ball, cones (option: junior-sized sports goal, soda bottles)

Optional Activity Bubble Catch



Ask children to stand in a circle. From the middle of the circle, blow bubbles to the children and have them catch the bubbles with one or two hands.

EQUIPMENT NEEDED: Bubbles

Big Ball Catch

Stand facing the child and slowly bring the ball toward them, at the level of their waist. Repeat several times, moving more quickly each time. Next, drop the ball right before it reaches their hands and encourage them to catch it with their hands and not let the ball hit the ground.

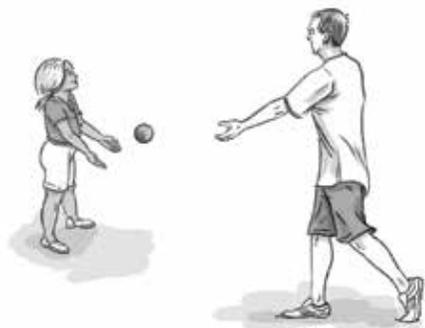
EQUIPMENT NEEDED: Slow motion ball (option: beach ball)



Tips for Observation

Encourage older children or those with high skill levels to model activities and support the other children. This promotes communication, leadership and friendship.

Low Ball Catch



Stand facing the child, who is about three steps away. Gently toss a ball to the child making sure the ball gets to the child at waist level or below. Encourage the child to catch the ball with fingers pointing down.

Progress by moving further away.

EQUIPMENT NEEDED: *Slow motion ball (option: beach ball, playground ball)*

High Ball Catch

Kneel facing the child, who is about three steps away. Gently toss a ball to the child, making sure the ball gets to the child at chest level or higher. Encourage the child to catch the ball with fingers pointing up.

Progress by moving further away and increasing the size of the ball's arc.



EQUIPMENT NEEDED: *Slow motion ball (option: beach ball, playground ball)*

Bounce Catch

Face the child and bounce a ball, so the child can catch the ball without moving. Encourage the child to bounce pass the ball back to you.

Progress by moving further away and using smaller balls.



Group Play: Have children stand in a circle and bounce-to-pass the ball to one another.

EQUIPMENT NEEDED: *Slow motion ball (option: playground ball)*

Circle Ball



Ask children to stand in a circle and pass the ball with short tosses to the next person. Add a second ball when the first ball has made it halfway around the circle. Have children step backward to increase the size of the circle for a greater challenge.

Group Play: Make it a game. Encourage children to see how many catches the group can make without dropping the ball.

EQUIPMENT NEEDED: *Slow motion ball (options: beach ball, playground ball)*

Tips for Observation

Bubbles and beach balls have longer flight times than other balls. This will help some children achieve early success in catching. Be sure to pick the right-sized ball for each child – not too big and not too small.



Throwing

Throwing requires strength, flexibility, balance and coordination. Children learn how to grip and let go of an object by tossing something small and light. If a child can easily lift a ball over their head with two hands, the ball is a good size.

Throwing is important in many sports. Being good at throwing helps children feel comfortable joining in games with friends.

Activities in this section include:

Bowling

Train Tunnel

Two-Handed Underhand Toss

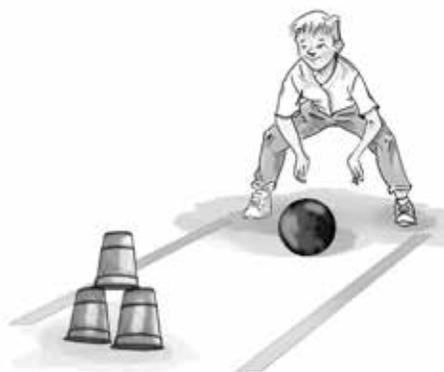
One-Handed Underhand Toss

Two-Handed Overhand Throw

One-Handed Overhand Throw

Target Practice

Shoot to Score Basketball



Optional Activity

Bowling

Create your own bowling lane with two balance beams. Arrange cups in a pyramid shape and have children roll a ball towards them to knock the cups down.

EQUIPMENT NEEDED: Stacking cups (option: plastic bowling pins, empty soda bottles), soft balance beams (option: tape, sticks), ball

Train Tunnel

Have children stand in a line with one child in front of the other and their legs apart, making a "tunnel" with their legs.

Ask the child at the end of the line to roll a ball forward through the tunnel, pretending the ball is a train. The ball or "train" will usually not make it through everyone's legs, because it "needs to pick up passengers." Whoever is closest to the ball should pick it up. Then, all the other children move in front of the child with the ball so that he or she is at the back of the line and can roll the ball through everyone else's legs.

EQUIPMENT NEEDED: Ball

Tips for Observation

Throwing and catching are closely linked, so you will often find yourself working on both skills at the same time.

Two-Handed Underhand Toss

Encourage the child to stand with bent knees and hold a ball with two hands. Ask the child to look at your hands and toss the ball underhand to you.

Progress by having the child toss the ball into a basket, over a low barrier or through a hoop.

Group Play: Have children stand in a circle and two-handed toss the ball to one another.



EQUIPMENT NEEDED: Slow motion ball (option: beach ball, playground ball), hoop (option: low net, basket)

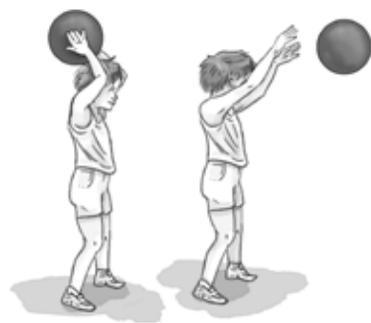
One-Handed Underhand Toss

Encourage the child to stand with bent knees, holding a small ball with one hand. Ask the child to look at your hands and underhand toss the ball into your hands. Progress by having the child toss the ball into a basket, over a barrier or through a hoop.

Healthy Play: Consider using food-shaped beanbags or beanbags with photos of food taped to them. Ask children to toss the beanbag into a "healthy" hoop or basket and an "unhealthy" hoop or basket, based on the food displayed on their beanbag.



EQUIPMENT NEEDED: Small foam ball (option: beanbag, tennis ball), hoop (option: low net, basket)



Two-Handed Overhand Throw

Have children stand with one foot in front of the other, hip-width apart, and encourage them to rock forward and back. As children rock to the back foot, have them raise their arms up over the head. When rocking forward, have them bring the arms forward to throw the ball.

Progress by having children throw the ball into a basket, over a barrier or through a hoop.

EQUIPMENT NEEDED: Slow motion ball (option: beach ball, playground ball), hoop (option: low net, basket)

One-Handed Overhand Throw

Using the same technique as two-handed overhand throw, encourage children to use one hand, bringing their arm back and forward overhead to throw a small ball towards you.



Progress by having children throw the ball into a basket, over a barrier or through a hoop.

EQUIPMENT NEEDED: Small foam ball (option: tennis ball, beanbag), hoop (option: low net, basket)

Tips for Observation

With tossing and throwing, encourage children to step forward with the opposite foot as the arm that is throwing.

Target Practice

Tape pictures to the wall at various heights to serve as targets. The targets can reinforce shapes, colors, animals, healthy habits and other relevant topics.

Use floor markers to encourage proper foot placement. Have children stand on the floor markers and throw small balls at the targets.

EQUIPMENT NEEDED: Pictures, tape, floor markers, small foam balls (option: beanbags)

Shoot to Score Basketball

Have children stand in a circle around an adult who is holding a hoop. Ask the children to pass the ball around the circle a certain number of times. The child who ends up with the ball should shoot the ball into the hoop for a point.



EQUIPMENT NEEDED: Hoop (option: basket), ball

Striking

Striking means hitting a ball or object with one's hand or with an object, like a stick, bat, paddle or racket. Striking helps develop the hand-eye coordination skills needed for tennis, golf, softball, volleyball and floorball.

Activities in this section include:

Handball

Ball Tap

Beginning Floorball or Golf

Beginning Tennis or Softball

Beginning Volleyball

Handball

Place a ball on a cone. Have children hit the ball with a fist or open hand.

EQUIPMENT NEEDED: Slow motion ball (option: beach ball), cone (option: softball tee)



Ball Tap

Tap a ball in the air toward children and have them tap the ball back toward you, or toward each other, with an open hand.

Count the number of taps before the ball hits the floor.

EQUIPMENT NEEDED: Slow motion ball (option: beach ball, balloon)

Tips for Observation

Large balls are easier to strike than small ones.
Stationary objects are easier to strike than moving ones.



Beginning Floorball or Golf

Place a ball on the ground. While holding a dowel, have children stand sideways facing the ball. Encourage children to strike the ball with the dowel. Have children hold the dowel with thumbs pointing down.

Group Play: Set up two cones to be the goal and have the children shoot on goal. Children can also practice catching by taking turns as goalie.

EQUIPMENT NEEDED: Slow motion ball (option: beach ball, small foam ball, tennis ball), dowel (option: junior size floorball stick, junior size golf club), cones

Beginning Tennis or Softball

Place a large ball on a cone. While holding a paddle, have children stand sideways facing the ball. Encourage children to strike the ball with the paddle.

For a greater challenge, gently toss a ball to children and encourage them to strike it with a paddle.

Group Play: Create “bases” for the children to run around after they hit the ball, mimicking the sport of softball.

EQUIPMENT NEEDED: Ball, cone (option: softball tee), paddle (option: racket, bat)



Tips for Observation

Balls thrown slowly and with small arcs of flight are easier to hit than balls thrown at a fast pitch or with a high arc.



Beginning Volleyball

Divide children into two groups, separated by a balance beam. Encourage children to tap or hit a ball with an open hand from one side of the barrier to the other.

EQUIPMENT NEEDED: Balance beam (option: rope, low net), slow motion ball (option: beach ball, balloon)

Tips for Observation

Shifting weight is important to correct striking form. If children are not shifting their weight, have them rock forward and backward and side-to-side while standing on floor markers.



“Being a part of Young Athletes means a lot to my son Mateo because he loves sports. As a family, we are more united because my other two kids without intellectual disabilities participate also. In his school he can be part of more activities now and has the support & recognition of his mates.”

- Melisa, Mexico



Kicking

Kicking describes when an object is hit with the foot. Kicking requires eye-foot coordination. It also requires the ability to balance, at least for a moment, on one foot. Being able to kick a ball is important for football (soccer), and allows children to play with others.

Activities in this section include:

Stationary Ball Kick

Penalty Kick

Passing Practice

Give and Go

Pinball

Three-Pin Bowling

Cone Dribble



Stationary Ball Kick

Place a ball on the ground and have children stand behind it. Encourage children to kick the ball toward you with the toe of their preferred foot.



For a greater challenge, encourage children to kick for distance by having them kick past various floor markers. Or kick the ball between two cones or markers to score a goal.

EQUIPMENT NEEDED: Slow motion ball (option: beach ball, junior football (soccer ball), playground ball), floor markers (option: cones)

Penalty Kick

Place a ball on the ground and have children run up to the ball and kick it toward you.



For greater challenge, encourage children to run up to the ball and kick it between two cones to score a goal. Other children can practice trapping and catching by taking turns as goalie.

EQUIPMENT NEEDED: Slow motion ball (option: beach ball, junior football (soccer ball), playground ball), cones

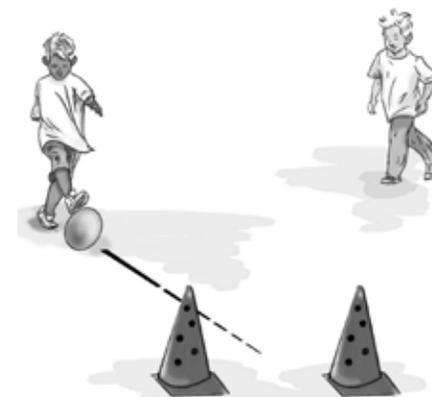
Passing Practice

Have children stand in a circle and encourage them to kick a ball to each other. Make sure to keep the ball in the circle.

EQUIPMENT NEEDED: Slow motion ball (option: beach ball, junior football (soccer ball), playground ball)

Give and Go

Kick a ball to the child and encourage them to kick the moving ball between two cones to score a goal.



EQUIPMENT NEEDED: Slow motion ball (option: beach ball, junior football (soccer ball), playground ball), cones (option: goal, floor markers)

Tips for Observation

Children should focus their eyes on the ball before kicking and on the target as they kick.

Pinball

Use the balance beams to create the rectangular frame of a pinball machine. Place cones and blocks within the rectangle to create obstacles.

Have children stand on the balance beams and gently kick the ball to each other, letting the frame and obstacles change the direction of the ball.



EQUIPMENT NEEDED: Balance beams, cones, blocks (option: cups), slow motion ball (option: playground ball, sports ball)



Optional Activity

Three-Pin Bowling

Construct a bowling lane with two balance beams and set up three empty plastic bottles at the end of the lane. Have children take turns kicking a ball to move or knock down the bottles.

EQUIPMENT NEEDED: Balance beams, plastic bottles (option: stacking cups), slow motion ball (option: playground ball, sports ball)

Cone Dribble

Set up cones randomly in the play space. Ask children to lightly kick the ball as they move around the space without hitting the cones. Children can take turns or several children can dribble at the same time.

EQUIPMENT NEEDED: Cones, slow motion ball (option: junior football (soccer ball), playground ball)

Tips for Observation

When kicking, the body leans back just before contact with the ball. The opposite arm swings forward with the kick. The kicking leg should follow through.

Advanced Sports Skills

Advanced sports-specific skills require children to use the skills they have developed earlier in the Guide and put them into a sports context. This requires a high level of connection, strength, power, coordination, teamwork and awareness.

Activities in this section include:

- Punting
- Galloping
- Skipping

Football (Soccer) Skills:

- Stand, Roll and Trap
- Two-on-One
- One-on-One

Basketball Skills:

- Dribble
- Pass and Shoot
- Dribble and Shoot

Softball Skills:

- Run the Bases



Punting

Encourage the child to practice balancing on one leg, with their kicking leg in the air in front of their body and their arms out to the sides. Then, have the child swing their leg backward and forward. Have the child hold a ball in both hands, drop it when the leg is back and kick it by swinging the leg forward.



EQUIPMENT NEEDED: Slow motion ball (option: beach ball, playground ball)

Galloping

Place a series of floor markers on the ground in a straight line. Have children leap onto a marker with their preferred foot and bring the back foot up to the marker. Continue leading with the preferred foot.

EQUIPMENT NEEDED: Floor markers

Skipping

Place a series of floor markers on the ground in a straight line. Have children step onto the marker and then perform a low hop on that foot. As the hopping foot lands, place the other foot on the next marker.

EQUIPMENT NEEDED: Floor markers

Tips for Observation

These skills require strength, balance, vision, coordination and teamwork. Observe which components are a struggle for children and return to activities described earlier in the Guide.

Football (Soccer) Skills

Stand, Roll and Trap

Ask children to stand in a circle and roll a ball to each other. Have children stop or trap the ball with the bottom of their feet. Make the activity more exciting by including counting or rhyming each time the ball is rolled.



EQUIPMENT NEEDED: Slow motion ball (option: junior football (soccer ball), playground ball)

Two-on-One

One child is the goalie and stands in front of the goal. Two other children are teammates who want to score a goal. On a clap or whistle, one child kicks the ball to his or her teammate, then that child shoots the ball towards the goal created by two cones.

After each child practices being the goalie, passing and shooting, the drill is run again or with other children.

EQUIPMENT NEEDED: Slow motion ball (option: junior football (soccer ball), playground ball), cones (option: junior-sized sports goal)

One-on-One

Encourage two children to run and kick to pass the ball three times. The child with the ball after the third pass should be encouraged to shoot on goal. After the shot, the ball is passed to the next two children.

EQUIPMENT NEEDED: Slow motion ball (option: junior football (soccer ball), playground ball), cones (option: junior-sized sports goal)

Basketball Skills

Dribble

Stand behind the child and assist them in bouncing a ball with two hands. Let the ball hit their hand without catching it. Provide less assistance as child's skill improves.

Progress to different types of balls and then progress to bouncing or dribbling the ball with one hand.

EQUIPMENT NEEDED: Slow motion ball (option: junior basketball, playground ball)

Pass and Shoot

Have children stand in a circle and put a hoop in the middle. Encourage children to throw, bounce-to-pass, or pass the ball three times so that the third person ends up with the ball. They shoot the ball into the hoop.

EQUIPMENT NEEDED: Slow motion ball (option: junior basketball, playground ball), hoop (option: basket)

Dribble and Shoot

Have children stand in a line in front of a hoop. When they have the ball, have children dribble three times, take a shot. Then, collect the ball from the hoop and then pass it to the next child in line.

EQUIPMENT NEEDED: Slow motion ball (option: junior basketball, playground ball), hoop (option: basket)

Softball Skills

Run the Bases

Use floor markers for bases. Have one child stand on each base. Set up a cone at home plate and have one child bat a ball off it. The batter is encouraged to run around the bases before the ball is passed between three different players. The trainer or coach rotates the children to different positions.

EQUIPMENT NEEDED: Floor markers, slow motion ball (option: soft foam ball, softball), cone (option: softball tee), dowel (option: bat, stick)



Young Athletes in Schools



As children explore the world around them through play, they learn many concepts of life. Adding movement and physical activity into the classroom leads to a lifetime of activity.

The benefits of physical activity and play go beyond sports. Special Olympics Young Athletes helps children interact with each other and develop important communication, learning and self-help skills. Starting motor activities early is very important for children with intellectual disabilities. Children who receive support at an early age will be more capable of doing challenging movements as they grow older.

Structure in Schools

- **Frequency:** at least one time per week, three times per week is best

Young Athletes has the greatest impact on motor skills when run more than once per week. Schools should strive to offer activities three times per week.

All three lessons can be conducted in the classroom, or can be enhanced with at-home activities. For example, if Young Athletes takes place twice per week in the classroom, family members may conduct activities once per week at home.

- **Timing:** 30 – 45 minute session
- **Setting:** Indoors or outdoors

Young Athletes can be run in many safe settings. These include a gym during physical education time or in the classroom/outdoors during a time dedicated to motor development or play.

Family Engagement

While families may not be involved with Young Athletes in schools, it is important for families to participate with their child. Families can participate in a variety of ways, including:

- **Initial Meeting.** Schools are encouraged to host an introduction for parents at the start of the school year. Parents and family members can learn about Young Athletes. They can also learn how to support their child at home during the school year.
- **Weekly newsletters and emails.** Connect with parents weekly to share the activities and progress with families.
- **Volunteers.** Invite family members to participate as volunteers and support the Young Athletes lessons.
- **At-home activities.** Share the Activity Guide with families. Provide suggestions of everyday items that could be used as equipment. This allows families to replicate activities with their child at home.
- **Demonstration or Celebration event.** At the conclusion of Young Athletes, plan an inclusive celebration event or field day. Invite family members to come see the different activities learned in class.



Additional Resources

The Young Athletes Curriculum is a secondary resource that provides scripted lesson plans for use over an eight-week period in schools. For each week, there are three days of lesson plans, for a total of 24 days of activities. The lessons are designed to be offered in order to help children become familiar with the activities. Children build skills through repetition.

The Young Athletes Curriculum was developed from the activities in the Activity Guide. It introduces how to run Young Athletes in schools.

The Young Athletes Curriculum and other resources for educators can be found at resources.specialolympics.org/YoungAthletes.

Building a Lesson Plan

Use the structure below to develop individual lessons for Young Athletes in the classroom. It will help provide repetition. It also emphasizes individual growth and support social interactions.

- **Warm Up:** The warm up gets children moving and prepared for the upcoming activities. A fun warm-up can include songs, games and stretching.
- **Individual Skill Development:** This section allows children to focus on their individual growth and success. Select a skill and activity from the Guide and run it as a singular activity. Or, select several activities and set up different stations.
- **Group Games/Activity:** These games and activities are a fun and effective way to practice skills. They reinforce classroom lessons, encouraging communication, and social interaction.
- **Cool Down and Closing Song:** This section helps children to slow down and prepare to return to other classroom activities. With a closing song, review the activity or skills learned. Complete the lesson with a good stretch.

On the next page, you will find a sample lesson template for developing Young Athletes lessons in the classroom.

Tips for Adults

- Using words, pictures or other visuals, share the individual activities on a white board or chalkboard. This provides visual cues for children as they complete the day's lesson.
- Find a blank Lesson Plan Template at: resources.specialolympics.org/YoungAthletes



Young Athletes Lesson Plan

Sample Lesson for "Walking and Running" Activities



Warm Up (5 minutes)

- Song - Wheels on the Bus
- Follow the Leader



Skill Development/Stations (10- 15 minutes)

- Side Stepping
- Run and Carry
- Sticky Arms



Group Activity (10-15 minutes)

- Fire Drill
- Obstacle Course



Cool Down/Closing Song (5 minutes)

- Song - If You're Happy and You Know it

Key Points to Consider in the Classroom

Space and Safety

- **Not too big; not too small.** Take time to read each activity. Make sure the space matches the needs of the activity and the number of children in the group.
- **Indoor versus outdoor.** Young Athletes is good for both indoor and outdoor spaces. Be mindful of spacing. Define borders for safety.
- **One space vs. two spaces.** Many teachers have run Young Athletes by dividing their class into two groups. Use a classroom and hallways to run two smaller groups of children at a time.

Structure

- **Establish a routine.** Routines provide clear expectations, consistency and comfort for many children.
- **Plan for rest breaks.** Provide a space where children can rest if they become tired or overstimulated by the environment or activity.
- **Encourage different modes of movement to transition between activities.** This strengthens different muscles and encourages children to learn a new skill.
- **Use music to signal transition.** Songs can be used to signal when one activity is finished and another is about to begin.
- **Unified partners.** Have older children or children without ID support younger children by showing activities and serving as leaders and unified partners.
- **Hydration and healthy snacks.** Offer water and fruit at the end of the session, if available. Good hydration and nutrition are important for physical health and learning.

Leadership and Volunteers

Along with many other benefits, Young Athletes can help to create inclusion, acceptance and respect in classrooms and schools. Consider adding to sessions by giving children the chance to lead and learn.

- After repeating songs multiple times, encourage children to lead the warm-up and cool down songs.
- Within the activities, identify ways for children to begin taking on leadership roles. For example, let children take turns being the leader in “Follow the Leader” or setting the path in “Obstacle Course”.
- Use classroom time to discuss important topics that help children become better members of their classroom or community. Topics can include concepts like inclusion, respect, abilities and friendship.

Young Athletes can also support older individuals in developing leadership skills. Consider the following suggestions:

- Older primary school children can support Young Athletes by demonstrating or modeling skills and helping younger children to complete activities.
- Secondary school students can serve as volunteers for the activities. Volunteers are great to run individual stations or support children as they move from one activity to the next.
- Partner with a local university to enhance the Young Athletes activities. Consider working with relevant departments, such as, education, special education, physical therapy, or coaching. University students can serve as volunteers or coaches, and can even take leadership in creating lesson plans.
- Have Special Olympics athlete leaders serve as assistant coaches and volunteers.

Demonstration or Celebration Events

As they learn and practice new skills, children will gain confidence and pride in their growth. Celebration events, like a Unified Field Day, Unified Game Day or Young Athletes demonstration, offer schools the chance to engage children of all ages and abilities. They also highlight the program for families and the community.

To ensure a valuable experience for all, consider the following suggestions for planning an event:

- Invite families and community members so they can share in the success. Also, invite other classes in the school to the event. This way, all children can experience the fun of inclusion.
- Older students in the school can serve as volunteers and take leadership in running the various activities.
- Consider making the event feel more festive by having a small opening and closing ceremony.
- Host a celebration event at the end of the school year or after sessions are complete. The event should celebrate children’s individual successes and progress.
- Set up stations during the event that reflect the activities and games children did in Young Athletes.



Young Athletes in Communities



Youth sport and recreation programs are where children come together with a “coach” for organized play. They can be found in many communities. Special Olympics Young Athletes can provide that same inclusive opportunity for children with and without intellectual disabilities.

Young Athletes in the community allows parents to share in the fun their children have while playing with others. They also observe their children achieving skills that will help them in sports and in life.

Structure in Communities

When determining how to conduct community Young Athletes sessions, the following details can serve as a guide for set-up and structure.

- **Frequency:** one time per week, plus two times per week at home
- **Timing:** 45 minute – 1 hour session
- **Setting:** Indoors or outdoors
- **Locations:** Community center, sport club, university campus, public recreation space, library, or other venues
- **Coaches:** Community volunteer, specialized professional, family member or university student
- **Inclusion:** Siblings or local community children
- **Volunteers:** Family members, Special Olympics athlete leaders, local sport club members, university students or community volunteers

Volunteering or assistant coaching is a great leadership opportunity for older Special Olympics athlete leaders. Interaction with athlete leaders is also valuable for families as they can get inspired about future possibilities for their child.

Community Session Structure

Use the structure below to develop individual sessions for Young Athletes in the classroom. It will help provide repetition. It also emphasizes individual growth and supports social interactions.

- **Warm Up:** The warm up gets children moving and prepared for the upcoming activities. A fun warm-up can include songs, games and stretching.
- **Individual Skill Development:** This section allows children to focus on their individual growth and success. Select a skill and activity from the Guide and run it as a singular activity. Or, select several activities and set up different stations.
- **Group Games/Activity:** These games and activities are a fun and effective way to practice skills. They reinforce classroom lessons, encouraging communication, and social interaction.
- **Cool Down and Closing Song:** This section helps children to slow down and prepare to leave. With a closing song, review the activity or skills learned. Complete the lesson with a good stretch.



Key Points to Consider in a Community Program

Space and Safety

- **Not too big; not too small.** Take time to read each activity. Make sure the space matches the needs of the activity and the number of children in the group.
- **Indoor versus outdoor.** Young Athletes is good for both indoor and outdoor spaces. Be mindful of spacing. Define borders for safety.
- **One space vs. two spaces.** Depending on the number of children and volunteers, trainers can divide a large group into smaller groups, sometimes by age or ability and run two groups at the same time.

Structure

- **Establish a routine.** Routines provide clear expectations, consistency and comfort for many children.
- Create different skill stations to accommodate children of different ages and ability.
- Add group games and activities into the session when children are of similar age or ability.
- **Encourage different modes of movement to transition between activities.** This strengthens different muscles and encourages children to learn a new skill.
- Invite siblings, parents or children without ID to support children by modeling activities.
- **Use music to signal transition.** Songs can be used to signal when one activity is finished and another is about to begin.
- **Plan for rest breaks.** Provide a space where children can rest if they become tired or too excited by the activity or environment.
- Offer water and fruit at the end of the session, if available. Good hydration and nutrition is important for physical health and learning.



Family Engagement

It is important for families to participate with their child in Young Athletes. It is a chance for families to connect with members of their community and other families. This supports growth, development and a feeling of acceptance.

Families can engage in a community program in a variety of ways, including:

- **Weekly newsletters and emails.** Connect weekly to share the activities and progress with families.
- **Session supporters.** Invite family members to participate in the weekly sessions, supporting their children through the various activities, or encourage families to take the next step and become coaches.
- **At-home activities.** Share the Activity Guide with families. Provide suggestions of everyday items that could be used as equipment. This allows families to replicate activities with their child at home.
- **Family support groups.** Provide families with a space to talk and connect while their children are in Young Athletes. Families can be the best support system for one another.

Family Forums

Family Forums involve families in Special Olympics. They offer a setting for parents and caregivers to gain access to health information, resources and support.

Consider the following ideas when planning a Family Forum:

Frequency and Timing

Plan a Family Forum monthly or once every three months. Families can gather with guest speakers while coaches and volunteers conduct that week's Young Athletes session.

Potential Topics

Family Forums need to address the questions and concerns of local family members. They should also be sensitive to the cultural and religious needs of the community. Below are some suggestions for valuable Family Forum topics. Meet with family members first and get their input before deciding on final topics.

- Advocating for your child's rights and access to services
- Your child's medical and dental care
- Accessing follow-up care – how to identify the right professional for your child
- School opportunities – what is available for children with ID in the community
- Nutrition, healthy eating and cooking demonstrations
- General health topics related to the overall community, such as malaria prevention
- Learning through play
- Healthy sibling relationships
- Promoting independence at an early age

Guest Presenters

When leading Family Forums, use community partners, university professors or industry experts to lead the conversations. For example, bring in a pediatrician to talk about working with your child's doctor. Have a nutritionist come to speak about healthy eating.

Young Athletes in the Home



Family involvement in the lives of young children is important. Parents, grandparents, caretakers, brothers, sisters, aunts, uncles and cousins should have every opportunity to be involved in Young Athletes. Through Special Olympics Young Athletes in the home, families can play together in a fun and caring environment.

When run at home, Young Athletes can be a stand-alone program or can support the activities children are doing in a school or community program.

Stand-Alone Activities

A great way to start Young Athletes is simply to play with children, using the Young Athletes Activity Guide to structure playtime. The activities in the Guide can be used one-on-one with an adult and a child. Or invite siblings and neighborhood children to participate in the fun.

Start by having 20 to 30 minutes of structured play, at least three times per week. Select two to three activities to focus on in each play period. Make sure to keep things fun. Adapt the activities as your child progresses in each skill area.

Support for Community or School Programs

Practicing Young Athletes at home can help support the skills children are learning as part of Young Athletes in their school or community.

To achieve the growth recognized in the Young Athletes curriculum study – where children gained seven months of motor skills over eight weeks – children should repeat skills and activities three times per week.

Families can support this growth by using Young Athletes as a guide for play at home. Ask your child’s teacher or coach to share the lessons they are doing each week and follow along at home.

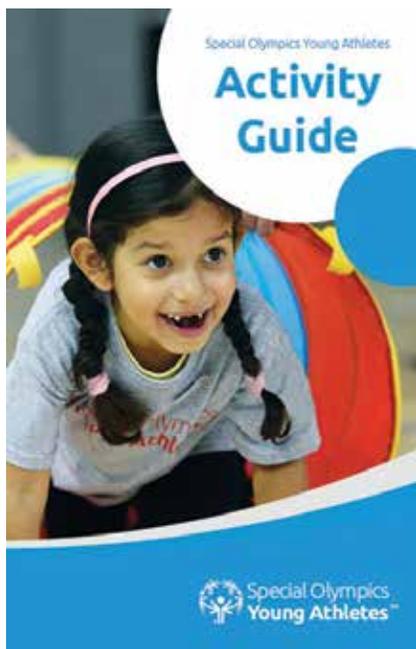
Key Points to Consider in your Home-Based Activities

- **Do not feel limited by the suggested equipment.** Official sports equipment is not required. Most equipment can be replaced with things you can find at home. Like tape for a balance beam or empty soda bottles for cones. Use your creativity and have fun!
- **Invite siblings and other children in your community to play.** All children love the activities and games in the Activity Guide. There is no better way to have fun and get fit than to play with others.
- **Get creative.** As you start to do the activities in the Guide, come up with new activities that play to your child’s strengths and weaknesses. Connect to your child’s favorite sports or activities.
- **Connect with other families.** Find a local Special Olympics Family Support Network to connect with other families. Become a family leader by volunteering or starting a community Young Athletes program.
- **Have fun!** While there are many benefits to Young Athletes, one of the main goals is to support parents in playing with their child in a fun setting. Enjoy this time playing together. Make a connection through physical activities, fitness and sports.



Additional Resources





The Young Athletes Activity Guide is just the beginning. Online you can find more information and resources to help support Young Athletes. These resources include:

- Individual videos displaying proper form for all activities in the Guide
- The Young Athletes Curriculum, with 24 scripted lessons based on the Activity Guide
- Other resources to help program leaders run Young Athletes in the school, community and home
- Information to support and engage family members
- Additional health and fitness activities
- Marketing materials to promote Young Athletes in the community

resources.specialolympics.org/YoungAthletes

Equipment Modifications and Adaptations

Changes to equipment can decrease injury and increase success. Balls, Frisbees, balloons, pucks, bats, rackets, paddles, sticks, bases, nets, goals and fitness equipment can be changed to meet the needs of each child.

- **Change the ball size.** Make the ball or sport object (puck, shuttle) larger or smaller.
- **Length or width.** Change the length of the striking implement (bat, stick) to be longer, shorter or wider.
- **Weight.** Offer striking equipment or balls that are lighter or heavier.
- **Grip.** Make the grip larger, smaller, softer or molded to fit the child's hand.
- **Composition and texture.** Offer a variety of balls and striking equipment that are made of foam, fleece, plastic, rubber, cardboard or other materials.
- **Colors.** Use equipment in many colors for organization or to visually engage children.
- **Height or size.** Lower the height of a net, goal or base. Use larger bases marked with numbers or colors. Increase the size of a goal or change the height to increase accuracy in aiming at a target.
- **Sound, light, pictures, signs or colors.** Use colored scarves, pictures and other visuals to emphasize location.



Modifications for Children with Motor Challenges

Young Athletes provides a space for children of all abilities to be successful. In some cases, changes may need to be made to ensure all children benefit from the experience.

Regardless of ability level, it is important to adapt activities to meet the individual needs of each child.

For children who are unable to walk:

- Select activities that focus on sitting on the floor with and without support. These activities include “Rolling and Trapping”, “Scarf Games” and more.
- Modify activities so that children can crawl, rather than walk or run.

For children who are unsteady on their feet:

- Allow children to use walkers or push a cart to participate in activities.
- Hold children at the waist so they can work on balance, striking and throwing skills.

For children who use a wheelchair or stroller:

- Allow children to hit off a softball tee.
- Lower nets, targets or barriers.
- Use larger balls that allow children to kick from the wheelchair.
- Position the wheelchair at a side angle to the ball or target for overhead throwing and side striking activities.
- Allow other children to assist by pushing the wheelchair or stroller during group activities.

For children with limited movement:

- Provide hand-over-hand assistance to complete the activities.
- Provide physical support at the torso or hips.

Modifications for Children with Autism

Consider the following suggestions when planning Young Athletes sessions that include children with autism:

Structure and Consistency

- Schedule Young Athletes for the same time every day to maintain consistency.
- Repeat the same structure for every Young Athletes session. Start with a warm up and opening song. Have individual skill practice and group games. Then, close with a song. A consistent routine helps children know what to expect.
- Provide a clear beginning and clear end to activities.
- Use visuals and pictures (like the template seen on page 68) to walk children through the activities for that day’s session.

Surroundings and Physical Stimulations

- Limit distractions, like bright lights or loud sounds.
- Avoid sudden noises, like a whistle or clapping.
- Designate a quiet room or have a calm area where children can go during times of overstimulation.

Instruction

- Define clear boundaries for activities.
- Give clear and concise directions for each activity. This helps children understand what is expected of them.
- Develop rules about social interactions, behavior and communication. Use those rules to provide structure to the group.
- Provide individual support for children from volunteers, staff or other children.

Developing Healthy Habits Early

It is important to introduce healthy habits for children at an early age. Young Athletes includes health and fitness information while focusing on motor skills.

Some key healthy habits to focus on include:

- Handwashing
- Healthy foods and beverages
- Reducing screen time (TV, computer, video games, smart phones)
- Daily physical activity
- Healthy daily habits, like brushing teeth

In this Guide, many “Healthy Play” ideas share easy activity modifications that address key health and fitness messages.

To support the “Healthy Play” activities, additional equipment can be purchased. These items include floor markers with images of fruits and vegetables, food-shaped beanbags, or beach balls with various food, beverages or exercises on them.



There are additional health and fitness activities that can be added to Young Athletes. Three sample lessons are in the Guide. Additional lessons and activities to support healthy habits can be found at resources.specialolympics.org/YoungAthletes

Children’s Songs

Locally popular songs can be modified to talk about health topics in a fun and exciting way. The sample songs below show how songs can be updated to teach children about nutrition, physical activity and general health and well-being.

Apple, Apple, Way Up High

Sung to “Twinkle Twinkle Little Star”

Apple, apple, way up high,
I can reach you if I try.
Climb a ladder,
Hold on tight.
Pick you quickly
Take a bite.

Wash, Wash, Wash Your Hands

Sung to “Row, Row, Row your Boat”

Wash, wash, wash your hands
Wash the dirt away
Before you eat, before you sleep
And after outdoor play.

Which Food is Healthy?

EQUIPMENT NEEDED: Real or plastic foods, or pictures of food, tape

The goal of this activity is to help children learn about different types of food and making good food choices.

On a wall or table, draw a happy face (smile) and an unhappy face (frown) with tape. Give children different healthy and unhealthy food items. These can be pictures of food, plastic or cloth food, or real food packaging.

Ask children to group the foods into two groups – those that make them healthy and strong (happy face) and those that are unhealthy (unhappy face).

Once children have separated the foods, discuss which foods have been correctly placed on the happy face and which food items were wrongly identified as “healthy”. Using the grid below as a sample, talk to children about why those foods are not healthy. Also, suggest replacing with foods that are healthier choices.

Unhealthy vs Healthy Foods

Unhealthy Food	Healthy Food	Comment to Child
Chips/Crisps	Bananas or Carrots	“Chips don’t make strong muscles and soft skin and good eyes, but bananas and carrots make you healthy!”
Juice	Milk	“Milk has lots of calcium and protein that will help you get taller and have strong bones, muscles and teeth.”
Soda	Water	“When you are thirsty, water is a good choice for your body. Soda has lots of sugar and will make you even thirstier.”

Tame the Tube

EQUIPMENT NEEDED: Small box, “Screen-Free Activities” Cards

The goal of this activity is to show the importance of limiting screen time (like TV, computer, video games, tablets, smart phones) to no more than two hours a day for children and families.

Copy the list below and cut out each activity. Place individual activities in a small bowl or box. Ask children to pick an activity and then do each activity as a family or with the whole classroom. Ask children to suggest other screen-free activities that they would like to do.

Talk about the importance of limiting screen time throughout the activity.

Screen-Free Activities

Read a book	Sing a Song	Take a Walk
Dance to a Song	Play with Friends	Play a Game
Play Outside	Write a Poem	Cook a Healthy Meal
Draw a Picture	Listen to Music	Play your Favorite Sport

Additional Resources : Next Steps with Special Olympics

Children will progress at different rates in Young Athletes. Some children will continue to be challenged and others will be ready to move on to more advanced skills. Work with children individually to know the right next step. The next step could be participating in another Young Athletes session, beginning a training program for a sport, or advancing directly to becoming a competitive Special Olympics athlete or unified partner.

Regardless of ability level, Special Olympics provides opportunities for children and adults throughout their lives. Through health promotion, physical activity and sports, Special Olympics has something for everyone.

Through Olympic-style individual and team sports, people with intellectual disabilities over the age of eight can participate in meaningful training and competition opportunities.

Become a Unified Teammate

Special Olympics Unified Sports joins people with and without intellectual disabilities together on the same team. Unified Sports was inspired by a simple principle: training together and playing together is a quick path to friendship and understanding.

Learn more at www.specialolympics.org





www.specialolympics.org/YoungAthletes