

Eligibility to Participate

Page: Page 1 of 4

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**Special
Olympics**
Illinois



General Statement of Eligibility

Special Olympics training and competition is open to every person with intellectual disabilities who is at least eight years of age and who registers to participate in Special Olympics as required by the Special Olympics Incorporated General Rules. Some virtual programming may not require registrants to complete all components outlined in the General Rules.

Age Requirements

There is no maximum age limitation for participation in Special Olympics. The minimum age requirement for participation in Special Olympics competition is eight years of age. Special Olympics Illinois permits and encourages children who are at least six years old to participate in age-appropriate Special Olympics training programs offered by Region Programs (Young Athletes Transition Events and MATP Events or in specific (and age-appropriate) cultural or social activities offered during the course of a Special Olympics event. These events must be participation only and conducted in a manner that does not recognize place finishes and encourages the spirit of participation. These children may be recognized for their participation in such training or other non-competition activities through the use of certificates of participation, participation ribbons or MATP Challenge ribbons/medals. Place finish awards cannot be used. No child may participate in Special Olympics competition (or be awarded medals or ribbons associated with competition) before his or her eighth birthday.

Motor Activities Training Program Participation

The Special Olympics Motor Activities Training Program (MATP) is designed for persons with the greatest physical need who do not yet possess the physical and/or behavioral skills necessary to participate in official Special Olympics sports. This program provides a comprehensive motor activity and recreation training curriculum for these participants. MATP emphasizes training and participation rather than competition. In addition, the program provides the means for athletes to participate in appropriate recreation activities geared to their ability levels. Athletes who are at least six years old may participate in the MATP program. The official Special Olympics Challenge Ribbon or Medal must be used at MATP events.

Young Athletes Program Participation

The Young Athletes program is an innovative sports play program for children ages 2-7 with intellectual disabilities and their peers, designed to introduce them into the world of sports prior to Special Olympics competition eligibility at the age of 8. The program engages children with and without intellectual disabilities through developmentally appropriate play activities designed to foster physical, cognitive and social development.

This program is designed to address two specific levels of play. Level 1 includes physical activities focused on developing fundamental motor tracking and eye-hand coordination. Level 2 concentrates on the application of these physical activities through a sports skills activity program and the development of skills consistent with Special Olympics sports play.

Eligibility to Participate

Page: Page 2 of 4

Updated: 05/15/21

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Degree of Disability

Participation in Special Olympics training and competition is open to all persons with intellectual disabilities who meet the age requirement 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 Special Olympics Incorporated General Rules.

Identifying Persons with Intellectual Disabilities

A person is considered to have intellectual disabilities for purposes of determining his or her eligibility to participate in Special Olympics if that person satisfies any of the following requirements:

1. The person has been identified by an agency or professional as having intellectual disabilities as determined by their localities; or
2. The person has a cognitive delay as determined by standardized measures, such as intelligent quotient or "IQ" testing or other measures, which are generally accepted within the professional community in that State's nation as being a reliable measurement of the existence of a cognitive delay; or
3. The person has a closely related developmental disability. A "closely related developmental disability" means having functional limitations in either general learning (such as IQ) and in adaptive skills (such as in recreation, work, independent living, self-direction or self-care). However, persons whose functional limitations are based solely on a physical, behavioral, or emotional disability, or a specific learning or sensory disability, are not eligible to participate as Special Olympics athletes. However, they may be eligible to volunteer for Special Olympics as partners in Unified Sports, if they otherwise meet the separate eligibility requirements for participation in Unified Sports which are set forth in the Special Olympics Incorporated Unified Sports Handbook.

Unified Sports

Special Olympics Unified Sports competition involves athletes (individuals with intellectual disabilities) and partners (individuals without intellectual disabilities) competing together. Eligible athletes must meet the criteria previously described. Special Olympics Unified Sports training and competition is open to any partner who is at least eight years of age and who registers to participate in Special Olympics as required by the Special Olympics Incorporated General Rules. To be a Unified Partner requires completion of the Unified Sports Partner Application for Participation, completion of the Special Olympics Illinois Class A Volunteer Registration Form, completion of both the Protective Behaviors and Concussion Awareness trainings and meet the separate eligibility requirements for participation set forth by Special Olympics Inc.

Eligibility to Participate

Page: Page 3 of 4

Updated: 05/15/21

Replaced: 8/1/19

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Special Olympics Inc. has determined that an athlete cannot also be a Unified Partner. The definition of a Unified Partner is an individual without an intellectual disability and the definition of an athlete is an individual with an intellectual disability or a closely related developmental disability. A participant is either an athlete or Unified Partner, they cannot be both. If a participant wants to change their identified role, then they need to contact their Region Director to determine how to proceed with their request.

IHSA & IESA Eligibility

The Illinois High School Association and the Illinois Elementary School Association have rules that prohibit or restrict an athlete, Unified Partner or coach from participating on a non-school team or in non-school competition. Exceptions may be granted by IHSA or IESA. Athletes, Unified Partners and coaches should contact their local principal or athletic director to assist with requesting an exemption.

Participation of Athletes with Criminal Records, Pending Criminal Charges or a History of Violent, Abusive or Disruptive Behavior

This policy applies to all participating athletes and athletes applying for participation.

Principles

Special Olympics Illinois (SOILL) is an athlete-centered movement that welcomes athletes with intellectual disabilities of all abilities to participate in sports training and competition. The health and safety of all SOILL participants is of paramount importance to SOILL. Participants should feel that every SOILL event is a safe and positive experience and should not be fearful of other athletes, coaches or volunteers.

Because of our inclusive philosophy, the issue of how to treat athletes who have been convicted of violent crimes, have pending criminal charges or who engage in violent, abusive or disruptive behavior is particularly sensitive. SOILL must balance the principles of inclusiveness with providing a safe environment for athletes, volunteers and staff members.

Special Olympics Illinois will pursue all legal remedies available to it against any individuals (or that individual's parent or legal guardian) who willfully or negligently fails to comply with this policy's reporting and suspension requirements.

No Automatic Criminal Background Checks of Athletes

SOILL will not conduct automatic criminal background checks of athletes, however, it may become necessary to conduct a criminal background check in certain instances where SOILL is made aware that an athlete may have a violent or abusive background, a criminal record or pending charges that are beyond just minor traffic violations. If SOILL determines an athlete's criminal background check discloses any such incidents (beyond minor traffic violations), then SOILL shall evaluate the severity of the incidents(s) disclosed, and determine what, if any action needs to be taken. Factors are applied on a case-by-case basis. At a minimum, factors include:

- Type of Offense/Incident
- How Recent is the Offense/Incident

Eligibility to Participate

Page: Page 4 of 4

Updated: 05/15/21

Replaced: 8/1/19



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- Number of Offenses/Incidents

Action Options

The following outlines several possible outcomes, in no particular order. Depending on the evaluation of the incident, SOILL may immediately suspend an athlete or take other action SOILL deems necessary to protect all of its athletes, volunteers and staff.

- Probationary Period
- Require One-on-One Supervision
- Prohibit Overnight Stays or Travel
- Restrict Participation in Some Sports or Events
- Suspension
- Expulsion

Athletes who apply to volunteer for SOILL will be treated the same as all other volunteer applicants. Therefore, if the athlete is applying to be a Class A Volunteer, the athlete is subject to the SOILL Volunteer Screening Policy.

Athlete Sex Offender Policy

SOILL will screen all athletes using the Sex Offender Registry which contains information available to the public. Any current athlete or any athlete applying for participation that is listed on the Registry or is required by any state or federal law to register with any Sex Offenders Registry is barred from participating in any Special Olympics Illinois training, competition or athlete centered activities.

Any current athlete or any athlete applying for participation that is under criminal investigation for committing a crime of a sexual nature or was formerly on the Sex Offender Registry but subsequently removed must notify SOILL immediately in writing of the prior conviction(s), investigation or allegations. Anyone who is under criminal investigation for committing a crime of a sexual nature will be suspended from participating in any SOILL training, competition or athlete centered activities, pending resolution of the investigation. Approval for participation for anyone that was listed on the Sex Offender Registry and has been removed or was under criminal investigation for committing a crime of a sexual will be reviewed on a case-by-case basis.