

Young Athletes is an innovative sports play program designed for 2-7 year olds, with and without intellectual disabilities, to learn the fundamental sports skills prior to Special Olympics eligibility at age 8. In order to participate in the traditional Special Olympics program, an athlete must be 8 years old and diagnosed with an intellectual disability. Although only traditional Young Athletes are eligible to compete in the traditional program, Young Athlete peer partners, those without intellectual disabilities, can also continue to participate in Special Olympics.

The transition from Young Athletes to the traditional Special Olympics program is vital to the success of the organization as athletes, volunteers and coaches are needed. It is important that those athletes that began training in Young Athletes continue to increase their confidence, physical abilities and learn the valuable life lessons from competing as an individual or as part of a team in the traditional program. The Young Athletes peer partners hopefully have learned the importance of inclusion and developed a connection to Special Olympics Illinois that encourages them to continue to support the organization by serving as a volunteer, unified partner and/or eventually coach, as a coach must be a minimum of 14 years old. It is important that the younger generation becomes highly involved with Special Olympics Illinois otherwise, without athletes, volunteers and coaches, the traditional Special Olympics program would not exist.

The transition from the Young Athletes program to the traditional Special Olympics program begins at age 6. When an athlete turns 6 years old, he or she may begin training in any official sport. Statewide, Special Olympics Illinois has more than 175 sanctioned competitions in 17 different sports, including 10 state tournaments. Below are the Special Olympics Illinois state competitions. Each season, an athlete can participate in several sports; however, athletes can only participate in 1 sport if the State competition offers multiple sports.

<b>Tennis</b> -AUGUST	<b>Floor Hockey</b> -NOVEMBER	<b>Spring Games</b> – APRIL/MAY
<b>Golf</b> -SEPTEMBER	<b>Bowling</b> –DECEMBER	<b>Summer Games</b> – JUNE
<b>Softball</b> -SEPTEMBER	<b>Winter Games</b> –FEBRUARY	Aquatics
<b>Fall Games</b> –OCTOBER	Alpine Skiing	Track &Field
Equestrian	Snowshoeing	Bocce
Volleyball	<b>State Basketball</b> – MARCH	Gymnastics
<b>Flag Football</b> -NOVEMBER		Powerlifting
		Soccer

As 6 and 7 year olds, athletes also have the opportunity to participate in exhibitions at the following state competitions:

- State Basketball Tournament in Normal (March)**
- Summer Games in Normal (June)**
- State Softball Tournament in Springfield (September)**
- State Golf Tournament in Decatur (September)**
- Fall Games in Rockford (October)**

- Individual Basketball Skills
- 50 Meter Run and Tennis Ball Throw or Individual Soccer Skills
- Individual Softball Skills
- Individual Golf Skills
- Individual Volleyball Skills

In order to begin training and participate in the above competitions, athletes MUST have a valid Medical Form and a valid Consent Form on file. Medical Forms must be completed by a parent/guardian and signed by a doctor. Consent Forms must be signed by a parent/guardian. To receive forms and additional information on how to complete the form, please contact [youngathletes@soill.org](mailto:youngathletes@soill.org) or call 224-301-6362.

As an athlete begins to approach age 8, it is important that families contact their local Region Director. Special Olympics Illinois is divided into 11 geographical regions, each with a corresponding Region Director. To determine these geographical regions, please visit <http://www.soill.org/contact/> and then contact the appropriate Region Director to begin determining the best fit for the young athlete to continue their Special Olympics career!

Young Athletes staff hope that the transition from the Young Athletes program to the traditional program is a smooth process for everyone involved. Please do not hesitate to contact the Young Athletes staff at or 224-301-6362 for more information. We look forward to your continued involvement in Special Olympics Illinois!

Sincerely,  
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