



A Guide for Sibling Youth Engagement

Special Olympics



“[My brother] is the single most influential person in my life. He taught me lessons in compassion, perseverance, tolerance, and much more. He is my motivator and my touchstone.”

Joyce

Special Olympics Massachusetts

“To me, she is my everything. We are the closest of sisters as it gets and Special Olympics helped us to be this way.”

Sydney

Special Olympics South Dakota

“I am lucky that I saw my mother and my sister, Rosemary, treated with unbearable rejection... The combination of the love of my family and the awful sting of rejection helped me to develop the confidence that I needed to believe that I could make a difference in a positive direction.”

Eunice Kennedy Shriver

Founder of Special Olympics

This guidebook is for youth-age siblings of people with intellectual disabilities. It provides information about Special Olympics, intellectual disabilities and sibling engagement. The main purpose of this guidebook is to outline all of the opportunities for siblings to become involved in Special Olympics. We hope that siblings will read this guidebook and learn that Special Olympics has a place for them. No matter what age or interests a sibling may have, there is something for everyone!

What is an Intellectual Disability?

So your sibling has an intellectual disability...

Maybe your sibling's intellectual disability (ID) is new to you and your family. Or maybe it has been a part of your whole life. Either way, it can be hard to understand your sibling's disability. Special Olympics is here to support you! The information below will help you understand ID.

Use this information if your friends have questions about your brother/sister. The better you understand this information, the more helpful you will be to others who want to learn!

Intellectual Disability

Intellectual disability (ID) is a term used when a person has certain challenges. These challenges make it harder to carry out daily activities. They may struggle with communication, social and/or self-care skills. A child with ID may learn and develop differently than other children.

Intellectual disability used to be called "mental retardation." However, the R-word (retarded) became exclusive and offensive. "Intellectual disability" is now the official term.

Levels of ID

People with ID experience different challenges. The severity of their challenges also differ. A person with a more severe disability may need more support to function in school and the community. A person with a less severe disability may need less support.

Intelligence Quotient (IQ)

An IQ test measures a person's ability to learn, reason, problem solve, etc. A test score below 70-75 is one sign of ID. IQ is not the only factor that influences a person's future success. Effort, motivation and self-discipline also predict success.

What qualifies as ID?

Special Olympics uses the American Association of Intellectual and Developmental Disabilities' definition of ID. It states that a person has ID if he or she meets all of these three criteria:

1. IQ is below 70-75;
2. There are significant limitations in two or more adaptive areas (skills needed to live, work, and play in the community, such as communication or self-care); and
3. The condition manifests itself before the age of 18.

Causes of ID

For many children, the cause of their ID is unknown. Injury, disease, or a problem in the brain can cause ID. Some causes can happen before, during or soon after birth. These might include genetic conditions, infections during pregnancy, or lack of oxygen. Other causes of ID may not occur until a child is older. These might include severe head injury, infections or stroke.

Societal Impact on People with ID

People with ID are not at fault for having different challenges. Some communities do not support people with ID well. This may make it hard for people with ID to function in that community. For example, a student with Down syndrome is not disabled by her diagnosis. Her school's curriculum assumes that all students learn at a similar pace and have similar abilities. If her school offered the appropriate support and adaptations, she would be successful in her schoolwork. Therefore, her school's curriculum is disabling.

When your sibling is struggling with a task, try to identify his/her problems. Ask yourself: What could I, or my community, do to help my sibling? How can we make this task inclusive for people with ID?

Do Not Stop Here! If you still have more questions, you can...

Ask your parents!

Connect with your local [Program](#) Family Coordinator!

Read more [here!](#)

Myth Busting!

People with intellectual disabilities cannot play sports.

MYTH



If given the opportunity and appropriate adaptations, people with intellectual disabilities can overcome barriers and play sports.

FACT



People with intellectual disabilities cannot learn.

MYTH



People with intellectual disabilities may learn differently, but they can still learn. Everyone learns at their own pace.

FACT



People with intellectual disabilities cannot have jobs.

MYTH



Most people with intellectual disabilities are able to hold jobs and contribute to their community. Their ability to do so depends on the level of support they need.

FACT



Myth Busting!

I caused my sibling to have an intellectual disability.

MYTH



Intellectual disabilities are not contagious or caused by other people. They are caused by genetics, injury, or exposure to disease.

FACT



My sibling's intellectual disability will be cured when he or she grows older or visits a spiritual healer.

MYTH



Intellectual disabilities are chronic, meaning they last throughout life. However, people with ID can still learn and grow throughout their lives.

FACT



Having a sibling with an intellectual disability is my family's punishment for sins we have committed in this or a past life.

MYTH



Intellectual disabilities are not a form of punishment and are not caused by the family's actions or bad blood. They are a result of biology.

FACT



Myth Busting!

If I have children, they will also have intellectual disabilities.

MYTH



Only some types of intellectual disabilities can be inherited. Ask your parents or doctor if your sibling's ID is genetic and if you can have genetic testing done.

FACT



I cannot have a romantic relationship because I have too much responsibility caring for my sibling with ID.

MYTH



Many siblings of people with ID are able to have relationships. Having a partner who accepts your sibling with ID can provide you with additional support.

FACT



In order to take care of my sibling in the future, I have to sacrifice what I want for my own future.

MYTH



There are many roles you can take with regard to future caretaking so that both you and your sibling's needs are met.

FACT



What is Special Olympics?

Mission

Special Olympics' mission is to offer year-round sports training and competition for people with ID. This gives them ongoing chances to become healthy, show courage and feel joy. They can share gifts, skills and friendship with their families, other Special Olympics athletes and the community.

Background

Eunice Kennedy Shriver founded Special Olympics in 1968. Eunice had a sister, Rosemary, who had ID. She and Rosemary grew up playing sports together and with their family. In those days, there were not many programs for people with ID. Eunice started Special Olympics to offer people with ID “the chance to play, the chance to compete and the chance to grow.”

There are 200 million people with ID in the world. Our goal is to reach out to every one of them – and their families, too. Special Olympics reaches out through trainings, competitions, health exams and fundraising events. We also create chances for families, community members and others to meet and participate. Everyone can change attitudes and support athletes together!

Special Olympics relies on volunteers. We have many events for siblings, parents, other family members and friends to become involved. Families are our most powerful and valuable natural resource!



Siblings and other family members who participated in the Special Olympics Africa Sibling and Family Workshop in Johannesburg, South Africa pose for a group photo

What is Sibling Engagement?

Sibling engagement occurs when the sibling of a person with ID is actively involved in their brother or sister's life. They are active participants in their sibling's Special Olympics journey. Together, they play, learn, develop and work. They make their relationship stronger in the process. The siblings are a team who motivate and support each other. They work toward and achieve shared and personal goals.



Siblings from around the world with and without intellectual disabilities participate in Special Olympics events

Sibling Engagement through Special Olympics has **mutually beneficial** outcomes. Your sibling will appreciate the time you take to invest in his or her goals. Sibling engagement can offer you:

- Pride in yourself and your sibling
- Increased self-esteem
- Professional development skills
- Problem-solving skills
- Leadership skills and opportunities
- Advocacy skills
- Friendships with other siblings
- A stronger bond with your sibling
- Greater tolerance and acceptance of all people
- Stronger family unity
- Opportunities for personal and athletic growth

How Can I Get Involved?

Types of Involvement

Special Olympics offers the perfect platform to become an engaged sibling! Explore your options below:

Support

Cheer on Your Sibling

Volunteer

Volunteer at Local SO Events

Healthy Athletes

Become a SO Official

Participate

Young Athletes

Unified Sports

University Engagement

Become a SO Coach

Get Fit

Unified Fitness Club

Fit Families

SOfit

Connect

Family Support Network

Advocate

Whole School Advocacy

Inclusive Youth Leadership

Program Leadership

How Can I Get Involved?

Activity Guide

Read more about all of the opportunities Special Olympics can offer you!

1. Support

Cheer on your sibling at practices and competitions!

Example: Sofia and her family go to her brother, Mateo's, Special Olympics swimming competition. She holds up the poster that she made for Mateo and cheers him on as he competes.

Type of Involvement: Support

Time Commitment: Can attend weekly practices or competitions every few weeks

Age: All ages

Resources: Learn more about being a family supporter [here!](#)

2. Volunteer at Local Special Olympics Practices and Competitions

There is always a need for volunteers in Special Olympics! Volunteer roles vary depending on the type of event you are helping with.

Example: Thabo volunteered for his brother's track meet last week. He was in charge of using the stopwatch to time each athlete as they raced. He loved the feeling of responsibility it gave him and that he was able to watch his brother, Zain, compete, too!

Type of Involvement: Volunteer

Time Commitment: One-time event or volunteer weekly/monthly

Age: 8+

Resources: Learn more about volunteering [here!](#)

3. Healthy Athletes

Special Olympics Healthy Athletes® uses health care experts who volunteer their time. They provide free health exams and services for our athletes. Volunteer at one of our health events if you are a medical professional or student.

Example: Yui is a medical student and volunteered at a local Special Olympics Healthy Athletes event. She taught Special Olympics athletes why eating fruits and vegetables is good. She gave her sister with ID, Kanna, a high-five as she came through her station. She introduced Kanna to her new friends she was volunteering with.

Type of Involvement: Volunteer

Time Commitment: One-time event or volunteer every few months

Age: 18+

Resources: Learn more about becoming a Healthy Athletes volunteer [here!](#)

4. Become a Special Olympics Official

Officials are an important part of sports competitions. Officials can be sports referees or judges. Referees make sure that athletes are following the rules of the sport. Judges score athletes based on how well they compete. These positions are perfect for siblings who have experience or an interest in a specific sport!

Example: Gabriel grew up playing basketball with his sister, Isabella, who has ID. He wanted to use his basketball skills in his volunteer role with Special Olympics. He became certified as a Special Olympics basketball official. Now Gabriel officiates at every local competition that he can.

Type of Involvement: Volunteer

Time Commitment: One-two days per month plus a training period that includes certification completion and 10 hours of observed officiating

Age: 18+

Resources: Learn more about the certification requirements to become a Special Olympics official [here!](#)

5. Young Athletes

Young Athletes is a sport and play program for children with and without ID. The program is for children ages 2 to 7 years old. Children learn basic sport skills, discover fun ways to become fit, and build strong relationships with siblings and friends. Children learn balance, jumping, throwing, kicking, and more through dozens of fun games!

Example: Meredith (age 5) and her brother with ID, Jonah (age 6), participate in Young Athletes together every week. Their favorite activity is to race in an obstacle course so they can challenge each other. They even like to build their own obstacle courses at home, too!

Type of Involvement: Participate

Time Commitment: Three days per week for 45 minutes – 1 hour

Age: 2-7

Resources: Learn more about Young Athletes [here!](#)

6. Unified Sports®

Unified Sports joins people with and without ID on the same team. It was inspired by a simple belief: training and playing together is a quick path to friendship and understanding. Teams are made up of people of similar age and ability. This makes practices and games more fun, challenging and exciting for all.

Example: Zaila has a sister with ID named Glory. They both joined their school's Unified athletics team and practice together every week. Zaila and Glory decided to be Unified partners and have felt closer as sisters ever since!

Type of Involvement: Participate

Time Commitment: One-two days per week

Age: 8+

Resources: Learn more about Unified Sports [here!](#)

7. University/ College Engagement

Join the thousands of university and college students across the globe who are working to benefit Special Olympics. Join a Special Olympics College Club/Society/Student Group at your school!

Example: Symone wanted to continue supporting her brother with ID, Owen, after she started university but was not sure how. During her university's orientation, she learned about the Special Olympics Club. She was excited to become a member! Now she volunteers at local events and advocates for people with ID, like Owen, across her campus.

Type of Involvement: Participate

Time Commitment: Can attend weekly/monthly club meetings or hold one-time events

Age: Enrolled university/college student

Resources: Learn more about how to become involved with Special Olympics in universities [here!](#)

8. Become a Special Olympics Coach

Special Olympics coaches help athletes with ID find their own strengths and abilities. They also show them how to build upon those strengths and improve every day.

Example: Oliver used to play soccer in high school. Now, his little sister, Charlotte, is competing in soccer skills with Special Olympics. He decided to become a soccer coach for his local Special Olympics Program. Now, he can teach Charlotte and other Special Olympics athletes about his favorite sport.

Type of Involvement: Participate

Time Commitment: One-two days per week plus a training period

Age: 16-18+

Resources: Learn more about what it means to be a Special Olympics coach [here!](#) Learn more about how to become a coach [here!](#)

9. Unified Fitness Club

Unified Fitness Club is a year-round program that offers chances for Unified physical activity. People with and without ID exercise through weekly or bi-weekly walking sessions. They earn incentives by tracking their physical activity. The Club is perfect for siblings who would rather participate than compete. It is also great for those who want to add onto their sports activities.

Example: Kwame is 10 years older than his brother Zane who has ID. He wanted to do more things together with Zane but was not sure how, given their age gap. They joined their local Unified Fitness Club and now they walk together and catch up on each other's lives every week.

Type of Involvement: Get Fit

Time Commitment: At least one day per week on an ongoing basis

Age: 8+

Resources: Learn more about Unified Fitness Clubs [here!](#)

10. Fit Families

Fit Families is a 6-week fitness challenge for athletes and their supporters (family members or others). The program offers chances to become active and healthy together.

Example: Aditya and Arjun are brothers and have always been competitive with each other growing up. Now, they both have goals to improve their health, so they joined Fit Families. Together, they track their health successes and push each other to be healthier.

Type of Involvement: Get Fit

Time Commitment: Six weeks

Age: 8+

Resources: Learn more about Fit Families [here!](#)

11. SOfit

SOfit is an 8-week Unified program that encourages participants to be active. It also teaches them about holistic wellness.

Example: Daniela and her sister with ID, Mia, take weekly wellness classes. They learn about diet, daily exercise and lifestyle choices. They support each other in working toward their personal wellness goals. Daniela wants to exercise for 30 minutes every day. Mia wants to meditate every night.

Type of Involvement: Get Fit

Time Commitment: Eight weeks

Age: 8+

Resources: Learn more about SOfit [here!](#)

12. Family Support Network

Special Olympics Family Support Network connects Special Olympics families. It provides support and information in a time of need. The Network holds Family Forums. These are chances for families to share ideas, experiences and advice. The forums cover many topics related to Special Olympics.

Example: Fahima was 12 when her little brother, Armeen, was diagnosed with ID. She joined the Family Support Network to learn about ID and was surprised to meet other siblings just like her. From the network, she learned how to support Armeen and made a new group of friends. Her friends understand what it is like to be a sibling of a child with ID.

Type of Involvement: Connect

Time Commitment: One-two hours per meeting

Age: 8+

Resources: Learn more about the Family Support Network [here!](#) Reach out to your national Special Olympics Program to find out about opportunities to connect [here!](#)

13. Whole School Advocacy

Use your voice to teach your peers about the abilities of people with ID.
Hold advocacy events at your school!

Example: Ayu's school was planning a social event. She knew it would be the perfect chance to share her message of inclusion with her friends. She and her sister with ID, Diah, worked with her school to set up a tent at the event. They passed out Special Olympics brochures and shared their experiences with others.

Type of Involvement: Advocate

Time Commitment: Three-five weeks of planning plus a one-day event

Age: 8+

Resources: Learn more about how Special Olympics is changing attitudes [here!](#)

14. Inclusive Youth Leadership

Inclusive youth leadership is for young people of all abilities. It enables them to lead in their school and community. These leadership activities help young people find their voices and become change agents. Examples of Inclusive Youth Leadership include serving on Youth Activation Committees, assisting with youth summits, serving as team leaders on Unified Sports teams, and planning Young Athletes events, among more.

Example: Sebastian spent years volunteering and playing bocce with his sister Emilia, who has ID. One day he decided it was time to take his involvement a step further. Last year, he decided to lead his school's Unified Sports bocce team. This year, he served on his local Youth Activation Committee. Next year, he is planning to host a school assembly on inclusion.

Type of Involvement: Advocate

Time Commitment: Can attend weekly/monthly committee meetings or lead weekly or one-time events

Age: 8+

Resources: Learn more about Inclusive Youth Leadership [here!](#)

15. Program Leadership

Program leadership enables older youth and adults to lead Special Olympics initiatives in their communities. Leadership on the Program level can range from running Athlete Leadership Trainings to serving as a Board member. Other examples of Program Leadership include being a staff member, serving as the National Director or Family Coordinator, and running Inclusive Youth Activation Committees, among more.

Example: Jamilah has always enjoyed being a leader in the Special Olympics movement. She has been her sister's Unified partner, a leader for her local Young Athletes program, and a member of the Youth Activation Committee. Now that she is older, she wants to take her leadership to the next level. Since she has experience in youth engagement and leadership, she is applying to be the Unified Sports Manager at her local Special Olympics office.

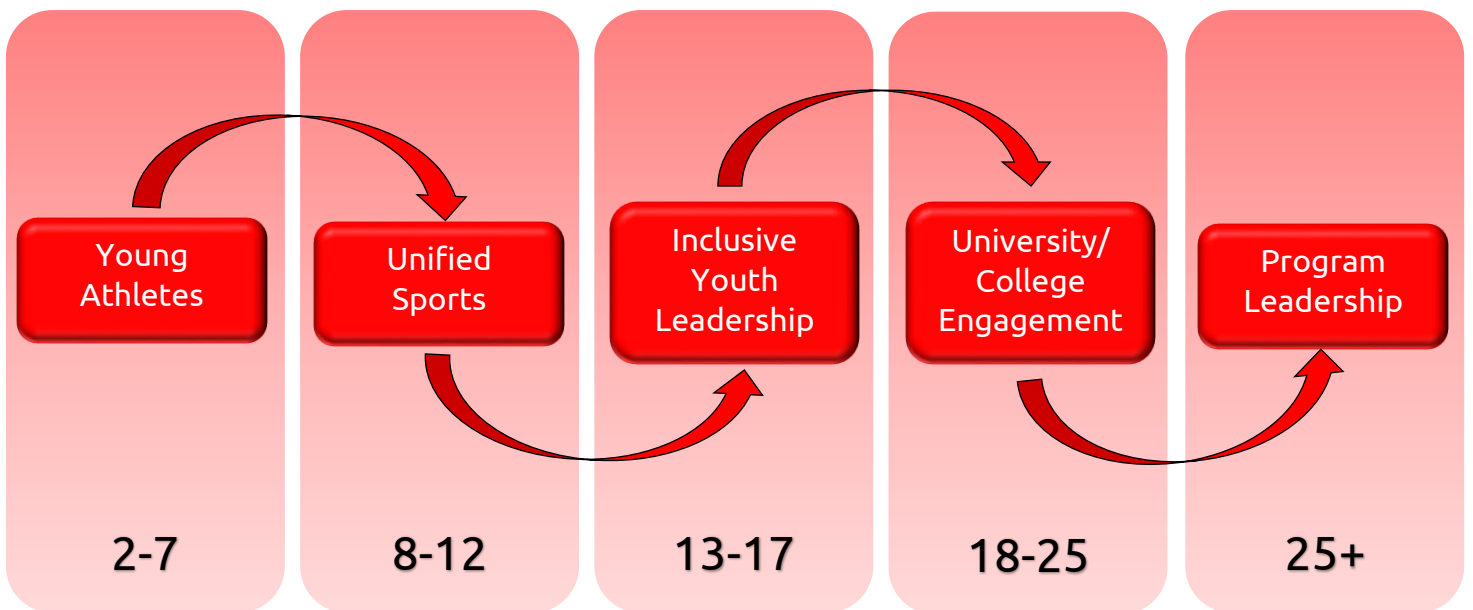
Type of Involvement: Advocate

Time Commitment: Can be a daily commitment or attend weekly/monthly meetings

Age: 18+

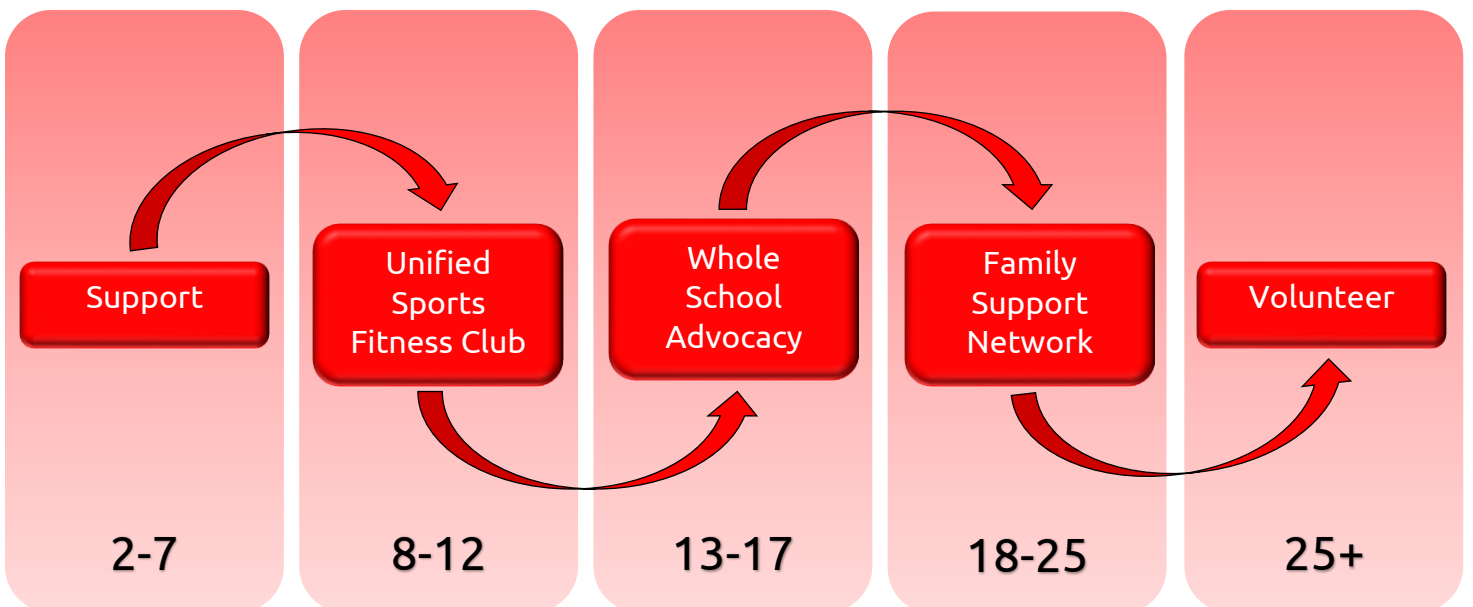
Sibling Pathways

As a sibling, there are many ways you can be involved with Special Olympics over your life. Your role in Special Olympics will change over time depending on your interests, goals and time commitments. The pathways below show a few examples of the many pathways you can take. Use the *Types of Involvement* chart and *Activity Guide* to help create your own ideal pathway! Reach out to your [Special Olympics Program](#) to become involved!



Example Pathway 1

AGE



Example Pathway 2

AGE

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<https://medium.com/specialolympics!>

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