



**Q:** Does an athlete need to attend a SOPA training school to become certified?

**A:** Yes, an athlete wishing to become a certified coach will need to attend a coaches training school and complete a practicum as any other coach. Once their initial certification expires, Athletes as Coaches will be expected to complete “Continuing Education” courses to retain their certification.

Before attending a SOPA training school, an athlete wishing to become a certified coach must email [vsyshelp@specialolympicspa.org](mailto:vsyshelp@specialolympicspa.org) to get started on completing their PA state background checks. All other Class A volunteer trainings (General Orientation, Protective Behaviors and Concussion Training) may be completed by the athlete logging into their profile in SOPA’s [online portal](#) and visiting the “Class A Required Trainings” tab.

SOPA will host seasonal training webinars to review this document and answer any questions that Athletes as Coaches and/or other local volunteer leaders may have that aren’t addressed here. Click below to register for the following in 2023. All are to take place from 6-7 PM:

- [Tuesday, February 21<sup>st</sup> \(Spring\)](#)
- [Tuesday, July 11<sup>th</sup> \(Fall\)](#)
- [Tuesday, November 14<sup>th</sup> \(Winter\)](#)

Please note that while these trainings are 100% optional, it is highly recommended that all athletes considering becoming certified coaches attend these trainings prior to the start of their sports season. Recordings of all trainings will be available to be shared with anyone that wasn’t able to attend.

Athletes that are already certified coaches, local program volunteers and regional SOPA staff are welcome to attend!

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**Q:** What does an athlete need to do if they want to attend a SOPA training school?

**A:** If an athlete is interested in becoming a certified coach, they must be approved by their local program, as is any other coach wishing to seek certification. Currently, athletes do not have the ability to register for training schools through their own online portal profile. They would need to contact [vsyshelp@specialolympicspa.org](mailto:vsyshelp@specialolympicspa.org) after receiving approval from their local program to allow them to get registered.

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**Q:** What is the difference between coaching vs. competing?

**A:** Athletes serving as coaches may compete in one sport and coach in another sport in the same season. However, similarly to if they compete in multiple sports in one season, they will have to decide what sport they wish to compete/coach in at Sectionals/State prior to the start of the season. That way, the local program can plan accordingly.

Athlete as Coach may return as a competitor for the sport they're coaching in the following year if they determine coaching is not for them.

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**Q:** Are Athletes as Coaches permitted to chaperone other athletes?

**A:** No, Athletes as Coaches cannot assume a chaperone role.

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**Q:** Are Athletes as Coaches a part of the 4:1 ratio?

**A:** No, they are part of the 4:2 ratio. Special Olympics requires one coach to serve as a chaperone for every four athletes. Since Athletes as Coaches cannot chaperone other athletes, and so local programs do not have to bring additional volunteers, Athletes as Coaches are included in the 4:2 ratio to ensure the 4:1 ratio is still being met.

SOPA does **NOT** encourage athletes to serve in coaching capacities unless they are working towards certification as most non-certified coaches are there to help meet the 4:1 ratio for training and competition.

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**Q:** How does the SOPA Housing Policy affect Athletes as Coaches?

**A:** Any Athlete as Coach individual will be treated as a coach and must:

- Have all required Class A background checks and trainings.
  - Be housed with other athletes according to SOPA's Housing Policy BUT not within their coaching sport. This will keep any conflicts of authority out of play. If HOD does not believe this is appropriate, they will explore alternative (exception) solution (see below).
  - When housing with another sports athlete is not an option (i.e., only one sport attending) they will be permitted to be housed with another Class A (non-ID) volunteer coach with written consent provided by the adult athlete and witnessed by a local program leader or their family.
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**Q:** How much will it cost local programs to send Athletes as Coaches to state competitions?

**A:** Athletes as Coaches coming to any state events as members of a delegation and providing a coaching role, will not be charged neither as an athlete nor as an "additional delegate". Once a region is established, this will no longer be applicable as SOPA will be covering all delegation expenses for all multi-day competitive and non-competitive events.

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**Q:** Are Athletes as Coaches allowed to serve on an Athlete Leadership Team (ALT) and/or serve as an Athlete Representative, Global Messenger or Health and Fitness Coordinator?

**A:** Yes, under the condition that they compete in at least one sport. If an Athlete as Coach transitions completely into a coach, their local program will be asked to identify another athlete to be trained and serve in the vacant Athlete Leadership role(s) within a year to allow a current athlete the opportunity to serve in a leadership capacity.

In addition to coaching, Athletes as Coaches that fully transition into coaches may also pursue other volunteer opportunities at the local, regional and/or state level if they are interested in the opportunity and the staff/volunteers supporting them agree they are appropriate.

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**Q:** How are Athletes as Coaches impacted by the SOPA Dating Policy?

**A:** Athletes as Coaches may date other athletes, provided that there is no conflict of authority between the Athlete as Coach and their significant other. If the Athlete as Coach and their significant other both take part in the same sport, they must be at separate training sites. Otherwise, the same policy for general coaches also applies to Athletes as Coaches.

Any other scenarios regarding Athletes as Coaches and the SOPA Dating Policy are to be reviewed and addressed by SOPA's VP of Mission Integration.

**If you have any questions that are not on this list, please contact Jordan Schubert at 610-630-9450 ext. 236 or [jschubert@specialolympicspa.org](mailto:jschubert@specialolympicspa.org).**