



**SOPA TEAM SPORT AGE GROUPINGS - TRADITIONAL AND UNIFIED**  
**Effective beginning with 2023 Fall Season**

SOPA is committed to creating a positive athlete experience; the key factors to this are health and safety, social inclusion, meaningful involvement and quality training and competition. Special Olympics Inc. (SOI) outlines rules in regard to Age groupings in [Sport Rules, Article 1](#). In addition, please reference [Why Age Groups are Important](#) for further understanding on why SOPA is enforcing these rules. Please note: Team Sports Age Groups differ slightly for Traditional and Unified sports, see details below.

SOPA sponsored Team Sports include - Fall Season: soccer, flag football, volleyball; Winter Season: floor hockey; Spring Season: softball, basketball.

**Traditional Sport Age Groups:** In an effort to ensure the safety of our younger and older participants SOPA has added an additional group to the young and older age bracket.

Elementary School Age: 8-11 years of age

Middle School Age: 12-15 years of age

High School/College Age: 16 – 21 years of age

Young Adult Age: 22 – 40 years of age

Adult Age: over 40 years of age

**All ages are calculated by age at end of sign-up period each season**

(Fall Sport age group is determined as of June 15<sup>th</sup>, Winter October 15<sup>th</sup>, Spring January 15<sup>th</sup>)

**Unified Sport Age Groups:** In addition to health and safety, social inclusion must also be taken into consideration.

- Requirements for Competitive Models:
  - Elementary/Middle school – If any member of a team is between the ages of 8-13, the variance between the youngest and oldest member of the team must be no more than 3 years (i.e.: if youngest player is 8 years old, oldest can be 10; if youngest is 12 oldest can be 14)
  - High School - If any member of a team is between the ages of 14-17, the variance between the youngest and oldest member of the team must be no more than 5 years. (i.e.: if youngest player is 15 years old, oldest can be 19; if youngest is 17, oldest can be 21)
  - Adult - If all members of a team are 18 and older the variance between the youngest and oldest member of the team should be no more than 20 years.
- Player Development Unified Sports can have a slightly wider age range in order to secure Unified Partners with the skills needed to be effective within the model. The health and safety of all participants MUST always be considered as a top priority.

SOPA recognizes the challenges presented to Regions/Programs and coaches in identifying a sufficient number of athletes within a narrowed age group who wish to play a particular sport. This is the reason SOPA has designed a process to allow an athlete whose skill, strength, speed, size and social maturity fall outside that of other participants in his/her age group. Please refer to [Team Sport Age Group Exemption Explanation and Request Form](#) for detailed information on what is allowable and how to submit these requests.