



## “HOW TO” ENGAGE ATHLETES IN A VIRTUAL SETTING

This is a moment of high anxiety, grief, and trauma for many of our athletes. As a coach, you have the opportunity to support your athletes through this difficult time through your support and love for our athletes. Below are guidelines and suggestions for ways to interact and engage our athletes over your preferred video conferencing tool.

### **Schedule out your meetings**

- Just like your in person training, plan out the virtual training with your athletes. There is a sample Phase A plan in the Sport Specific Guidebooks, please adapt that sample to fit your needs.
- Acknowledge each athlete when they log on, address them by name and make sure they know you are glad to see them.
- Ask questions that acknowledge the situation, while also providing a sense of hope and something to look forward to.

### **Establish team support**

- Set normal expectations for each of the virtual training: no phones or other devices that could distract the athlete or group, when someone is talking be are actively listening, develop responses from the group to positively support their teammates.
- When an athlete says something positive or encouraging to a teammate, pause to highlight that behavior.

### **Celebrate every little thing**

- Just like when you are in person, you want your athletes cheering each other on.
- When meeting remotely, try to include activities that engage the athletes and set them up for success (garbage can basketball, soccer dribbling, pushups, etc.).
- Many of our athletes are dealing with challenges away from Special Olympics. Discuss those challenges at your meetings and be proud of how they are working through those challenges.

### **Focus on the skills**

- Training the athletes through this virtual experience will take some creativity. In your meetings, adjust your camera so the athletes can watch you model a skill or drill. You can also have the athletes lead a skill or drill during training as well.
- Keep up their (and your) fitness. Lead your athletes through some basic exercises that they can do at home. You can set goals to reach from meeting to meeting, like 10 pushups without stopping, so the athletes can work toward that goal outside of your meeting time.



## **Set the example**

- Be a role model for how you want your athletes to interact. Be mindful that social cues can be read differently on a virtual platform.
- Do the activities with them. Don't be afraid to fail in front of your athletes. It is great to show your athletes that it is ok to struggle as long as you are improving.
- Talk to your athletes about how you manage your time. Be honest about how these times can be challenging, it's ok to feel flat, lethargic, and unmotivated from time to time - but focus on the time you have together to be high energy and productive.

## **Be Coachable**

- Talk to other coaches about what they are doing to engage their athletes.
- The best coaches are the best thieves, use other people's ideas to engage the team.
- Learn about other platforms that you can interact with your athletes on. See what they are using, research those platforms, and use them if you believe it is an appropriate format.