

SOPA Housing Policy Overview



Arranging housing for overnight events involves the consideration of a variety of factors. Although it is not possible to avoid all risks, we must always consider ways to avoid or minimize identifiable risks when practical. Therefore, the Special Olympics Pennsylvania (SOPA) Board of Directors has established a housing policy. SOPA's housing policy is not intended to and cannot foresee all possible situations that might arise. In the event a situation arises that is not specifically provided for in the Policy, a resolution of that situation in keeping with the spirit and other provisions of the Policy will be implemented after appropriate review and approval by SOPA's President and CEO.

The Head of Delegation (HOD) for each local program is responsible for implementing the Housing Policy at events and ensuring that volunteers and chaperones are familiar with and carrying out the Policy. This includes pre-event housing assignments as well as managing this policy for late activation of athletes, Unified Partners or volunteers.

This overview document is intended as a guide to help HODs, staff and other interested persons better understand SOPA's housing policy and how to implement it. In the event of a conflict between this guide and the policy, the Board-approved policy shall take precedence.

Key considerations:

- Prior to attending an overnight event:
 - All athletes/Unified Partners must complete and sign a "Travel Information" form (if there are any changes from information provided on the Application for Participation form currently on file). This "Travel Information" form will be provided and collected by each local Program HOD prior to travel.
 - **The local SOPA program will make reasonable attempts to inform each adult athlete, each Unified Partner, and the parents or guardian of each minor athlete and each adult athlete unable to consent about the name and age of his or her roommate(s) during the overnight event and the names of the chaperones attending.**
- **All coaches, volunteers, or other chaperones staying overnight in the same facility with SOPA athletes MUST have an up-to-date Class A Volunteer Form on file** (to include a current Criminal Background Check).
- **Strive to always have at least 2 volunteers present and minimize the likelihood of a volunteer being alone with an athlete.** A chaperone/athlete ratio of at least one properly registered and screened chaperone to every four athletes must be maintained during overnight events. Note: Proper supervision can be maintained without having a chaperone present in the room at all times.
- **Under no circumstances may a SOPA coach, Unified Partner, volunteer or chaperone be assigned to share a room with an athlete of any age or gender unless the chaperone is a same gender parent, guardian or other family-designated adult**, and that chaperone has been properly registered and screened. For purposes of this requirement "properly registered and screened" means the individual has completed Class A volunteer screening.
- **Individuals of opposite gender shall not be assigned to the same room.** Exceptions to this requirement are outlined in the full policy and include:
 - A required one-on-one chaperone who is a parent, guardian or other family-designated adult who has been properly registered and screened (received Class A volunteer screening).
 - Married athletes who are both attending the event as members of a registered delegation. This exception does not apply to the spouse of an athlete who is not participating in the event, but attending solely as a spectator.
 - Married volunteers who are both attending the event as members of a registered delegation. This exception does not apply if one of the volunteers is attending solely as a spectator.
- **All reasonable efforts will be made to house athletes (or Unified Partners) of appropriate age ranges together.** Remember, athletes house with athletes only (Unified Partners may share rooms with other Unified Partners, subject to these guidelines, but may not be assigned to rooms with SOPA athletes).

- In order to participate in an overnight event, **athletes (or Unified Partners) under the age of ten (10) must be accompanied by a properly registered and screened parent, guardian, or other family-designated adult** individual for the duration of the event.
- **Under no circumstances is an athlete (or Unified Partner) 18 years of age or older permitted to room with an athlete (or Unified Partner) 13 years of age or younger.** When athletes (or Unified Partners) over 18 years of age are rooming with athletes (or Unified Partners) under 18 years of age, there shall be no more than a four year age difference between those athletes (or Unified Partners). To the maximum extent possible, when athletes (or Unified Partners) between the ages of 10 and 17 will be housed together, they shall be housed such that there is no more than a four year age difference between the youngest and oldest.
- **All reasonable efforts should be made to house athletes of similar functional abilities together.** Local programs must note special needs (wheelchair access, allergies, etc.) when submitting housing requests, and reasonable attempts will be made to accommodate such needs within the constraints of this policy and the limitations of the facility itself. If any such special need cannot be met the local program shall give notice to the athlete(s) affected or, in the case of a minor or athlete incapable of consenting on his/her own, to his or her parent or guardian.
- If an athlete is required to have one-to-one supervision due to a previously reported incident/action, the athlete and same gender chaperone may not stay in the same room with other members of the delegation.
- Technology is becoming more and more a part of our lives. Please be cognizant of this and **enforce the appropriate use of cameras, imaging and digital devices.** For example, use of such devices in showers, restrooms, or other areas where privacy is expected by participants is prohibited.

Specific considerations in hotels/motels/dorms:

- **In hotel/motel environments, a maximum of two (2) athletes/Unified Partners under age 18 may share a bed (double size or larger). Athletes/Unified Partners age 18 and older will not share beds. Coaches/volunteers will not share beds, regardless of age.**
- In dorms, no one will share beds. In hotel/motel situations described above when sharing a bed is permitted and the number of persons assigned to a room exceeds the number of available beds, volunteers should promote the use of sleeping bags, request cots from the hotel/motel, use pull-out beds or couch cushions to fashion additional makeshift beds (if permitted by fire ordinances), and/or use additional bedding in an “over/under” arrangement (with one athlete under the covers and the other on top of the covers with the additional bedding) to maximize potential sleeping arrangements.
- For state events, Programs are required to assign as many athletes to each room as possible while adhering to the requirements of these new guidelines. All coaches are to be assigned two to a room unless an odd number of coaches creates a need to assign a single person to a room.

Additional considerations for various housing situations:

- Hotels. Whenever possible, reserve connecting rooms so that chaperones/ volunteers have direct access to the athletes’/Unified Partners’ room(s). If connecting rooms are not available, ensure that the chaperone has a key to the athletes’/Unified Partners’ room(s) and that the athletes /Unified Partners know how to reach the chaperone at all times.
- Condo/Dorm (or other facility with multiple private rooms) – Whenever possible, leave the doors to private rooms open (unlocked) so that chaperones can monitor each room.
- Cabins or Barracks (or other facility with a large number of beds in one room) – Whenever possible, chaperones should be assigned to a location in close proximity to the athletes/Unified Partners he/she is supervising. No less than two (2) Class A registered adult chaperones will be assigned to each cabin or barracks regardless of the number of athletes/Unified Partners assigned to the same.