

Reporting Guidelines

Background Information:

- Special Olympics Pennsylvania (SOPA) provides year-round sports training and competition for children and adults with intellectual disabilities or closely related developmental disabilities.
- These athletes, who may or may not have a physical disability, represent programs from more than 172 countries from all the major continents.
- Special Olympics operates on funds raised at the international, national, state and local levels from corporations, individuals, special events and grants.
- Special Olympics is sports, competition and socialization, meaning that the benefits include not only fitness coordination and cardiovascular improvements but also confidence, discipline, self-esteem, and fun.
- From the start, Special Olympics has made training the priority and has established strict guidelines to ensure that every athlete receives quality training before competing. To improve the quality of training, Special Olympics instituted a program of coaches training curriculum and certification in 1981.
- Every athlete who competes in Special Olympics events will compete against athletes of similar ability, since athletes are placed in competition divisions according to previous times or scores, age, and, where appropriate, gender.
- Special Olympics serves the needs of athletes of all ability levels, including those with more severe mental retardation or closely related disabilities in addition to mental retardation; and high-functioning athletes who may be able to move into mainstream sports or participate in Unified Sports.®
- Special Olympics has organizations in place from the local level right up to the international level. Every state (Chapter) and National Special Olympics program has its own staff, its own board of directors, and its own network of area, provincial, and local programs.
- Special Olympics Inc. is officially recognized and endorsed by the International Olympic Committee and is the first organization other than a National Olympic Committee to be recognized.
- Special Olympics is endorsed and supported by the National Governing Bodies of the sports which it offers, and competitions are conducted according to the rules of those bodies, with appropriate adaptations. These rules are in the Official Special Olympics Summer and Winter Rules books.

Photography Release Statement:

No athlete may compete in any Special Olympics event without having a signed parent/guardian release statement on file with Special Olympics. The statement grants permission for Special Olympics and the media to use the athlete's name, likeness, voice and

words in television, radio, films, newspapers, magazines, and other media for the purpose of promoting and publicizing Special Olympics, educating the public about Special Olympics and raising funds for Special Olympics.

Language Guidelines

Words matter. Words can open doors to cultivate the understanding and respect that enable people with disabilities to lead fuller, more independent lives. Words can also create barriers or stereotypes that are not only demeaning to people with disabilities, but also rob them of their individuality. The following language guidelines have been developed by experts for use by anyone writing or speaking about people with intellectual disabilities to ensure that all people are portrayed with individuality and dignity.

Special Olympics prefers to focus on people and their gifts and accomplishments, and to dispel negative attitudes and stereotypes. As language has evolved, Special Olympics has updated its official terminology to use standard terminology that is more acceptable to our athletes. We use “people-first language” - example: refer to people with intellectual disabilities, rather than “intellectually disabled people”. See more tips below.

Appropriate Terminology:

- Refer to participants in Special Olympics as “Special Olympics athletes” rather than “Special Olympians” or “Special Olympic athletes.”
- Refer to individuals, persons or people with intellectual disabilities, rather than “intellectually disabled people” or “the intellectually disabled.”
- A person has intellectual disabilities, rather than is “suffering from,” is “afflicted with” or is “a victim of” mental retardation/intellectual disabilities.
- Distinguish between adults and children with intellectual disabilities. Use adults or children, or older or younger athletes.
- A person “uses” a wheelchair, rather than is “confined” or “restricted to” a wheelchair.
- "Down syndrome" has replaced “Down’s Syndrome” and “mongoloid.”
- Refer to participants in Special Olympics as athletes. In no case should the word athletes appear in quotation marks.
- In formal documents, refer to persons with a disability in the same style as persons without a disability: full name on first reference and last name on subsequent references. Do not refer to an individual with intellectual disabilities as "Bill" rather than the journalistically correct "Bill Smith" or "Smith."
- A person has a physical disability rather than crippled.
- Use the words "Special Olympics" when referring to the worldwide Special Olympics movement.

Terminology to Avoid:

- Do not use the label "kids" when referring to Special Olympics athletes. Adult athletes are an integral part of the movement.

- Do not use the word "the" in front of Special Olympics unless describing a specific Special Olympics event or official.
- Do not use the adjective "unfortunate" when talking about persons with an intellectual disability. Disabling conditions do not have to be life-defining in a negative way.
- Do not sensationalize the accomplishments of persons with disabilities. While these accomplishments should be recognized and applauded, people in the disability rights movement have tried to make the public aware of the negative impact of referring to the achievements of people with physical or intellectual disabilities with excessive hyperbole.
- Use the word "special" with extreme care when talking about persons with intellectual disabilities. The term, if used excessively in references to Special Olympics athletes and activities, can become a cliché.