

special
olympics **young**
athlete
program

activity guide



Special Olympics

New Jersey

DEAR FUTURE SPECIAL OLYMPICS PARENTS,

Everyone participates in sport...whether competitively or recreationally.

We run, play tennis, swim, compete on softball teams, ski and shoot baskets...and so should your child. The Special Olympics Young Athlete program is the starting point.

The program in which your child will take part is fun and flexible and will introduce activities that will serve as the foundation for future participation in sport. The Young Athlete Program brings meaning to running, throwing, hitting and jumping, skills that will be fundamental to your child's future success in softball, track and field, basketball or whatever sport your child chooses to participate.

The Special Olympics Young Athlete Program, created in partnership with the University of Medicine and Dentistry of New Jersey, is a program designed for children with intellectual disabilities of all ability levels and can be used by parents and siblings as well as playgroup and preschool programs. The program allows for creativity, developing sports skills in a fun, play activity environment that can include family and friends.

Special Olympics New Jersey welcomes you and your family to the world of sport through the Special Olympics Young Athlete Program...the starting point to success in your child's life through sport!

Success To All,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Marc S. Edenzon". The signature is fluid and cursive, with a long horizontal stroke at the end.

Marc S. Edenzon
President

about the program

The Young Athlete Program, while serving as an introduction to sports for children with intellectual disabilities, offers families the opportunity to share in the success of their future athlete. The Program provides an experience that will lead to an appreciation of fitness and sport for the whole family. Most importantly, through their preparation for participation in sports, families will see the potential of their child.

The Young Athlete Program has been created in consultation with the University of Medicine and Dentistry of New Jersey, to meet the physical and developmental needs of children, ages 2 ½ to 7, in the areas of physical activity and play, with an emphasis on sports skills. The design of this program provides flexibility for the parent/sibling, paraprofessional, teacher or volunteer to conduct activities. The Young Athlete Program can be used in a preschool/school, playground or one-on-one situation. Inclusive activities are encouraged to help promote social development.

EQUIPMENT

The following items are provided in the Young Athlete Program Kit:

substitutions are listed beside each item

balance beam *rope or floor markers*

light, inflatable ball *any ball*

bean bags *small toys, figures or natural items such as flowers, leaves, etc.*

cones *boxes or cut logs of different sizes*

dowels *yardsticks, paper towel or gift wrap rolls, small tree branches*

floor markers *placemats or material in different sizes and shapes*

hoops *different sized boxes, hula hoop*

paddle *short stick*

scarf *any flowing, light material*

slow motion ball *any ball*

small foam ball *any ball*

Additional equipment that may be used:

junior size basketball, junior size plastic golf club, junior size plastic hockey stick, junior size racket, junior size soccer ball, playground ball, plastic bat, rope, tee, tennis ball

suggested equipment is listed beside each skill throughout the book

activity list

- 1 foundational skills
- 2 walking & running
- 3 balance & jumping
- 4 trapping & catching
- 5 throwing
- 6 striking
- 7 kicking
- 8 advanced skills

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foundational skills

body awareness

SCARF GAMES *scarf*

Encourage the child to follow the movement of the scarf with his/her head and eyes. Try dropping the scarf and encourage the child to “catch” the scarf with his/her hand, head, elbow, foot, etc.

SPORTS SONG

(Sing with the melody of “The Wheels on the Bus”)

Encourage the child to perform the actions of the song.

For example: The goalie in the game will stop the ball, stop the ball, stop the ball. The goalie in the game will stop the ball, all day long. Replace with: The swimmer in the pool goes swim, swim, swim. The player on the court jumps up & down. The skier on the hill goes swish, swish, swish. The starter on the track says “Ready, set, go.” The coach of the team says “Do your best.”

IF YOU’RE HAPPY AND YOU KNOW IT

Sing this well-known action song and encourage the child to perform the activities. Try replacing “clapping” with stomp your feet; rub your belly; shake your body; tap your head; etc.

OBSERVATIONS AND TIPS

Use high energy and enthusiasm to encourage participation in all the activities. Make note of the child’s ability to remember lyrics, activities and/or body parts and reinforce those areas in other activities such as eating and dressing.

awareness & fitness

“I SPY WITH MY LITTLE EYE....” *floor markers, bean bags*

A player calls out the name of an object that is visible and then everyone races to the object by walking, running crawling, etc. Progress the game by calling out a feature of an object (color, shape, etc).

OBSTACLE COURSE *cones, floor markers, hoops, dowels*

Set up cones, hoops, etc. and have the child play follow the leader. Sing or chant the activities you are doing such as: over/under, around/between, on/off, slow/fast.

OBSERVATIONS AND TIPS

Make note of the concepts the child has mastered and those that are still developing (e.g. knows on/off, not up/down; identifies red, not blue). Incorporate concepts during play and other activities such as dressing.

strengthening & fitness

INCHWORM WIGGLE

Bend forward so that hands and feet are on the ground and encourage the child to move like an inchworm by walking the hands forward and then walking the feet up to the hands.

BUNNY HOP

Bend forward so that hands and feet are on the ground and encourage the child to hop like a bunny by moving the hands forward and then hopping the feet up to the hands.

BRIDGES AND TUNNELS

Tunnel: One player forms a tunnel by touching the ground with his/her feet and hands or by getting down onto hands and knees (all-fours). The other player crawls, scoots, walks, or runs through the tunnel.

Bridges: One player forms a bridge by sitting with the feet and hands flat on the ground and pushing his/her bottom up in the air. The other player crawls, scoots, walks, runs under the bridge.

OBSERVATIONS AND TIPS

Make note of approximately how many times the child can perform the activity (inchworm wiggle, bunny hop) or how long the child can hold up the bridge or tunnel. Encourage more repetitions or more time over several weeks to develop muscular strength and endurance. Encourage bridges and tunnels to be rigid and strong while people and objects pass under and through.



walking & running

FOLLOW THE LEADER

Encourage the child to “follow the leader” as you walk in different ways (slow, fast, march, etc.) and move different parts of your body (arms up, arms out, etc.)

FOLLOW THE PATH *cones, floor markers, hoops, dowels*

Encourage the child to follow a path marked with hoops, cones or markers.

SIDE STEPPING *floor markers, bean bags*

Encourage the child to side step right and left onto a variety of markers. Objects can be placed on markers several feet away that the child can retrieve and place on a different marker.

OBSERVATIONS AND TIPS

Encourage the child not to crouch or make extra movements when walking or sidestepping and to keep his/her hips and feet facing forward. Try placing a beanbag on the child’s head to encourage good posture and balance.

OBSTACLE COURSE *cones, floor markers, hoops, dowels*

Set up cones, markers, hoops, etc. and encourage the child to walk, crawl, climb, jump, run through/around a series of obstacles. Begin with a straight course with similar activities at each “station” and progress to including a variety of tasks, zig-zags, reversals, etc.

RUNNING STYLES

Demonstrate different types of running (slow, fast, backward, etc.) Decide on a command signal that the child likes (e.g. whistle, clap, saying “Now” or “Change”) Each time the command signal is called, the child must change the running style.

RUN AND CARRY *bean bags*

Encourage the child to run a distance, pick up an object from the ground, and run back to the starting point. Repeat several times for endurance training.

OBSERVATIONS AND TIPS

If arms are swinging across the body or not in opposition with the legs, work on this by standing or running in place. If foot slapping is noticed or heard, encourage toe-running and heel-running. If the stride length is too small, encourage the child to step or run between or onto markers. Gradually increase the distance between the markers.

balance & jumping

“COACH” SAYS

Ask the child to copy your movement and assume different positions. Encourage the child to perform actions that require balance such as standing on tippy-toes or heels, standing with one foot directly in front of the other, or standing on one foot.

BALANCE BEAM *balance beam, rope*

Follow a straight path, walking along a rope or balance beam. Progress to straddling the rope or beam while walking, then walk on top of the rope or beam.

FOOT TRAP *slow motion ball or junior size soccer ball*

Have the child place his/her foot on top of the ball and maintain balance before kicking the ball. Progress by having the child trap a ball that is rolled slowly toward him/her.

OBSERVATIONS AND TIPS

Encourage the child to mimic your movements during “Coach” Says. Try placing a beanbag on the child’s head to encourage good posture and balance. Encourage landing with two feet at the same time.

STEP AND JUMP *balance beam, floor markers*

Encourage the child to step up onto a balance beam or step and then jump down from it. Progress by having the child jump farther out onto a marker, or jump down from higher steps or surfaces.

JUMPING HIGH *dowel, rope, floor markers*

Encourage the child to jump over a dowel, rope or marker, or encourage the child to jump up to grab an object. If the child cannot clear feet from the floor, encourage jumping up for an object while “jumping down” from a beam or step.

FROG HOPPING/LEAPIN’ LIZARDS *floor markers*

For Frog Hopping, encourage the child to jump forward from one marker to the next. Progress to Leapin’ Lizards by encouraging the child to run forward and leap into the air either over or onto a marker.

OBSERVATIONS AND TIPS

If the child takes off or lands flat-footed, encourage leaning forward and bending the knees. If leaping is difficult for the child, run along the child’s side, holding his/her hand and practice leaping over an object onto a marker.



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ROLLING AND TRAPPING *slow motion ball, small foam ball, tennis ball*

Sit opposite the child with legs outstretched in a straddle position, so that legs are touching and a diamond shape is formed. Roll the ball to each other and catch/stop it with your hands. Progress this activity so that you're kneeling or standing.

GOALIE DRILL *slow motion ball, cones*

Have the child stand in front of two cones that have been set up to form a goal. Encourage the child to stop the ball with his/her hands so that the ball doesn't roll between the cones.

BIG BALL CATCH *beach ball, slow motion ball*

Stand facing the child and slowly bring the ball toward the child, repeat several times, moving more quickly each time. Next, have the child grab the ball from your hands. Then, tell him/her that the ball will be let go right before it reaches his/her hands. Practice this several times before actually tossing the ball.

OBSERVATIONS AND TIPS

Eyes should be focused on the ball. Fingers should be spread apart and facing down when rolling or catching a ball that's below the waist. The ball should be controlled with the hands only, not the chest, legs, etc.

trapping & catching

BEAN BAG CATCH *bean bag*

Stand facing the child and repeat the process of the Big Ball Catch using a small bean bag. Encourage the child to catch the bean bag with one hand.

HIGH BALL CATCH *beach ball, slow motion ball*

Kneel facing the child who is about three feet away. Gently toss a beach ball or fairly large ball to the child and encourage catching the ball with fingers pointing up. Be sure the toss is done from the chest level and with the fingers pointing up. Progress by moving farther away and mixing up high and low tosses.

BOUNCE CATCH *beach ball, slow motion ball*

Face the child and bounce a beach ball or other fairly large ball so the child can catch the ball without moving. Progress to moving farther away and using smaller balls.

OBSERVATIONS AND TIPS

Eyes should be focused on the target. Fingers should be pointing down when catching a ball that approaches below the waist, and pointing up when the ball approaches above the waist.

throwing

ROLLING *slow motion ball, cones*

Sit on the ground with your legs straight out to the side. Roll a ball back & forth. Progress this activity so that you're rolling the ball from half-kneeling or standing. Encourage the child to roll a ball from a standing position so that it passes between two cones to score a goal.

TWO-HAND UNDERHAND *slow motion ball*

Encourage the child to stand with bent knees and hold a beach ball or fairly large ball with fingers pointing down. Ask the child to look at your hands and toss the ball into your hands.

ONE HAND TOSS *small foam ball, bean bag, tennis ball, hoop*

Encourage the child to stand with bent knees holding a small ball or beanbag with one hand. Ask the child to look at your hands and toss the ball into your hands. Progress to tossing an object through a hoop or toward a target.

OBSERVATIONS AND TIPS

Eyes should be focused on the ball. Fingers should be facing down when tossing a ball underhand. The foot opposite the tossing hand should be forward in the open stance.

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TWO-HAND THROWING *slow motion ball, junior size soccer ball*

Using a side-on stance, encourage the child to rock back and forth. As the child rocks to the back foot, ask him/her to raise his/her arms up over the head. When rocking forward, encourage him/her to bring the arms forward to throw the ball.

OVERHAND THROWING *small foam ball, tennis ball*

Using the same technique as two-hand throwing, encourage the child to bring his/her arm back and forward overhead to throw a small ball toward your hands.

THROWING FOR DISTANCE AND ACCURACY

small foam ball, tennis ball, hoops, cones

Encourage the child to throw a small ball as high or far as possible. Set up markers at difference distances so the child can focus on the goal or target.

OBSERVATIONS AND TIPS

The opposite leg steps toward the target and the hips and shoulders rotate forward. As the arm moves forward, it bends at the elbow and then straightens at ball release. The wrist snaps downward when the ball is released.

HANDBALL *beach ball, cone, tee*

Place a beach ball on a cone or tee. Have the child hit the beach ball with a fist or open hand.

BALL TAPPING *beach ball, slow motion ball*

Tap a beach ball toward the child and have him/her tap the ball back toward you with an open hand. Progress to having the child in a side-on or sideways, ready position. Toss beach ball to the child and have him/her hit the ball with an open hand.

BEGINNING TENNIS/SOFTBALL

beach ball, slow motion ball, cone, paddle, junior size racket

Place a large ball on a cone or tee. Encourage the child to be positioned side-on to the ball. Have the child hold a paddle, racket, etc. and encourage him/her to strike the ball with the paddle or racket.

OBSERVATIONS AND TIPS

Encourage the child to stand side-on to the ball with good balance. Markers can be used for the child to stand on. Eyes should be focused on the ball. Encourage follow-through by having the child twist his/her bellybutton forward and/or clapping the hands out in front. If the child is not transferring weight, have him/her rock front and back while standing on markers.



striking

SIDE STRIKING *beach ball, slow motion ball, paddle, junior size racket, plastic bat*

Using a side-on stance, encourage the child to strike a tossed beach ball or other ball with a racket, paddle, stick, bat, etc.

BEGINNING HOCKEY *beach ball, slow motion ball, small foam ball, tennis ball, dowel, junior size plastic hockey stick, junior size plastic golf club*

Place a large ball on the ground. Encourage the child to be positioned side-on to the ball. Have the child hold onto a dowel, hockey stick, golf club, etc. with two hands and encourage him/her to strike the ball with the club or stick.

INTERMEDIATE TENNIS/SOFTBALL

beach ball, slow motion ball, small foam ball, tennis ball, junior size racket, plastic bat

Using a side-on stance, encourage the child to strike a bounced beach ball or other ball with a racket, paddle, stick, etc.

OBSERVATIONS AND TIPS

Encourage the child to stand side-on to the ball with good balance. Markers can be used for the child to stand on. Eyes should be focused on the ball. Encourage follow-through by having the child twist his/her bellybutton forward and/or clapping the hands out in front. If the child is not transferring weight, have him/her rock front and back while standing on markers.



Kicking

KICKING *beach ball, slow motion ball, junior size soccer ball, playground ball*

Place a ball on the ground and have the child stand behind it. Have the child kick the ball toward you with his/her preferred foot.

PENALTY KICK PREP

beach ball, slow motion ball, junior size soccer ball, playground ball

Place a ball on the ground and have the child run up to the ball to kick it toward you.

KICKING FOR DISTANCE

beach ball, slow motion ball, junior size soccer ball, playground ball, cones, floor markers

Encourage the child to run up to a ball and kick it for distance by having him/her kick a ball past various markers.

OBSERVATIONS AND TIPS

Eyes should be focused on the ball. Non-kicking foot is just behind and to the side of the ball. The kicking leg should bend at the knee for a back swing and should follow through. The opposite arm swings forward as the ball is kicked.

KICKING FOR ACCURACY

beach ball, slow motion ball, junior size soccer ball, playground ball, cones, floor markers

Place a ball on the ground. Encourage the child to run up to the ball to kick it toward a goal or between two cones.

KICKBALL

beach ball, slow motion ball, junior size soccer ball, playground ball, cones, floor markers

Roll or kick a ball toward the child and encourage him/her to kick the moving ball to you or toward a goal or target.

GIVE AND GO

beach ball, slow motion ball, junior size soccer ball, playground ball, cones, floor markers

Kick a ball toward the child and encourage him/her to kick the moving ball toward a goal or between two cones.

OBSERVATIONS AND TIPS

Eyes should be focused on the target. Weight shifting to the non-kicking leg is necessary for control and balance. When kicking, the body leans back just before contact with the ball. The opposite arm swings forward with the kick. The kicking leg should follow through.

advanced skills

BOUNCE & CATCH *beach ball, slow motion ball, junior size basketball, playground ball, small foam ball, tennis ball*

Stand behind the child and assist him/her in bouncing and catching a ball. Then, stand in front of the child and bounce the ball so the child can catch it without moving. Encourage the child to bounce pass the ball back to you. Progress to greater distances between players and smaller balls.

DRIBBLE *beach ball, slow motion ball, junior size basketball, playground ball*

Stand behind the child and assist him/her in bouncing a beach ball with two hands, but without catching it. Provide less assistance as child's skill improves. Progress to a different ball, then progress to bouncing (dribbling) with one hand.

OBSERVATION AND TIPS

These skills require the integration of strength, balance, vision, and coordination. Observe which components of the skill are well developed and which ones need further development. Preliminary and basic skills for these activities can be developed through the other activities described in this program.

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PUNTING *beach ball, slow motion ball, junior size basketball, playground ball*

Encourage the child to practice one-legged standing balance with the leg forward and the arms out to the sides. Then, have the child swing the kicking leg back and forward. Next, have the child hold a beach ball in both hands, drop it and kick it.

GALLOPING *floor markers*

Place a series of markers on the ground in a straight line. Have the child step onto the marker with his/her preferred leg. Then, ask the child to bring up the trailing foot to the marker and hop onto it. Continue leading with the preferred foot.

SKIPPING *floor markers*

Place a series of markers on the ground in a straight line. Have the child step onto the marker and then perform a low hop on that foot. As the hopping foot lands, place the other foot on the next marker.

OBSERVATIONS AND TIPS

These skills require the integration of strength, balance, vision, and coordination. Observe which components of the skill are well developed and which ones need further development. Preliminary and basic skills for these activities can be developed through the other activities described in this program.

becoming a special olympics athlete

Congratulations.

Your child is approaching completion of the Young Athlete Program and has developed many of the fundamental skills designed for transition into learning to take part in a variety of sports. Regardless of the level of achievement, there is a sport for your child.

Athletes, their families, teachers and volunteers should take advantage of sport specific training materials offered by Special Olympics to develop a training plan for participation in selected sports. By simply introducing a start cadence and running between lines, you prepare your athlete for track competition. By instructing a child to throw from behind a line, you are beginning to train for the softball throw or shotput. Dribbling a ball around cones, bouncing a tennis ball on a racquet or kicking a soccer ball towards a goal, all lead to the development of skills that prepare a child for a competitive experience.

Participation in Special Olympics requires a commitment to training and learning sports that will lead to a child's success on the playing field, and as a result, greater acceptance in activities in the community. Just as any child is provided the opportunity to play baseball, soccer or basketball, so too can your child experience the benefit of playing and excelling in sports in Special Olympics and beyond.

We invite you to join us in a lifetime of sports.

Welcome to Special Olympics.

