Activity Guide for Families & Caregivers

Special Olympics
Young Athletes™

New Jersey
Welcome to Young Athletes™ and get ready to be amazed! Young Athletes™ was designed to give you ideas and tips (and equipment, too!) for how to play with your child in ways that will encourage the development of motor skills so that he or she will be ready to take on the world of sports and compete when the time is right.

Following the suggested activities in this guide (and making up a few of your own!), you will see your child begin to master jumping, kicking, catching and throwing, among other skills, on his or her way to building self-confidence and pride.

And don’t forget to pull out the guide and equipment for the neighbors and play dates! All children love the activities and games described in the guide and there is no better way to have fun and get fit than to play with others. Plus, who knows... you just might find yourself head coach of the first ever Young Athletes soccer, basketball or floor hockey team!

Play! Have fun! Be amazed!

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What does every child want?
The chance to kick a ball, to throw it well, and to share their successes with family members.

What does every child with intellectual disabilities want?
The exact same thing.

While there are many social and physical benefits of *Young Athletes™*, one of the primary goals is to provide you with some tools and resources that allow you to PLAY with your child in a non-clinical setting.

It is our hope that you enjoy this time playing together and make a connection through physical activities, fitness and sports.
Special Olympics Young Athletes™ was created in consultation with Rutgers, The State University of New Jersey (formally UMDNJ), to meet the physical and developmental needs of children with intellectual disabilities ages 2 through 7. The activities and equipment provided in Young Athletes™ are designed to develop prerequisite skills to prepare athletes for future participation in sports training and competition.

Once athletes turn 8 years old, they are eligible to enter into official Special Olympics training and competition programs.

Fostering Relationships at Home . . .
Parents, siblings, friends and young athletes can play together at home with the Young Athletes™ kit using the activity guide to provide ideas and suggestions for games and activities.

Making Connections in the Community . . .
Community programs offer an opportunity for parents, siblings, friends and young athletes to come together in a guided play experience led by a Young Athletes™ coach and volunteers.

Connecting Friends at School . . .
Early childhood educators, therapists and P.E. teachers can utilize the Young Athletes™ program in the school setting. Young Athletes progress and learn sports skills at their developmental level.
Activities
• Foundational Skills (body awareness, strength)
• Walking & Running
• Balancing & Jumping
• Trapping & Catching
• Throwing
• Striking
• Kicking
• Advanced Skills (sports preparation)

Your FREE Young Athletes™ home kit includes:
• Activity Guide
• Soft Balance Beam
• Cones
• Floor Markers
• Bean Bags
• Scarf
• Balls
• Poles
• Hoops
Body Awareness

Body awareness is a foundational skill for motor and social skill development. For body awareness, activities such as scarf games and children’s songs are recommended. The scarf’s movement allows for children to make many adjustments in movements and postures, and still achieve success.
Activities & Games

Scarf Games

Individual:
Drop the scarf and encourage your child to catch it with his/her hands, head or feet. Verbally cue your child to look at the scarf as it falls.

Partner Play:
Have your child play with a friend or sibling by tossing the scarf to one another. Each child can take turns calling out the body part with which to catch the scarf.

Pretend Play:
Pretend the scarf is a bird and make it fly high in the sky or a fish that is swimming in the water.

Children’s Songs
Children’s songs that associate words with actions encourage language, body awareness and coordinated movement. Examples of activity-based songs that help children associate words with actions are “Wheels on the Bus,” “If You’re Happy and You Know It,” “Hokey Pokey,” and “Head, Shoulders, Knees and Toes.”

Variation:
Piggyback Songs are a great way to create your own lyrics to tunes of children’s songs that are familiar to you and your child. There are many websites that offer piggyback song lyrics. Try incorporating “sports terminology” within the lyrics to introduce sports terms to your child. Don’t be afraid to be silly and have fun!

Tips & Adaptations:
• Use high energy and enthusiasm to encourage participation in all the activities.
• Make note of your 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
Awareness of one's self and one's relationship to the environment along with basic health and physical fitness is important for functional mobility and motor development. These activities will help to promote your child’s ability to recognize his/her body in the environment, and interact with people and objects within it.
Activities & Games

“I Spy With My Little Eye”
Encourage your child to scan his/her environment to identify and differentiate between an object and their features. Ask your child to spy for certain colors, shapes or other features. Ask him/her to crawl, walk backwards, run, etc. to the spied object.

Obstacle Course
Set up a basic obstacle course with the Young Athletes™ equipment and items in your home. (Pillows are great to crawl or jump over and benches and chairs work well for crawling under.) Introduce and reinforce concepts such as on/off, over/under, around/through, and fast/slow as the child completes the course. Repeating the activity to music will also help to promote rhythm and aerobic fitness.

Toe to Toe
Have your child sit on the floor facing you. Call out two body parts, such as “toe to toe,” “back to back,” “elbow to elbow,” etc. Encourage your child to match his/her body part with yours so that your toes, backs, elbows, etc. are touching. Progress to unmatched parts, such as “hand to head.”

Partner Play:
Invite a friend or sibling to play. Children can take turns being the leader in "I Spy," “Toe to Toe” or the obstacle course. This is a great way to reinforce self-directed play and improve social and language skills.

Tips & Adaptations:
• Observe your child’s endurance for physical activity. Children with low muscle tone may tire easily. Go at your child’s pace. His/her endurance will improve with time and practice.
• Incorporate concepts during play and other activities such as dressing and eating.
• Make note of the concepts your child has mastered and those that are still developing (knowing on/off but not up/down, or identifying red but not blue.)
Strength is an important foundation for mobility and skill development. The activities presented in this section will promote strength and stability through the torso/trunk, arms and legs, and will build a good foundation for balance activities.
Activities & Games

Tunnel Crawl
Have your child crawl through a tunnel or under a series of obstacles such as dowels supported by cones.

Variation:
Crawl next to your child for encouragement. Make a game of who can get to the end first!

Animal Exercises
Children love to pretend that they are animals and move their bodies in different ways. You can use your imagination or some of these exercises to encourage movement and expression. Use picture books or images from the computer to help your child visualize the animal and the movement.

- **Inchworm Wiggle**: Have your child bend forward so that his/her hands and feet are on the ground. Think of the position as an upside-down V. Encourage him/her to move like an inchworm by walking the hands forward and then walking the feet up to the hands.
- **Bunny Hop**: Have your child bend forward so his/her hands and feet are on the ground. Encourage him/her to hop like a bunny by moving the hands forward and then hopping the feet up to the hands.
- **Bear Crawl**: Have your child bend down with his/her hands and feet on the ground. Encourage him/her to crawl/walk like a bear. Make sure the knees do not touch the floor. Growl for fun!
- **Crab Walk**: Have your child sit on the floor with feet flat on the floor, knees bent and hands flat on the floor, slightly behind the body. Ask him/her to lift the hips off the floor and walk his/her hands and feet backwards. Once that is mastered, ask him/her to crawl sideways or forward in the same position.

Yoga
Yoga positions offer many benefits such as flexibility, balance, strength, coordination, spatial awareness, sensory integration and self-control. There are many websites and DVDs that offer yoga instruction for children. This is a wonderful activity to learn and do together as a family.

Tips & Adaptations:
- Make note of approximately how many times your child can perform each activity.
- Encourage more repetitions or longer duration over several weeks to develop muscular strength and endurance.
- Have fun counting or reciting the alphabet while you play.
- Add music to create a fun environment.
As with all gross motor skills, each child will develop at his/her own pace. Many children often begin walking between 9 and 15 months of age. Beginning walkers walk with their hands up at shoulder height (this is called high-guard) and their feet wide apart and turned out at the toes. This offers them a wide base of support. As children feel more balanced and secure, they will drop their arms, narrow their base of support by bringing their feet closer together, and begin to rotate their trunk as they move.

Most children don’t begin to run until 6 to 7 months after they begin to walk. As with beginning walkers, beginning runners will use a high guard with their arms, and a wide base until they feel more balanced and secure.

Tips & Adaptations:
- Encourage your child not to crouch or make extra movements when walking or side stepping and keep the hips facing forward.
- Try placing a beanbag on your child’s head to encourage good posture and balance.
- If arms are at high guard or swinging across the body, offer your child a mid-size ball or object to carry while walking or running.
- Listen and watch for foot slapping while running and encourage your child to walk on their toes or heels to reverse flat foot steps.
- If you notice your child is using too long or too short strides, use floor markers to trace a pattern on the floor that he/she can follow that allows for proper stride length.
- Don’t place too much emphasis on the time frame in which your child learns to walk or run. Enjoy spending time with him or her.
Activities & Games

Follow the Leader
Encourage your 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.)

Variation:
To prepare your child to start and stop moving on a cue, as needed in sports competition, try blowing a whistle or clapping when you start or stop.

Partner Play:
Invite a friend or sibling to play and have each child take a turn being the “leader.”

Follow the Path
Set out a path marked by hoops, floor markers or cones for your child to follow. Change the distance between the objects to encourage proper stride length or add variety.

Side Stepping
Set out a path marked by hoops, floor markers or cones and have your child side step to each object.

Variation:
Place an object at the end of the path for your child to pick up and then bring back to the starting point.

Running Styles
Model different types of running (slow, fast, backwards, zig-zag, etc.) Decide on a command signal such as a whistle, clap or hand signal. Each time you use the command signal, your child should change his/her running style.

Run & Carry
Place two floor markers or cones a few feet from one another. Place two to five small objects on one marker. Have your child pick up the objects one at a time and run/walk to place it on the opposite marker. Repeat until all objects are on the opposite marker.

Variation:
Play music to add to the excitement of the activity or have a race to improve aerobic fitness.
Adequate balance is a requirement of most sports and gross motor activities. Poor balance can affect safety and mobility skills at home and at school. Good balance can affect a child’s ability to:

- Get on and off the school bus
- Climb stairs
- Get in and out of a car
- Feel comfortable on playground equipment
- Walk on grass or sand
- Walk up a curb
- Kick or throw a ball

There are many factors that can have an effect on balance including visual impairments, vestibular difficulties and low muscle tone.

A child will typically have the best balance when his/her eyes are open, feet are wide apart, he/she is close to the ground, and the surface he/she is standing on is firm, even and stable. Standing with the feet together or eyes closed will likely cause a child to sway.

Tips & Adaptations:

- To make an activity or game involving balance easier or more difficult, consider changing the support surface (sand, grass, mat, etc.) or base of support (balance beam, floor markers, etc.)
- New jumpers will push off and/or land with one foot leading the other, rather than both feet pushing off and landing at the same time. It will take some time, but encourage your child to jump off and land with both feet at the same time.
- If your child pushes off or lands flat-footed, encourage him/her to lean forward and bend at the knees.
- If leaping is a challenge for your child, run alongside and hold his/her hand as you practice leaping over an object or marker.
- Be patient and work on balance and jumping activities often.

Partner Play:

Once your child has practiced some of the activities and games in this guide, take some equipment to the park or playground and invite a friend. Your goal is to apply the skills he/she is learning and show how you can use the playground equipment to support what you are working on at home.
Activities & Games

“Coach Says” (Simon Says)
Ask your child to copy your movement and assume different positions. Some positions that may challenge his/her balance could be:
- Standing on tippy-toes or heels
- Standing with one foot directly in front of the other
- Standing on one foot
- Standing with feet together and arms out

Step & Jump
Have your child step up onto a balance beam and then step or jump down from it. As your child's ability improves, progress by having your child jump farther out onto a marker, or down from higher steps or surfaces.

Jump & Grab
Hold a scarf and encourage your child to jump up and grab the scarf as he/she:
- Jumps down off a step or balance beam
- Jumps down from a step or balance beam onto a floor marker
- Jumps to a floor marker a few inches away
- Jumps over a rope or floor marker

Trees in the Forest/Flowers in the Garden
Have your child pretend to be a tree or a flower by having them stand with their feet on two floor markers. Pretend to be the wind and move around your child fanning them with a scarf as they bend and sway in the breeze. Increase the difficulty by moving the floor markers closer together or having them put both their feet on one floor marker.

Partner Play:
Invite a friend or sibling to play so there are many trees or flowers blowing in the breeze. Let each child take turns being the wind.

Tic-Tock the Crock
Set out floor markers and pretend they are rocks in a river. Ask your child to pretend there is a crocodile in the river and that they need to get across by stepping on the “rocks” so that they don’t fall in. Increase the difficulty by placing the markers further apart.

Partner Play:
If a friend or sibling is playing, it can be a fun challenge to help each other get across the river. Holding hands makes it an even bigger challenge!
Trapping is when a child stops or catches a ball with his/her body, rather than just with their hands. Trapping and catching skills are used in many sports and require:

- Visual tracking and eye-hand coordination (Chapter 1 - Foundational Skills)
- Stability and strength (Chapter 1 - Foundational Skills, Chapter 3 - Balance & Jumping)

Tips & Adaptations:
- It is easier to trap and catch a mid-size or large ball than a small ball. A good sized ball will be approximately the width between the child’s hands when his/her elbows are held at the sides.
- It is easier to trap or catch a rolled ball than a tossed ball.
- When beginning to practice trapping and catching with your child, don’t throw the ball high up into the air.
- Catching or trapping slower moving objects is easier when first starting out. Bubbles, beach balls and the flyweight ball included in your Young Athletes™ kit have longer flight times than playground balls, and will help your child achieve early success in catching.
- Ask your child to bring his/her arms out in front with the palms up. When catching above the waist, fingers point up.
- Always encourage “eyes on the ball.”
- A new catcher is often only as successful as the person who is tossing the ball.
- As a child improves, he/she should progress to stepping toward the ball when it is in flight in order to catch it.
- As a child improves, he/she should progress to catching with one hand based upon the size of the ball.
- Have your child try catching in different positions such as kneeling or sitting.
- Velcro gloves and paddles are great to use for transitioning from two to one-handed catches.
Activities & Games

Rolling & Trapping
Sit in front of your child and roll a ball back and forth. As your child rolls the ball, ask him/her to count, name an animal or a color.

Variation:
Decrease the size of the ball or increase the speed the ball is thrown. Have your child side-sit or kneel.

Bubble Catching
Have your child stand on a floor marker. Blow bubbles in the direction of your child. Ask him/her to catch the bubbles with one or two hands while remaining on the marker. Encourage him/her to clap or squeeze a bubble. Bubbles have slow flight characteristics that can help your child achieve early success in catching rather than trapping.

Big Ball Catch
Stand facing your child and slowly pass the ball to him/her. Repeat several times, moving more quickly each time. Next have your 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.

Bean Bag Catch
Stand facing your child and repeat the process of the “Big Ball Catch” using a small beanbag. Encourage your child to catch the bean bag with one hand.

High Ball Catch
Kneel about three feet away from your child. Gently toss a beach ball or slow moving ball from chest level (higher than head height to your child) and encourage him/her to catch the ball with fingers pointing up. Be sure to throw the ball with a high arc and with fingers pointing up.

Variation:
Move farther away as you toss the ball.
Vary between high tosses and low tosses to your child.

Bounce Catch
Face your child and bounce a beach ball or medium to large sized ball so that he/she can catch it without moving. Progress to moving farther away and using a smaller ball.
Throwing requires strength, flexibility, balance and coordination. Early development of grip and release begins with two-handed underhand tossing of a light weight, mid-size ball. A good rule of thumb is if the ball can easily be lifted above the head with two hands, then the ball is a good size for the child. Progression then continues to two-hand overhand throwing and then one-hand throwing.

**Tips & Adaptations:**
- Throwing and catching are closely linked skills, so you will often find yourself working on both at the same time.
- Beginner throwers will stand with their feet even, regardless of whether they are tossing underhand or throwing overhand.
- To advance the skill of throwing, encourage your child to have his/her feet hip-width apart with one foot slightly forward so that weight shifting and trunk rotation can occur.
- Floor markers can be used to encourage correct feet position.
- As throwing skills progress, and as your child’s arm moves forward, it will bend at the elbow and then straighten when the ball is released. The wrist will also slap down as the ball releases.
- When your child is ready to play throwing games with one hand, switch to a smaller ball so that it can be easily gripped and released.
- Have your child stand slightly sideways to the target at which they are throwing, with the foot opposite the throwing hand forward. This stance will allow him/her to shift weight forward as he/she releases the ball.
Activities & Games

Rolling
Sit on the ground with your legs outstretched in a straddle position. Roll a ball back and forth with your child. Progress this activity so that you’re rolling the ball from kneeling or standing.

Variation:
Encourage your child to roll a ball from a standing position so that it passes between two cones to score a goal.

Two-Hand Underhand
Encourage your child to stand with bent knees and hold a beach ball or flyweight ball with the fingers pointing down. Ask the child to look at your hands and toss the ball into your hands.

One-Hand Overhand Toss
Encourage your 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 or beanbag into your hands.

Variation:
Toss the ball or beanbag through a hoop or at a target.

Two-Hand Overhand Throwing
Have your child stand with feet hip-width apart and one foot in front of the other. While facing the direction of the throw or a target, encourage your child to rock forward and back. As he/she 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.

One-Hand Overhand Throwing
Using the same techniques as two-hand throwing, encourage your child to bring his/her arm back and forward to throw a small ball towards your hands or a target.

Variation:
Encourage throwing the ball as far as possible. Set up targets at various distances so your child can focus on accuracy and distance.

Bowling
Create your own bowling lane with two balance beams and stacking cups in a pyramid formation (or other configuration) at the end of the “lane.” Have your child roll a ball towards the cups. Keep score for a math and number recognition connection!

Partner Play:
Invite friends and siblings to a bowling “party.” Set up one or two lanes, keep score and make a poster with the name of your very own home bowling alley!
Striking is a term used to describe an action of either hitting a ball or object with one’s hand, stick, bat, paddle, racket, etc. Striking or tapping a stationary ball with a fist or open hand encourages development of the skills necessary for sports such as tennis, golf, softball, volleyball and hockey. Prerequisite skills for striking include eye-hand coordination (Chapter 1 - Foundational Skills), spatial awareness (Chapter 1 - Foundational Skills), strength and flexibility (Chapter 1 - Foundational Skills), and good balance (Chapter 2 - Balance & Jumping).

- Encourage your child to keep his/her eyes on the ball (visual tracking.)
- Encourage your child to stand side-on to the ball with good balance. Using floor markers can help your child stand in the proper position. A side-on stance, where he/she faces the ball, is important for good balance and rotation.
- Have your child twist his/her bellybutton forward when striking the ball to encourage follow through.
- Shifting your weight is important to correct striking form. If your child is not shifting his/her weight, have him/her rock forward and back while standing on floor markers.
- Large balls are easier to strike than small ones, and stationary objects are easier to strike than moving ones.
- Throw the ball slowly and with a small arc when just starting out having your child strike a moving object.
- Increase the skill level by increasing the distance between the ball and your child’s body. This allows your child to progress from using a hand to strike, to striking with a paddle and then to striking with a bat/golf/hockey stick.
Activities & Games

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

Ball Tapping
Tap a beach ball or flyweight ball toward your child and have him/her tap the ball back toward you with an open hand. Progress to having your child in a sideways ready position. Toss the ball to your child and have him/her hit the ball back with an open hand.

Beginning Tennis/Softball
Place a large ball on a cone or tee. Encourage your child to stand sideways to the ball. Have your child hold a paddle or racket and encourage him/her to strike the ball with the paddle or racket.

Variation:
Toss a beach ball or flyweight ball with a slow and low arc to your child rather than using the tee or cone.

Partner Play:
Invite a friend or sibling to play and create “bases” for the children to run around after they hit the ball.

Beginning Hockey/Golf
Place a large ball on the ground. Encourage your child to position him/herself sideways to the ball. Have your child hold onto a hockey stick, long stick or golf club with two hands and strike the ball with the stick.

Variation:
Set up two cones to be the goal and have your child shoot the ball toward the goal. Use floor markers to assist with positioning of feet.

Partner Play:
 Invite a friend or sibling to play. Have them take turns striking the ball and playing “goalie.”

Intermediate Tennis/Softball
Encourage your child to strike a bounced beach ball or flyweight ball with a racket, paddle or bat, using a sideways stance. Use floor markers to help position the feet and remind your child to twist the torso for follow thorough.
Similar to striking, kicking a stationary, mid-size or large ball is easier than kicking a small or moving ball. Unlike striking, however, kicking requires the ability to balance, at least for a moment, on one foot. Most beginners will be successful in kicking if they run up to a stationary ball to kick it, because they will essentially run through the ball with one foot. Once your child masters running and kicking, have him/her stand behind a stationary ball and practice kicking it. This challenges your child to stand on one foot and disassociate one leg from another.

Tips & Adaptations:
- Encourage your child to keep his/her eyes on the ball and then look at the target.
- Beginner kickers will lean forward when they are kicking a ball. More advanced kickers will lean back just before contacting the ball.
- Weight shifting to the non-kicking leg is necessary for control and balance.
- The kicking leg should bend at the knee for a back swing then straighten at contact.
- The opposite arm swings forward with the kick to allow for stabilization and power.
- Advanced kickers will have more bend in their knee and will swing the opposite arm forward as the ball is kicked.
Activities & Games

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

**Partner Play:**
Invite a friend or sibling to play. One child can set up the markers for distance kicking or play “goalie” for accuracy. Take turns by switching roles.

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

**Variation:**
Encourage your child to kick for distance by having him/her kick past various markers. Encourage your child to kick the ball between two cones to score a goal.

Passing Practice
Kick a ball toward your child and encourage him/her to kick the ball back to you.

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

**Partner Play:**
Invite a friend or sibling to play a game of kickball. Set out “bases” and a “home plate.” Children can either kick a stationary ball from home plate or one rolled to them. After kicking the ball, encourage each child to run around the bases.
Advanced skills require a young athlete to incorporate the skills they have acquired and put them into context. This requires a high level of sensori-motor integration, strength, power, and coordination.

For example, dribbling a ball builds on striking, bouncing and catching. Galloping and skipping rely on skills developed in walking, running, jumping and leaping. Punting a ball requires eye-hand and hand-foot coordination, balance, strength, and flexibility. All of these sport sub-skills can be observed and improved with activities, games and suggestions from Young Athletes™. Advanced skills also include activities that promote teamwork and playing with rules.

When trying some of the games and activities in this section, have FUN! Enjoy the games and feel free to revisit the sub-skills from previous chapters to enhance your child’s performance or enjoyment of the activity.

Tips & Adaptations:

- Observe your child and try to determine which skills need further development. Preliminary and basic skills for these activities can be developed through the other activities described in this program.
- Early attempts to gallop, side-slide and skip are usually awkward and stiff, and children often resort to early walking and running patterns (high guard, no arm swing, short step length.)
- Galloping usually emerges first, after a running pattern is firmly established. Children will lead with their dominant leg, and then learn to lead with their non-dominant leg.
- Skipping does not typically emerge until 4 to 7 years of age, with only 50% of children skipping by age 5.
Activities & Games

Bounce and Catch
Bouncing requires visual tracking, eye-hand coordination, stability and strength, all of which are required for many sports and games. Experiment with different size balls to see which your child likes the best. Have your child stand with a ball in their hands and their feet hip-width distance apart. Encourage your child to drop the ball, let it bounce back and then catch it with two hands. Progress to “pushing” the ball down and catching it with two hands.

Ball Bounce
Stand behind your child and assist him/her in bouncing a ball with two hands, but without catching it. Provide less assistance as your child’s skill improves. Change the ball size or begin to bounce with one hand (dribble.)

Punting
Punting requires a lot of coordination, balance and spatial awareness. Encourage your child to practice one-legged standing balance with the other leg forward and the arms out to the sides. Then, have your child swing the kicking leg back and forward. Next, have your child hold a beach ball, soccer ball or playground ball in both hands, drop it and kick it.

Galloping
In order to gallop, one foot is placed in front of the other – this is the lead foot. The lead foot takes a large step forward while the back foot stays in place. The back foot then takes a step forward, but always stays behind the lead foot. Place a series of markers on the ground in a straight line. Have your child step on the marker with his/her preferred foot. Ask your child to then bring up the back foot to the marker and hop onto it. Continue leading with the preferred foot.

Skipping
Skipping is a locomotor skill that requires a child to repeatedly alternate their motion from the left side to the right side. It is essentially a combination of a hop and a gallop, all while maintaining balance, coordination and a sense of rhythm. Place a series of markers on the ground in a straight line. Have your child step onto the marker and then perform a low hop on that same foot. As the hopping foot lands, place the other foot forward on the next marker.

**Partner Play:**

*Invite a friend or sibling to play “Follow the Leader” allowing each child to take a turn leading in skipping or galloping. Each child can also take a turn laying out the floor markers in a straight or silly path. Sing or make up rhymes or stories as you skip and gallop.*

Hurdles
Set up hurdles using the cones or plastic bricks and poles that came in your Young Athletes™ home kit, painters tape on the floor or other safe objects to leap over. Encourage your child to run and leap over the hurdles without taking time to stop in between. Use floor markers to provide a target for your child to land on.
Young Athletes™ is designed to help develop relationships between children with intellectual differences and their parents, caregivers and families, while improving their gross motor and social skill development. Connecting with your community is an essential part of your child’s social and physical development.

Special Olympics New Jersey offers weekly Unified Young Athletes™ community programs throughout the state. Each community program offers 45 minutes of guided play with a trained Young Athletes™ coach. Unified Young Athletes™ is a FREE program that is offered to children ages 2 through 7 with and without intellectual differences. To locate a Young Athletes™ community program near you, contact the Special Olympics New Jersey Young Athletes Program Manager at (609) 896-8000 or visit our website at www.sonj.org.
Becoming a Special Olympics Athlete

Congratulations! Through Young Athletes™ your child has developed many of the fundamental skills that will support his/her transition into learning and playing a variety of sports. Special Olympics New Jersey provides year-round sports training and competition opportunities in over 24 sports! Whether individual or team sports interest your child, Special Olympics New Jersey has something for everyone. Special Olympics New Jersey functions much like a travel sports organization with qualifying local, sectional and state competitions.

Participation in Special Olympics requires a commitment to learning and training sports that will lead to your child’s success on the playing field, and greater acceptance in the community. Just as any child is provided the opportunity to play baseball, soccer or tennis, so too can your child experience the benefits of playing and excelling in sports. Through traditional or Unified Special Olympics New Jersey sports programs, your child can fulfill his/her dream to play sports in his/her own community.

Follow these steps to transition your young athlete to Special Olympics training and competition programs.

• Attend a “Getting Started” parent meeting. Email sportsinfo@sonj.org for dates, times and locations.

• Have your child’s physician complete and sign a Special Olympics New Jersey medical form. Once completed, make several copies and mail one to the Special Olympics New Jersey Office, 1 Eunice Kennedy Shriver Way, Lawrenceville, NJ 08648. You can request a medical form by emailing YAPinfo@sonj.org.

• Contact your Local Area Director to see what local training programs are available and accepting new athletes in your area. If there are no programs available, ask your Area Director how to create a new program through your school or in your community. A complete list of counties and their Area Directors can be found at www.sonj.org.

• Train and compete! Now that your child has a medical form on file and you have either located or created a Local Training Program (LTP), complete at least 8 weeks of training and/or other sport specific requirements to get ready for competition.

Welcome to the Special Olympics family!