



Special Olympics Australia

# **Young Athletes Coach Accreditation Course Coaches Guide**

JUNE 2020



Special Olympics  
**Young Athletes**

## Program Background

Young Athletes (YA) is a play-based program for children aged 2-8 years with and without an intellectual disability. The program focuses on activities that support social and physical growth and provides a model that creates greater access and opportunities for participating children and their families. As an early intervention strategy that aims to increase fundamental movement skills (FMS), the program creates a transition pathway into a more structured sporting environment – leading to long term participation in sport and physical activity through Special Olympics Australia (SOA), State Sporting Organisations (SSO), schools or other organised activity. This will establish a safe and supportive setting for families to access quality activity for their children in a range of environments.

The program aims to build emotional & physical well-being, confidence and resilience by providing participants with a consistent experience aimed at increasing their FMS. This is achieved by providing a flexible program that promotes having fun while being active. YA will also provide a welcoming network for families, with resources to encourage at-home participation and ongoing support to community-based organisations for delivery of activity.

## Purpose of Coaches' Guide

The YA Coaches' Guide has been developed to help coaches understand the objectives of this product and improve knowledge on how to provide activities to young children with an intellectual disability.

The course itself will provide numerous opportunities to reflect on key learning points through short quizzes and interactive elements. The Guide tasks are designed to help coaches prepare for coaching in the field and consider why and how they may apply different coaching methods.

The Guide also contains useful program information that will assist with gaining a deeper understanding of various administrative program elements along with a few tips and tricks to help your coaching.

Enjoy the course and all the best being an ambassador, role model and great coach for our Young Athletes across the country.

For more information about Special Olympics Australia programs or how to get involved please contact head office:

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## Coaching Tips

### Delivering sport for participants with an intellectual disability

The most important thing to remember is that every child is different. Knowing your participants will allow you to tailor activities to engage and challenge everyone at their own level. This is not only the best way to develop skills but also how to best manage behaviour! Some key tips are to:

- Look at what the child CAN do, not what they can't do!
- Get to know each child and treat them as an individual
  - Always ask questions to the participant first and then to parents, teachers or support staff. This will help you better understand individual abilities, behaviours and motivations – we'll provide examples later in this resource
- Put children in a position to succeed and challenge them to reach their potential
- Modify sessions according to the ability level and needs of your children
- Don't just coach - manage the session. Plan the delivery of your program to include direct support from helpers (parents, teachers or site staff) to help manage sessions effectively

### Make instructions simple and specific

The language you use to explain activities is important. Use short, specific instructions and use equipment to provide a physical reference point. Some examples may be:

- "Stand on the red dot"
- "Run around the green marker"
- "Throw the bean bag into the blue hoop"
- "Kick the ball between the orange cones"

### FMS development

The development of skills is an important aspect of coaching. You should provide opportunities for children to perform fundamental movement skills multiple times before introducing more specialised skills. Fundamental movement skills such as running, jumping, kicking, striking, throwing and catching provide a foundation for learning sport-specific skills.

You should let children have a go and have fun playing games before putting focus on correct execution of skills. Stand back and watch the children to determine their ability level and the best way to correct their skills.

### ALWAYS use demonstrations

Show children what to do while you are explaining instructions. Ideally use children to demonstrate while you explain. Children are more likely to understand the activity if they see a visual representation as well as hear verbal instructions.

# Coach as a Facilitator - Relationships and Individual Needs

## Know your participants and environment

Like any sports coaching session, it is essential to be prepared with the appropriate information to plan your session and be comfortable asking questions to help build your understanding of the participants you are coaching. The only way you can improve as a coach, and help your participants develop their skills, is by asking the right people the right questions.

So who do you ask? It is essential to ask the participant first. From there, you can utilise the following points of contact to help you deliver the best session possible:

- Parents and carers
- Support staff including teachers, aides, disability support workers, therapists
- Facilities including schools, early learning services, community spaces and recreation centres

Some questions you can ask include (but are not limited to):

### a) Participants

- What do you like most about playing with others?
- Is there anything you can't do when playing?
- Have you done gymnastics before?
- Do you think you can do this part of the activity?
- Do you mind if I help show you how to do that?  
— *Always ask the child if they feel comfortable before making physical contact.*

### b) Parents and Support Staff – always use the child's name when talking

- What does \*insert name\* like most about being active?
- Is there anything that I should know that may impact \*insert name\*'s involvement in the session?
- Are there any *communication or other tips* you can give me for encouraging \*insert name\*'s participation in the session?
- Are there any words or actions I should avoid to ensure \*insert name\* doesn't lose focus during the session?
- Are there any triggers or sensitivities to be mindful of to ensure \*insert name\* has a positive experience in the session?

### c) Facilities

- Are there any barriers making it difficult to access the venue?
- Are there any pieces of equipment in the playing area that we should avoid using or remove from the space?
- Where are the accessible toilets?

## Person-Centred Language

| WORDS TO USE                                                                                                                                                               | WORDS TO AVOID                                                                                                            |
|----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|---------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| Put the participants first and specify the need or disability, for example:<br>A child who uses a wheelchair.                                                              | Abnormal; cripple or crippled; mentally retarded.                                                                         |
| Say the 'child with a disability since birth', 'child with a congenital disability'.                                                                                       | Defect (as in birth defect, congenital defect).                                                                           |
| Put the child first and be specific, for example, a child with Down syndrome.<br><i>Note: Patient is only appropriate when referring to a doctor/patient relationship.</i> | Unfortunate; victim; suffer or suffering from; afflicted with; disease; illness; patient; in a vegetative state, invalid. |
| Child who is little or of short stature.                                                                                                                                   | Dwarf                                                                                                                     |
| Child with paraplegia.                                                                                                                                                     | Paraplegic                                                                                                                |
| Child with epilepsy.                                                                                                                                                       | Epileptic                                                                                                                 |
| Seizure                                                                                                                                                                    | Fit/attack/spell                                                                                                          |
| Child with an acquired brain injury.                                                                                                                                       | Brain damaged                                                                                                             |
| Handicapped is appropriate only if referring to a barrier facing people with a disability, for example, "....are handicapped by a lack of access."                         | Handicapped                                                                                                               |
| Put the participant first and be specific, for example, people who are blind.                                                                                              | Terms beginning with 'the', such as 'the disabled' or 'the blind'.                                                        |
| Child with cerebral palsy.                                                                                                                                                 | Cerebral palsy sufferer.                                                                                                  |
| Is a wheelchair user, uses a wheelchair.                                                                                                                                   | Confined to a wheelchair; wheelchair-bound.                                                                               |
| Accessible toilets/parking.                                                                                                                                                | Disabled toilets/parking                                                                                                  |

## Golden Rules of building relationships

You never know what you might get on any given day in the YA program. Your ability to plan and prepare for this is important as it will give you the confidence that you can handle any situation in a calm and composed manner.

In the Relationships and Individual Needs topic you were provided with numerous tips through the coach in action video and have access to some great questions to support establishing a relationships with your athletes. Now it is time to build some of your own golden rules to make this work for you.

Just like every athlete is different, so is every coach and different coaching tactics work differently for everyone. So using this information provided you are challenged to develop your Top 5 Golden Rules of building relationships and recognising individual needs.

Here's an example to get you started:

*Eg. 'Understand the requirements each athlete needs to feel they are in a safe and happy environment, this will put them in a sound frame of mind for the sessions.'*

### Top 5 Golden Rules

|    |  |
|----|--|
| 1. |  |
| 2. |  |
| 3. |  |
| 4. |  |
| 5. |  |

## Coach as a Facilitator – Tips for Working with Support Staff and Parents

To support successful delivery of the program we encourage coaches to work as a facilitator of the session and not just a coach. This may mean less coaching and more collaboration with supporting adults (parents, teachers or aides). Plan your session so it is easy to provide assistance to both children and support staff.

Here are a few examples of how support staff and parents can aid the lesson:

- Lead a participant around an obstacle course
- Partner with a participant during an activity
- Participate in group activities to keep athletes engaged and role model correct technique
- Occupy participants waiting in line with a simple activity to keep them engaged
- Encourage an athlete who has disengaged to participate

### Activity – The 3 Step Plan

Support staff and parents are an absolute vital cog to assist your coaching. Their knowledge of the environment, what the athletes are capable of and their respective individual needs is a gold mine of data you need to embrace.

This is part of taking a sound planning approach to coaching in the program and this should be executed in a considered manner. Even very experienced coaches would benefit from a clear and planned approach to working with staff and parents in the YA program, such is the unique nature of the coaching environment.

In this short activity you are challenged to consider three vital steps you can put into action in the lead up to, during and even after you have delivered an eight week program. You can use the TTO method for this task – Task, Timeline, Outcome – simple, yet powerful and designed to make you accountable for this vital element of program planning.

| <b>TASK</b><br>What do you need to do? | <b>TIMELINE</b><br>When do you need to do it? | <b>OUTCOME</b><br>What are you hoping to achieve/<br>what does success look like? |
|----------------------------------------|-----------------------------------------------|-----------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
|                                        |                                               |                                                                                   |
|                                        |                                               |                                                                                   |
|                                        |                                               |                                                                                   |

## The Young Athletes Coach – Program Delivery

### Goal setting

We can't predict the ability level of the athletes participating in the program so we hope to provide you with the confidence to adapt and modify the session appropriately. We encourage coaches to use the session plan and activities as a guide and adjust the session appropriately to maximise participation of their athletes whilst working towards the session goal. The goals that coaches and athletes set need to be very specific and in line with the needs and differences of each individual athlete.

In this activity you are asked to cast forward and identify some areas where it will be beneficial to focus on goal setting and achievement for both you and your athletes. Knowing that at this stage you would not have delivered your first session this is an exercise in vision and bringing together what you have learnt about the YA program.

The task is straightforward – identify three areas for yourself and three areas for your athletes that would enhance development throughout the YA program.

| <b>COACH</b><br><i>Eg. 'I will focus on practicing patience every week'</i> | <b>ATHLETE</b><br><i>Eg. 'Maximum engagement for the maximum amount of time.'</i> |
|-----------------------------------------------------------------------------|-----------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
|                                                                             |                                                                                   |
|                                                                             |                                                                                   |
|                                                                             |                                                                                   |

## Modifications & resources

Throughout the course it has been a consistent theme that you need to be ready to adapt and modify the way you coach, the goals you set and the resources you use in order to get a great result for your athletes.

As this is such a crucial part of program success, we want you thinking about this now – well before you get into the YA coach environment. Through this thinking and pre-planning we aim for you to build your confidence so you are ready to tackle every possibility that comes your way.

To illustrate the point around modification, here are nine different challenges you might come across in a session or a program. Your task is to identify how as a coach ways you might adapt the session to achieve an outcome.

| CHALLENGE                                                             | MODIFICATION STRATEGY | INTENDED OUTCOME |
|-----------------------------------------------------------------------|-----------------------|------------------|
| The activity on the card seems to be too challenging for the athletes |                       |                  |
| The athlete is not confident using a tennis ball to work on catching  |                       |                  |
| The athlete isn't doing the activity the way it looks on the card     |                       |                  |
| The athlete is bored                                                  |                       |                  |
| The athletes lose concentration when I explain the activity           |                       |                  |
| When I enter the venue there is equipment lying around everywhere     |                       |                  |
| An athlete is being unsafe                                            |                       |                  |
| The athlete refuses to jump on a mini-trampoline                      |                       |                  |
| The athletes in my group are hard of hearing                          |                       |                  |

## Resources

### Activity Cards – games to develop skills

Activity Cards are designed to provide deliverers with games that develop the FMS and social skills of children with an intellectual disability. Each card has particular objective(s) that will contribute to the growth of physical and social skills that can be used across all sports and contribute to a healthier and happier childhood.

**Skill Focus**  
 Lists the key FMS to be focussed on for the game

**Coach Instructions**  
 A script is provided to help coaches give short and specific instructions to start the activity

**Musical Statues**

**GAME SUMMARY:**  
Players practice finding their balance after performing a locomotor.

**Equipment needed:**  
➤ Music  
➤ Visual aids (balance and locomotor)

**Game setup:**  
Mark out an area with space for players to move around freely. When the music starts, players can move around the space or on the spot. When the music stops each player needs to stand as still as a statue until the music starts again.

**STAGE 1**  
"Let's all spread out so we have space to move. When the music plays, we are going to dance on the spot, when the music stops, you need to freeze and stand as still as a statue until you hear the music start again."

Each time the music plays, instruct the players to move in a different style of locomotor. These could include:

- marching/running with knees up high
- walking or running forward/sideways/backward/tip toes
- power walking
- big step walks
- toe-heel walks
- crab walk

**COACH INSTRUCTIONS**

**STAGE 2**  
Once players are confident with the game, add an instruction for when the music stops.

"This time, when the music stops, we are going to balance on one foot."

**ALTERNATIVE GAME**  
If the players do not enjoy moving to music, change the game to Follow the Leader.

"Everyone look at me and copy what I do."

Move around the space with different locomotors and stop in a balance shape before moving to a new movement.

Adult helpers can work with each player one on one to develop skills.

**FOUNDATION:**  
Skill Development

**COMPLEX:**  
Strategies & Tactics

**Game Setup**  
 A summary of how to setup the game using the equipment recommended

YOUNG ATHLETES PROGRAM | Musical Statues

SOAYAP01

**BRANCH OUT! Tips to modify Musical Statues**

**Rules:**

- Choose movements suitable to the ability of the players. Start travelling forward before progressing to side or backward movements.
- Allow players to think of their own balance shapes.
- Make it harder by asking players to form groups of 2-3 players when the music stops.

**Equipment:**

- Select music appropriate for the group, for example, fast music will encourage quick movements.
- Gym mats can be used for safety if playing on a hard surface.

**Environment:**

- Change the dimensions of the playing space. A larger playing space will allow more free movement, a smaller playing space will increase intensity.
- Can be played indoors or outdoors, as long as the music can be heard by the players.

**TEACHING STYLE:**

- Use **visual aids**, such as picture cards, to show the balances and movements you want players to try.
- Use **instructional prompts** to support players, such as "Sam, remember when the music stops, you need to freeze!"

**ALTERNATE SPORTS & SKILLS**

Use this game to warm up and develop balance and movement skills for gymnastics.

**SAFETY!**

- Ensure there is adequate space around the players to move easily.
- Players need to be aware of those around them to avoid collision, e.g. try not to hit another player whilst moving around the space.
- Do not let players use their head to balance on.

**CORRESPONDING ACTIVITIES LINK**

SOAYAP00

LINK TO COACHES GUIDE

Special Olympics Australia  
Young Athletes Program | Musical Statues

**Alternate Sports & Skills**  
 This section lists the skills that can be developed by making modifications to the game.

**Safety**  
 Very important! This lists essential rules and precautions to put in place for child safety.

YOUNG ATHLETES PROGRAM | Musical Statues

## Play at Home – creating connections to parents

The Play at Home cards are designed to educate and empower parents to contribute to the development of their children. The cards provide parents and carers with a summary of each session and equips them with greater skills to continue the delivery of information and activities in their home.



## Session Plan – flexible format

Each session has a particular skill objective that assists in the FMS and social development of each child. The lesson plan provides a structure to a session that can run anywhere between 30 and 60 minutes. Each group will be very different – including a variety of ages to abilities – understanding how to be flexible in delivery is the best way to introduce and develop skills in a fun and engaging environment.

| Sports Program   Session Plan                            |                                                                                                                                                                             | SKILL FOCUS<br>Jumping & Asking for Help                                                                                                                                                     |                                                                                                                                                                                                  | Special Olympics<br>Young Athletes                                                                                                                                                                       | Special Olympics<br>Australia |
|----------------------------------------------------------|-----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|--------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|-------------------------------|
| DATE                                                     | WEATHER                                                                                                                                                                     | Activity 1 Equipment                                                                                                                                                                         | Activity 2 Equipment                                                                                                                                                                             | Activity 3 Equipment                                                                                                                                                                                     |                               |
| VENUE                                                    | PARTICIPANTS                                                                                                                                                                | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Markers</li> <li>Visual - animal and action</li> </ul>                                                                                                | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Markers</li> <li>Visual - direction cards</li> </ul>                                                                                                      | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Roll-out tape or marker</li> <li>Coloured dots (min 2)</li> <li>Dome &amp; small cone (min 2)</li> <li>Bean bags (min 2)</li> <li>Visual - first, then</li> </ul> |                               |
| <a href="#">LINK TO YOUNG ATHLETES PROGRAM HOME PAGE</a> |                                                                                                                                                                             |                                                                                                                                                                                              |                                                                                                                                                                                                  |                                                                                                                                                                                                          |                               |
| OPENING                                                  | <b>Introduction:</b><br>The Wheels on the Bus (sport version)                                                                                                               |                                                                                                                                                                                              | <b>Social Skill:</b><br>Asking for Help                                                                                                                                                          |                                                                                                                                                                                                          |                               |
| SPORTS PLAY                                              | <b>Fundamental Activity 1:</b><br><br><b>Animal Action</b><br>Players use their imagination to practice different jumping techniques.<br><br><b>Notes or Modifications:</b> | <b>Fundamental Activity 2:</b><br><br><b>Hot Lava Jump</b><br>Players practice two-foot jumping and landing technique by jumping on the coloured dots.<br><br><b>Notes or Modifications:</b> | <b>Fundamental Activity 3:</b><br><br><b>Jumping Beam</b><br>Players practice different jumping techniques to pass from one side of the beam to the other.<br><br><b>Notes or Modifications:</b> |                                                                                                                                                                                                          |                               |
|                                                          |                                                                                                                                                                             |                                                                                                                                                                                              |                                                                                                                                                                                                  |                                                                                                                                                                                                          |                               |
| CLOSING                                                  | <b>Closing:</b><br>If You're Happy and You Know It                                                                                                                          |                                                                                                                                                                                              | <b>Session Goal:</b><br>Jump on the floor or from a small height                                                                                                                                 |                                                                                                                                                                                                          |                               |

## Opening and closing song/activity

To signal the start and end of the session we suggest engaging the athletes with an opening and closing song/activity. This is also the perfect opportunity to introduce the FMS for the session and assess the skill level each participant is at.

We encourage coaches to select a song/activity that is appropriate for the group but have listed some options below.

- **The Wheels on the Bus (sport version):** sing the melody of “The Wheels on the Bus” but change the actions to movements the participants can act out
- **If You’re Happy and You Know It:** sing “If You’re Happy and You Know It” and select actions that engage the athletes
- **Jump If You Feel You Want To:** sing along and copy the actions to Play School’s “Jump If You Feel You Want To”
- **Catching Bubbles:** play a background song and have the adult helpers blow bubbles so children can practice their trapping action
- **The Parachute Dance Song:** sing along and copy the actions of Maple Leaf Learning’s “The Parachute Dance Song”. This song can be done without equipment and has a focus on walking and running
- **Parachute:** play a background song and have the participants lay with their heads in the middle of the circle and feet facing outwards while adult helpers hold a parachute over them. As the parachute rises and falls, participants can practice their kicking action by raising their legs to try and touch the parachute with their toes
- **Simon Says:** have the participants move around the floor and when the coach says “Simon Says” they must stop and follow your instruction
- **Balloons:** play a background song and participants can practice striking a balloon with different body parts. Consider using one colour of balloon to prevent participants getting upset over their balloon colour. At the end of the opening song, put the balloons in a big garbage bag and explain that there will be a chance to play with them again for the closing song. Participants can then take the balloon with them to play-at-home



# Additional Coaching Support

## Supporting Positive Behaviours

### Transitions

Transitions are potentially the most difficult part of a training session for young children who experience disability. The key to establishing transition techniques is understanding that signals and cues must be purposefully taught. Choose techniques that meet the needs of the participants and be consistent by using these cues and signals every transition.

You might want to use signals for a variety of transition purposes, including:

- Stop play or movement
- Give directions
- Noise levels, quiet signals
- Safety or danger (e.g. broken equipment, aggressive behavior)
- Direct movement to specific space or formations (group time, stations, ect.)

Transition signals (should be verbal and visual):

- a phrase: 'freeze', 'clean up', 'one more minute till clean up'
- song: 'clean up', 'one more minute'
- clap
- timer
- bell or whistle (please note that a whistle could be too loud and might have adverse reactions from the children; use with caution)
- visual card – single picture card or first and then cards
- music
- tap on shoulder
- arm or hand signal

Suggestions for specific transition signals:

- **Stop- look- listen:** (hand up above your head palms out in stop position, paired with 'hands up, voices off') children raise their hands up (hand up prevents them from continuing playing), voices off; you could ask them to freeze with a jump stop
- **Dead bug:** (verbally prompt 'dead bug' paired with children quickly and safely lie on their backs, raising arms and legs in the air, wiggling gently)
- **Hit the deck/ Swimmer:** children drop carefully to the ground, in a tummy lying position, they can rest their arms or gently move them back and forth
- **Bottoms Against the Wall:** this clears the play area and makes the children go to the perimeter
- **Listening line:** (stretch arms out horizontally, paired with verbal 'listening line') children go quickly to the indicated line and sit for instruction
- **Listening circle:** (circular motion of hand above head, paired with 'circle spot') children move quickly to the circle spots and sit
- **Music:** play music during activities and explain to participants that when the music ends it is time to come in to the center and prepare to transition to the next activity

## Waiting activities

Children under the age of five may find it difficult to stand in line and wait for their turn during an activity. When planning your session include a short activity an adult helper can do to occupy participants and keep them engaged while waiting for their turn.

## Supporting individual needs

### Cool down spots/take a break

Cool down spots or take a break spots are areas that children can go to engage in a sensory activity or an area where they can remove themselves from a stressful situation to calm themselves down. A box of fidget or sensory toys can also be placed in this area for the athletes to use.

### Social Skills

The program incorporates the teaching of social skills each week to help athletes learn socially acceptable behaviours. These skills will support their life long involvement in sport as well as in general social situations.

### Social Stories

Social Stories are a specific visual representation of the appropriate social behaviours that can be shown to the child prior to engaging in an activity. They can be used to teach new skills, routines, behaviours and transitions.



## Acknowledgements

This Coaches' Guide and the accompanying Special Olympics Australia Young Athletes resource are based on the content of Special Olympics International's Young Athletes resource, in combination with current best practice in Australia. This content has been used with permission and aims to develop opportunities for children with an intellectual disability to access more opportunities to engage in physical activity.

This resource was made possible through the support of the Australian Government Department of Social Services. It has been developed through the hard work of employees of Special Olympics Australia and the Leaders of Evolution as well as a working group with representation from Special Olympics Australia, Gymnastics, Early Childhood and Disability organisations.

This Coaches' Guide forms one part of Special Olympics Australia's strategy to support the improved delivery of sport and physical activity to people with an intellectual disability. For further learning and support we recommend you visit [www.soalearn.com.au](http://www.soalearn.com.au).

The information in this Guide is meant to supplement, not replace, coach education and training. Like any sport and physical activity involving speed, equipment, balance and environmental factors, the delivery of Special Olympics Australia activities poses some inherent risk. Special Olympics Australia advise readers to take full responsibility for their own safety and know the limits of athletes participating. Before practicing the skills described in this Guide, be sure that your equipment is well maintained, and do not take risks beyond your level of experience, aptitude, training, and comfort level.

