



Special Olympics  
**Young Athletes**

# Young Athletes in the Community



# Young Athletes in the Community

## Overview

### Young Athletes in Communities

In youth sport and recreation programs, children come together with a “coach” for organized play. These programs can be found in many communities. Special Olympics Young Athletes can provide that same inclusive opportunity for children with and without intellectual disabilities.

Young Athletes in the community allows parents to share in the fun their children have while playing with others. They also observe their children achieving skills that will help them in sports and in life.

### Structure in Communities

When determining how to conduct community Young Athletes sessions, the following details can serve as a guide for set-up and structure:

- **Frequency:** One time per week; plus two times per week at home
- **Timing:** 45 minute to 1-hour session
- **Setting:** Indoors or outdoors
- **Locations:** Community center, sports club, university campus, public recreation space, library, or other venues
- **Coaches:** Community volunteer, specialized professional, family member or university student
- **Inclusion:** Siblings or local community children
- **Volunteers:** Family members, Special Olympics athlete leaders, local-sport club members, university students or community volunteers

## Key Points to Consider in your Community Activities

### Space and Safety

- *Not too big; not too small.* Take time to read each activity. Make sure space matches the needs of the activity and the number of children in the group
- *Indoor vs. outdoor.* Young Athletes is good for both indoor and outdoor activities, but be mindful of spacing. Define borders for safety
- *One space vs. two spaces.* Depending on the number of children and volunteers, trainers can divide a large group into smaller groups, sometimes by age or ability and run two groups at the same time

### Structure

- *Establish a routine.* Routines provide clear expectations, consistency, and comfort for many children
- *Create different skill stations* to accommodate children of different ages and abilities
- *Add group games and activities* into the session when children are of similar age or ability
- *Encourage different modes of movement* to transition between activities. This strengthens different muscles and encourages children to learn a new skill
- *Invite siblings, parents or children without intellectual disabilities* to support children by modeling activities
- *Use music to signal transition.* Songs can be used to signal when one activity is finished and another is about to begin
- *Plan for rest breaks.* Provide a space where children can rest if they become tired or too excited by the activity or environment

# Young Athletes in the Community

## Family Engagement

It is important for families to participate with their children in Young Athletes. It is a chance for families to connect with members of their community and other families. This supports growth, development, and a feeling of acceptance. Families can engage in a community program in a variety of ways, including:

- Weekly newsletters and emails. Connect to share the activities and progress with families.
- Session supporters. Invite family members to participate in the weekly sessions, supporting their children through various activities, or encourage families to take the next step and become coaches.
- At-home activities. Share the Activity Guide with families. Provide suggestions for everyday items that could be used as equipment. This allows families to replicate activities with their children at home.
- Family support groups. Provide families with a space to talk and connect while their children are in Young Athletes. Families can be the best support system for one another.

## Family Forums

Family forums are designed to get families involved in Special Olympics. They offer a setting for parents and caregivers to gain access to health information, resources and support. Consider the following ideas when planning a family forum:

### Frequency and Timing

Plan a family forum monthly or once every three months. Families can gather with guest speakers while coaches and

volunteers conduct that week's Young Athletes session.

### Potential Topics

Family Forums need to address the questions and concerns of local family members. They should also be sensitive to the cultural and religious needs of the community. Below are some suggestions for valuable Family Forum topics. Meet with family members first and get their input before deciding on final topics

- Advocating for your child's rights and access to services
- Your child's medical and dental care
- Accessing follow-up care- how to identify the right professional for your child
- School opportunities- what is available for children with intellectual disabilities in the community
- Nutrition, healthy eating and cooking demonstrations
- General health topics related to the overall community
- Learning through play
- Healthy sibling relationships
- Promoting independence at an early age

### Guest Presenters

When leading family forums, use community partners, university professors or industry experts to lead the conversations. For example, bring in a pediatrician to talk about working with your child's doctor or have a nutritionist speak about healthy eating.

# Young Athletes in the Community

## Lesson Plans

### Young Athletes Lesson Plan Template

Sample Lesson for Individual/Group Activities

#### Warm-up (5 minutes)

- The warm-up gets children moving and prepared for the upcoming activities. Use a common melody and motions that children have done before or are familiar with.

#### Individual Skill Development (15-20 minutes)

- This section allows students to focus on their individual growth and success. Select a skill and activity from the guide and run it as a singular activity. Or, select several activities and set up different stations.

#### Group Games/Activity (15-20 minutes)

- These games and activities are a fun and effective way to practice skills. They reinforce classroom lessons, encouraging communication and social interaction.

#### Cool Down/Closing (5-10 minutes)

- This section helps children to slow down and prepare to leave. With a closing song, review the activity or skills learned. Complete the lesson with a good stretch.



The boys are headed to the 2019 [@SpOlympicsMD](#) Summer Games to support the Young Athletes Program!!  
[#FutureChampions](#)

*Going to a YAP event? Snap a picture before you head out the door and share it on social!*

## Young Athletes in Communities

# Lesson 1: Foundational Skills

Equipment Needed: yellow balance beam, arrows, poly spots, scarves

### Melody and Warm-Up

- Song: "Wheels on the Bus"
- The athletes in our class touch their toes, touch their toes, touch their toes. The athletes in our class touch their toes, all through the day
- The runner on the team goes run run run, run run run run, run run. The runner on the team goes run run run, all through the ton.

### Individual Skill Development

#### Inchworm Wiggle

- Bend over and put your hands on the ground. Walk with your hands then, walk with your feet. Inchworm to the (name a piece of equipment: beanbags, balance beam, etc.)

#### Scarf Game

- Look where the scarf is going. Catch the scarf with your (hands, head, elbow, foot)

#### Bridges and Tunnels

- One athlete forms a tunnel by touching the ground with his/her feet and hands or by getting down onto hands and knees
- The other athlete's crawl or scoot, under the tunnel
- Once they go under the tunnel, have each athlete extend the tunnel (by forming a tunnel next to the person who started the activity)

### Group Activity

#### I Spy

- I Spy with my little eye.... An orange cone!
- Encourage athletes to find an object that is visible and everyone races to the object by walking or running

- The I Spy game progresses as a coach (or athlete) calls out the name of a piece of equipment and all athletes find that object

### Cool Down/Closing

- "Let's end Young Athletes with a song 'If You're Happy and You Know It.' Sing along with me and do what I do."
- If you're happy and you know it, clap and stomp (wiggle your body; fly like a bird: walk around with arms outstretched)
- Breathing exercises



Got my lift in today while volunteering for [@SpOlympicsMD!](#)

## Activity Guide

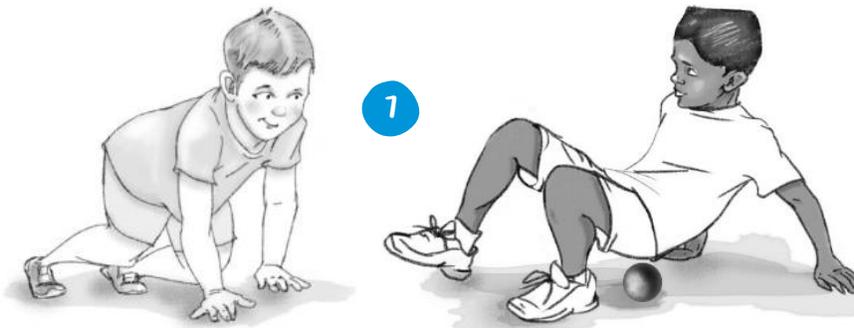
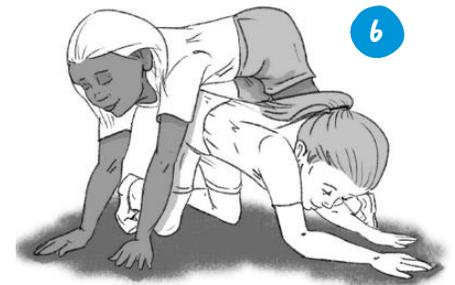
# Foundational Skills

Foundational skills help children become aware of themselves and their relationship to their surroundings. They also support basic health and physical fitness.

Body awareness, strength, flexibility, coordination and endurance are important for motor and social skills. Foundational skills promote development in all of these areas, which are essential for mobility at home and in school and the community.

### Activities in this section include:

1. Scarf Games
2. Children's Songs
3. I Spy
4. Obstacle Course
5. Musical Markers
6. Tunnels and Bridges
7. Animal Games
8. Parachute Games
9. Magic Carpet Ride



# Activity Guide

## Foundational Skills

### Scarf Games

Encourage children to follow the movement of the scarf with their head and eyes. Drop the scarf and encourage children to “catch” the scarf with their hand, head, foot or other body part.

### Group Play

Children can play together by tossing scarves to one another, calling out numbers, colors or names of animals with every toss. For a greater challenge, encourage children to listen carefully for what to do with the scarf. For example, “If you have a green scarf, pass it to the person next to you” or “pass the scarf behind your back to the person next to you.”

### Healthy Play

Have children try to name different fruits, vegetables or other healthy foods each time they toss the scarf.

*Equipment Needed:* Scarf

### Children’s Songs

Encourage children to sing songs that associate words with actions and body awareness, such as “Wheels on the Bus” or other familiar action songs. A song such as “If You’re Happy and You Know It” can be used to encourage children to perform different activities like clapping, rubbing the belly,

tapping the head and more. Have fun and ask children for ideas about what to do and how to move!

### Healthy Play

Adapt locally popular songs to teach healthy habits, while also building body awareness. See the “Additional Resources” section for healthy lyrics to “Twinkle, Twinkle Little Star.”

### I Spy

Encourage children to look around and notice different items in the space. Ask children to look for certain items and encourage them to run, walk or crawl to those items. Progress by asking children to identify colors, shapes or healthy food items. Children can work in pairs to promote social skills.

*Equipment Needed:* Floor Markers, Beanbags

### Tip for Observation

Encourage children to look in the direction they are walking or running and to keep their hips and feet facing forward.

## Activity Guide

# Foundational Skills

### Obstacle Course

Set up a basic obstacle course with any equipment you have, for example, hoops, beams, chairs or benches. Introduce various concepts as the children complete the course, including:

#### Equipment Needed

- Cones
- Floor Markers
- Hoops
- Dowels
- Beams

### Musical Markers

While music is playing, ask children to run, walk backwards, crawl or twist. When the music stops, have children find a floor marker to stand on (sharing markers is allowed). Remove markers until there is only one large hoop in the center that all the children can share.

### Healthy Play

When using floor markers, consider having floor markers that are shaped like healthy foods (like fruits and vegetables), printing out pictures, or associating various colors with fruits and vegetables. In the activity, when the music stops, ask children to stand

on the fruits or vegetables to reinforce making healthy decisions with food.

#### Equipment Needed

- Hoop
- Floor Markers

### Tunnels and Bridges

Adults and children make tunnels by touching the ground with their feet and hands, sending their hips into the air. Other children crawl through the tunnels. Adults and children make bridges by getting down onto hands and knees. Other children try to climb over the bridges.

### Animal Games

Ask children to pretend that they are different animals by moving their bodies in different ways. Picture books can help children see the animals and their movements.

- **Bear Crawl:** Have children bend down with their hands and feet on the ground. Encourage them to crawl or walk like a bear. Make sure the knees do not touch the floor. Growl for fun!
- **Crab Walk:** Have children sit on the floor with feet flat on the floor and knees bent. Hands are flat on the floor, slightly behind the body. Ask them to lift their hips off the floor and walk their hands

## Activity Guide

# Foundational Skills

and feet backwards. Then try crawling in different directions.

- **Crabs and Fishes:** Children pretend to be the Crab (see Crab Walk) and a ball is the Fish. The coach begins the game by rolling the ball under children's bottoms so that the fish is swimming through a sea of crabs. The ball can be pushed or kicked by the children to keep the game going.

### Optional Activities

#### Parachute Games

Children and adults hold the edges of a parachute. Working together to move the parachute up and down, have an adult throw a ball or beanbag on top. The children try to keep the parachute moving, while keeping the ball or beanbag from falling off.

#### Group Play

Parachute games are a great way to end sessions with a group of children. Have children make big waves with the parachute by slowly moving it up and down. Then have children let go of the parachute when their hands are above their head. Have children run to the center while a volunteer collects the parachute as it falls over the children.

*Equipment Needed:* Parachute (option: flat sheet), Ball

#### Magic Carpet Ride

The child sits on a blanket, holding the edges. An adult grasps the other end of the blanket and pulls it so that the child slides along the floor. The adult can pull the blanket faster as the child becomes comfortable. Safety is important with this activity. Demonstrate the activity and ensure the child is able to hold on tight to the blanket to prevent them from falling off.

*Equipment Needed:* Blanket (option: sheet)

#### Tip for Observation

Make note of children's ability to remember lyrics, activities, body parts or other important concepts. Reinforce those areas in other activities or self-help skills.