



Special Olympics Young Athletes

Guide for Families and Caregivers



Special Olympics
Young Athletes

Welcome to Special Olympics Young Athletes

Share in the joy of sports with your child! Young Athletes is a sport and play program for children ages 2 to 7 with and without intellectual disabilities (ID). Young Athletes activities make it fun and easy to continue your child's learning at home.

Why Young Athletes?

- Improves **motor skills**.
- Prepares children for **sports and school**.
- Contributes to **social and emotional learning**.
- Inspires **acceptance** through inclusive play.
- Builds **daily skills** for an **active, healthy life**.

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How to Play at Home

The activities your child is learning at school are found in the **Young Athletes Activity Guide**. Practicing these activities at home will continue their skill development. Activities are fun and easy to do at home.

How to Start

- Ask your child's teacher or coach which activities your child is doing at school.
- Set aside 20-30 minutes a few times a week to practice at home, so that your child gets to practice at least 3 times a week.
- Choose 2 or 3 activities to play at a time.

How to Play

- Every week, ask your child's teacher or coach what activities to practice.
- Play activities your child enjoys.
- Use items you have at home for equipment, such as toys, empty water bottles and towels.
- Choose activities that match the space you are in and the number of people playing.
- If playing inside, choose a space that is comfortable for children and big enough to play safely.
- If playing outside, play in an area with borders. Set up cones or markers to show boundaries.
- Celebrate your child often. Say things like, "You did great at..." or "I'm proud of you when..."
- Have fun!

There's no failure in Young Athletes, so try new skills and play often. Repetition is the key to skill development, and the more you play the more confident your child will get.

Find more ways to play at home at [SpecialOlympics.org/YoungAthletes](https://www.specialolympics.org/YoungAthletes).

Young Athletes Activity Tips

Young Athletes activities, found in the **Activity Guide** and on the **Young Athletes Activity Cards**, support 8 key skills areas.

Choose different activities from the same skill area to develop each skill. As your child gets more confident, try more difficult activities.

Be creative with activities to meet your child's needs. Play in groups with other children and family members to teach team play and acceptance.

Skills Areas

Foundational Skills help teach health, fitness and awareness of self and surroundings.

Act out words while saying them to help your child build connections.



Walking and Running activities allow children to explore and engage in play and learning.

Encourage your child to look where they are going and keep their hips and feet facing forward to improve balance and coordination.

Balance and Jumping activities help children climb stairs, walk on uneven surfaces like grass or sand, and build up to jumps and leaps.

Have your child look at a still object (you, a picture or a toy) to help them balance.





Trapping (stopping a ball with the body) and **Catching** (stopping a ball with hands) skills improve hand-eye coordination.

Choose a ball your child can trap and catch. Use smaller balls as your child gains confidence.

Throwing requires strength, flexibility, balance and coordination as your child learns to grip and let go of objects.

Help your child practice stepping forward with the foot opposite their throwing arm.



Striking an object with a hand or another object helps develop hand-eye coordination.

Start with large balls and still objects, which are easier to strike than ones that are small or moving.

Kicking helps develop foot-eye coordination and balance.

Have your child practice keeping their eyes on the ball before kicking, and on the target as they kick.



Advanced Sports Skills combine movements into more complex activities.

These activities combine different skills areas into sports like football and softball. If your child needs more practice with one skill, returning to the activities from that area can help them build up to these activities.

Build Healthy Habits Through Healthy Play

You can help your child build healthy habits by:

- Setting a good example by staying active and eating healthy.
- Being active with your child—walk, dance and play together as a family.
- Making time for play every day.
- Practicing Young Athletes activities instead of watching TV.
- Talking about healthy foods and activities during playtime.
- Letting your child help choose healthy snacks and meals.
- Eating fruit or vegetables after play instead of sugary snacks.
- Giving your child water or milk to drink, instead of soda or juice.
- Giving extra playtime or stickers as rewards instead of candy or snacks.
- Adding songs or games to healthy habits like washing hands and brushing teeth.
- Displaying the Make Way for Healthy Play Every Day poster in your home or play area.

Find more ways to turn play into healthy habits in the **Young Athletes Activity Guide**.

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What's Next?

Keep exploring sports and healthy play with your child! Special Olympics provides over 30 individual and team sports to people ages 8 and older with and without intellectual disabilities. Special Olympics can help your child transition from Young Athletes to competitive sports.

Through the Family Support Network, family members can become leaders, coaches or volunteers. Special Olympics also has health, fitness and wellness programs including health screenings and community health care programs.

Connect with your local Special Olympics Program to learn more, or visit **SpecialOlympics.org/GetInvolved**.