

## Eligibility to Participate in Special Olympics

Persons are eligible for Special Olympics competition provided they are:

- at least eight years of age,
- have been identified by an agency or professional as having an intellectual disability (mental retardation), and
- have registered to participate in Special Olympics.

Athletes who have physical disabilities but who do not have an intellectual disability are not eligible for Special Olympics.

### *Condensed from Article 6.01 of the Special Olympics General Rules*

**Special Olympics** training and competition is open to every person who:

1. Has been identified by an agency or professional as having an intellectual disability, **or**
2. Has a cognitive delay, as determined by standardized measures, **or**
3. Has a closely related developmental disability, which means having functional limitations in both general learning and in adaptive skills (such as in recreation, work, independent living, self-direction, or self-care).

Persons whose functional limitations are based solely on physical, behavioral, or emotional disability or a specific learning or sensory disability are not eligible to participate as Special Olympics athletes.

However, *these individuals may be eligible to be Special Olympics Unified Sports® Partners.*

Participation in Special Olympics training and competition is open to all persons with an intellectual disability, a cognitive delay or a closely related developmental disability who meet the age requirements *regardless of how mild or severe the person's disability, and whether or not that person also has other mental or physical disabilities.*

<p><b>NOTE:</b> Many Departments of Education no longer report students by level or intensity of service. They recognize 13 categories of disability of which mental retardation/developmental disability is one; however, the state is non-categorical in its service delivery system.</p>
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There is *no maximum age limitation for participation* in Special Olympics. The *minimum age requirement for participation in Special Olympics competition is eight years of age.* Children 6-7 years of age may participate in age-appropriate Special Olympics training programs but may not participate in Special Olympics competition or be awarded medals or ribbons associated with competition. Such children may be recognized for their participation through certificates of participation.

All persons who are eligible to participate in Special Olympics training and/or competition programs must register to participate with their local Accredited Program.

## Mental Retardation\*

### What is mental retardation / developmental disability?

*How is mental retardation / developmental disability expressed? What are some of the characteristics?*

Individuals with a slower rate of learning and a limited capacity to learn (typically scoring lower than 80 on a standardized IQ test) are identified as having mental retardation. Generally, they have a cognitive delay of two or more years. They may also walk and talk later, tend to be slightly shorter, and tend to be more susceptible to physical problems and illnesses.

In addition, such individuals may have difficulty managing the ordinary activities of daily living, understanding the behavior of others, and determining their own appropriate social responses. While having the same ranges of social behavior and emotion, they tend to have more frequent inappropriate responses to social and/or emotional situations due to difficulty generalizing information, difficulty in learning from past experiences, not fully comprehending what is expected of them, and lack of exposure to situations.

Mental retardation is more common than most people think. On average, three percent of the population may have mental retardation. However, only 1-2% of the population is actually receiving special services because of having mental retardation.

- ◆ Of the population with mental retardation, approximately 90% have mild disabilities and 10% have severe disabilities. Those with mild limitations may have a learning rate 40-70% of those without mental retardation.
- ◆ Those with severe limitations may lag four or more years behind their peers on physical and motor test. In addition, they are usually are incapable of traditional schooling. They need to master basic life skills and communication skills.

\* In different parts of the world, mental retardation is referred to people who have:

- Intellectual disability
- Developmental disability
- Mental handicap
- Mental impairment