



Family Involvement

Families play a vital role in supporting their athlete's participation in sport and in influencing their healthy choices beyond practice sessions. Engaging families in your sport program can assist your team in achieving performance and health goals. Families have the ability to be your best advocates and to reinforce at home what is being learned at practice. Below are suggestions for how coaches can engage and encourage families and caregivers to promote health and fitness among your athletes.

Pre-Season – Set the stage to create a healthy team culture

Host a Pre-Season Team Meeting

- Invite individuals who support your athletes outside of practice – families, friends, and caregivers.
- Present brief and simple information to increase family awareness and understanding of fitness. In particular, Special Olympics defines fitness as adequate physical activity, nutrition, and hydration for the optimal performance and health of athletes.
- Discuss your overall plans for the season - why you value and how you will integrate fitness into training – Get everyone to commit by signing a pledge “I commit to be fit!”
- Encourage families to set a simple and achievable goal around fitness/healthy behaviors (e.g. go for a walk twice a week; have one day each week with no TV; increase water consumption by one glass/day).
- Ask athletes and families about their expectations for the season – this helps generate buy-in/support and identify your best champions
- Remind families that they are a huge source of influence for their athletes and that modelling healthy behaviors and reinforcing positive messages can be meaningful.
- Invite families to observe and encourage athletes in any pre-season fitness testing that you plan for your athletes

In-Season – Establish and maintain a healthy team culture

Provide ongoing guidance to families to support athlete health and fitness

- Disseminate [Fit 5](#) and [Fitness Cards](#) or direct families to SOI fitness resources
- Inform families of local fitness facilities, recreational spaces, and/or program opportunities that you know are accessible and encourage them to try them.
- Inspire families and caregivers to work toward healthy lifestyles together.
 - Encourage families to be physically active while their athletes are at practice (e.g. go for a walk)
 - Challenge families/caregivers to friendly fitness “competition” against their athletes (who can get most steps this week, achieve Fit 5 goal for the week, etc.)
 - Delegate specific fitness and healthy behavior volunteer roles. Examples could include a healthy snack coordinator, a committee for organizing a fitness fundraiser, or a team parent to organize active social gatherings.
- Encourage healthy/nutritious food at team events and social gatherings, including eating out.



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Post-Season – Sustain year-round health and fitness.

Introduce a Lifetime of Wellness

- Encourage your athletes to participate in other Special Olympics sports.
- Work with families to advocate and challenge local fitness facilities and recreation centers to become more inclusive. Suggest that families be active with their athletes at local gyms, recreation centers, or parks throughout the year.
- Direct athletes and their friends and families to get involved in Special Olympics fitness programs
- Encourage families to continue with goal setting around fitness even in the off-season. Create a private Facebook group for your team and give athletes and their families' access. This can be a forum for information, communication, support, and reinforcement around team fitness during the off-season. Members of the group can post photos, comments, and information about fitness and health.