



Special Olympics International Athlete Dating Policy

(VOLUNTEERS AND STAFF DATING SPECIAL OLYMPICS ATHLETES)

Adopted by Special Olympics New Zealand

PURPOSE

Among the Special Olympics movement's highest priorities is the wellbeing of, and respect for the dignity of, Special Olympics athletes*. The purpose of this document is to make clear Special Olympics policy on volunteers* and staff dating Special Olympics athletes and to protect all participants in the Special Olympics movement, including athletes, coaches and staff, as well as Special Olympics organizations around the world.

Every Special Olympics Program must take all reasonable steps to ensure that athletes* participating in Special Olympics do so in an environment that is free from abuse, intimidation, fear, pressure or coercion from any person in a position of authority, including Special Olympics staff, coaches, and other volunteers. At the same time, Special Olympics respects the right of every Special Olympics athlete to be treated with dignity and to have the same rights as every other human being.

POLICY

Special Olympics prohibits any Special Olympics staff member or volunteer (excluding spouses of athletes and athletes who are Class B/C** volunteers) from dating or having a sexual relationship with any Special Olympics athlete. In the event that a Special Olympics organization learns of any dating or sexual relationship, the organization immediately shall require either: i) that the staff member or volunteer end his or her association with Special Olympics; or ii) that the association between the staff member or volunteer and Special Olympics be terminated.

In the case of a Special Olympics athlete who is also a staff member or volunteer, the Chief Executive Officer of the organization where the athlete competes must evaluate the circumstances on a case-by-case basis and determine if an authority relationship exists between the staff/volunteer athlete and the competing athlete, and if it is determined that there is such a relationship, then apply the above policy in the same manner as the policy is applied to non-athlete staff or volunteers.

Each Special Olympics Program should determine whether it is required by its national or local laws to report certain relationships between Special Olympics staff or volunteers and Special Olympics athletes to the appropriate authorities under any "mandatory reporting" or other requirements in place for that Program's jurisdiction, and comply with those requirements.

Special Olympics respects the right of athletes to have the full range of human relationships available to other human beings. This policy shall not be interpreted as a limitation on the rights of athletes, but only as a restriction on Special Olympics staff and volunteers.

IMPLEMENTATION

All Special Olympics organizations (e.g., SOI, Programs, and GOCs) shall implement the policy immediately.

*The terms “Special Olympics athlete” and “athlete” refer to persons with intellectual disabilities. The term “volunteer” includes Unified Partners.

** Class B/C “athletes who are volunteers” refers to those who have only casual or limited contact with athletes, such as Committee members and officials, and those who volunteer for Special Olympics for a single day or for a single event, thus having limited contact with Special Olympics athletes.

FREQUENTLY ASKED QUESTIONS

1. **Q.** If an athlete is dating a volunteer or staff person who does not have intellectual disability, does the athlete have to stop participating in Special Olympics.

A. No. The policy does not require that the athlete end his or her participation in Special Olympics.

2. **Q.** Can an athlete who is also a volunteer or staff person date an athlete who is not a volunteer or staff person?

A. Yes, as long as no authority relationship exists between them. If an athlete acting as a volunteer or staff person wants to date a participating athlete, the Program’s CEO (or comparable position) must evaluate the relationship and determine whether an authority relationship exists between the athlete acting as a volunteer or staff person and the other athlete. If there is not an authority relationship, the athlete acting as a volunteer or staff person may date the other athlete.

3. **Q.** Do any other organizations have similar policies?

A. Yes, policies like this are common. The Arc and AAMR each has a policy that provides that people with intellectual disabilities have the right to “Protection from sexual harassment as well as from physical, sexual, and emotional abuse and sexual relationships with paid staff.” Many organizations, including youth sports organizations, high schools, colleges, and universities, forbid relationships such as young athletes or students dating persons in positions of authority such as teachers, professors, and coaches. Since Special Olympics is a volunteer-driven movement, our policy covers volunteers as well staff.

4. **Q.** What if the CEO decides that the athlete in a volunteer or staff position has influence over the Special Olympics athlete?

A. The athlete acting as a volunteer or staff person would have to stop dating the other athlete or stop serving as a volunteer or staff member in an authority relationship, either by changing jobs or by no longer being a volunteer or staff member.

5. **Q.** Can an athlete who is a “day-of ” volunteer date another athlete?
- A.** Yes, an athlete who is a day-of volunteer may date a Special Olympics athlete. The policy does not apply to athletes who are “day-of” volunteers. It is assumed that a person who only volunteers for the day-of an event has no influence over persons with intellectual disability.
6. **Q.** Can an athlete who is a staff person or volunteer married to another athlete keep volunteering or working for Special Olympics?
- A.** Yes. The policy doesn’t apply to athletes who are married.
7. **Q.** Can a Unified Partner date an athlete?
- A.** No. A Unified Partner is treated the same as any other volunteer or staff person who is not a person with intellectual disability.
8. **Q.** Why does Special Olympics need an athlete dating policy?
- A.** Many U.S. Special Olympics Programs already have rules against dating between athletes and volunteers or staff. There was a need to formalize that practice.