

USASF COMMITTEE FOR TEAMS WITH SPECIAL NEEDS

PURPOSE:

To provide rules and safety guidelines, understanding and specialized training for coaches and assistants of athletes with Special Needs; to enhance the benefit of their positive life experiences through All Star Cheer and Dance.

GOALS:

- Provide athletic training to children and adults with intellectual and physical disabilities.
- Create a program that gives athletes with special needs the opportunity to develop physical fitness, demonstrate courage and determination, experience joy and success, and participate in the social aspects of friendship and teamwork in a safe and encouraging environment.
- Develop scoring philosophy for future development of recommended score sheets

Chairs

Justin Carrier, USASF Board of Directors
Glenda Broderick, USASF Southeast Regional Director

Committee Members

Alexis Trost - Energizers Dance Team	Jodi Kandle - Cheergyms.com
Ann Lehrmann - Cheer & Dance Extreme	Kimberly Dickenson - Cheer Express
David Owens - Empire Elite	Nicole Fusaro - Pacific Coast Magic
Gregory Collins - Cheer & Dance Extreme	Pam Swope - Storm Elite All Stars
Jeff Leforce - Oklahoma Twisters	Sharon Myrick - Maryland Twisters
Vanessa Graziano - Peak Athletics	

GETTING STARTED

- ✓ Review this handbook
- ✓ Utilize tools and resources provided and seek additional guidance from professionals
- ✓ Connect with coaches of athletes with special needs for advice
- ✓ Educate and train coaches in your program
- ✓ Visit local competitions that offer divisions for teams with special needs to observe
- ✓ Follow USASF Membership requirements.

(Athletes with special needs do not pay a USASF Membership fee, but must be registered within a Program File. Contact your Regional Director for assistance.)

PLEASE NOTE: This handbook is provided as a resource for USASF members and is not intended to be fully inclusive of all considerations for working with people with special needs. Members should further consult doctors and/or other professionals for advice regarding additional concerns that might affect a program for athletes with special needs.

TOOLS & RESOURCES

These links and documents are provided as a great starting place for you and your fellow coaches as you work with your athletes with special needs.

People First Training

The Disability is Natural website offers many resources including education on People First Language. PFL represents more respectful, accurate ways of communicating. People with disabilities are not their diagnoses or disabilities; they are people, first. Filled with stories, newsletters, articles and even an online store, *Disability is Natural* encourages new ways of thinking and an inclusive approach to working with people with special needs. See People First Language article and chart posted in Member Resources and visit: disabilityisnatural.com.

Seizure Training

Located in Member Resources, the Epilepsy Foundation has provided information for recognizing seizures, knowing proper first aid and when a seizure is a medical emergency. For more information, visit epilepsy.com

Special Olympics Coach Education Training

The Human Kinetics Coach Education Center offers an online course that prepares coaches to use their sport-specific knowledge in coaching athletes with intellectual disabilities. Follow this link to [take the course online](#):

AED/CPR National Safety Training

Online training and certification for Automated External Defibrillator (AED) and Cardiopulmonary Resuscitation (CPR). Follow this link to [take the course online](#).

NCSI Background Check

As part of USASF Professional Membership for coaches, a background check administered by National Center for Safety Initiatives. Instructions are in the Coach Membership area of Member Resources.

Recommended Training:

The USASF recommends that coaches receive at least the following training:

- ✓ **Coaches age 18 and over**
- ✓ People First Training
- ✓ Seizure Training
- ✓ AED/CPR National Safety Training
First Aid Training
- Assistants ages 15-18**
- ✓ People First Training
- ✓ Seizure Training

Mandatory Training:

The USASF requires the following:

- ✓ **Cheer Coaches age 18 and over**
- ✓ USASF Cheer Coach Credentialing
USASF Professional Membership with background check
- ✓ Concussion Training
- Dance Coaches age 18 and over**
- ✓ USASF Professional Membership with background check
- ✓ Concussion Training

Scoring & Safety: Cheer

A. For competitive Special Athlete divisions, Assistants are not permitted to be in direct contact with any building skill, tumbling skill, or motion.

B. For competitive Special Athlete divisions, the Assistants are permitted to guide sight impaired athletes and athletes in wheel chairs around the floor during transitions and formation changes.

The scoring philosophy was developed by the Special Needs Committee to facilitate concise communication, consistent adjudication and clear expectations for the performers.

The Special Athlete division is unique to other All Star divisions as it encompasses a wide range of abilities and skill levels. For that reason, the Special Needs committee asks that Event Producers implement a score sheet that rewards strong technique and independent performances with Gold, Silver and Bronze based on a range of scores. Bronze 60 - 99 Silver 80- 89 Gold -90-100. This will encourage teams to compete to better their performance each time they take the competition floor.

Score sheets for Special Athletes will be available to USASF Member Event Producers to utilize at their events. Special Athlete score sheets are located in the Member Resource section of the Event Producer Member USASF profile.

Safety Guidelines are posted on USASF.net under the "Safety" tab in the "Cheer" column.

IMPORTANT TERMS

Action Plan: Plan of necessary steps when dealing with seizures.

Adaptation: The action or process of adapting or being adapted. The adaptation of teaching strategy to meet athletes' needs

Assisted/Independent: *Assisted:* Performing action with physical help from coach or assistant. *Independent:* Performing action without assistance.

Assistant: Volunteers assisting with teams with Special Needs to include helpers, Best Buddies, team moms, etc.

Atlantoaxial Instability: (AAI) is characterized by excessive movement at the junction between the atlas (C1) and axis (C2) as a result of either a bony or ligamentous abnormality. Neurologic symptoms can occur when the spinal cord or adjacent nerve roots are involved. Most often associated with Down Syndrome.

Assessment Plan: The collecting and bringing together of information about an athlete's needs which may include social, psychological and athletic evaluations to determine an athlete's strengths and weaknesses in order to develop his or her athlete plan.

Attention Deficit (Hyperactivity) Disorder: A disorder characterized by the inability to maintain attention for a period of time.

Autism Spectrum: A condition characterized by severe language and communication delays as well as social delays.

Behaviors: Moods, habits and actions.

Cheer Coach Credentialing: The USASF Cheer Coach Credentialing Program examines, tests and certifies the knowledge, expertise and proficiency that a cheer coach possesses to safely teach building and/or tumbling skills in Levels 1-5. Current USASF Career Members who are 18 years or older are eligible for the credentialing program.

Expressive/Receptive Communication: *Expressive* language means being able to put thoughts into words and sentences, in a way that makes sense and is grammatically accurate. *Receptive* language means the ability to understand or comprehend language heard or read.

Dance Coach Credentialing: The USASF Dance Coach Credentialing Program educates and tests coaches on foundational coaching principles, confirms previous field experience and offers a choice of emphasis in one or more genre specialties including jazz, pom and hip hop. The successful completion of classes and testing, along with confirmation of practical field experience, will certify that a coach possesses the knowledge, proficiency and experience to teach the material presented. Current USASF Professional Members who are 18 years or older are eligible for the credentialing program.

Developmentally Delayed: A term used to describe a student who may demonstrate delays in several areas of development.

Down Syndrome: A congenital disorder arising from a chromosome defect, causing intellectual impairment and physical abnormalities including short stature and a broad facial profile. It arises from a defect involving chromosome 21, usually an extra copy (trisomy-21).

Emotional Disturbance: A behavior problem which prevents learning and/or getting along with others; the behavior must have continued for a minimum of six months and be characterized as severe.

Fine/Gross Motor Skills: *Fine* motor skills are small movements, such as picking up small objects and holding a spoon, that use the small muscles of the fingers, toes, wrists, lips, and tongue. *Gross* motor skills are the bigger movements, such as rolling over and sitting, that use the large muscles in the arms, legs, torso, and feet.

Intellectual Disability (ID): A disability marked by significantly below average intellectual functioning and often accompanied by deficits in adaptive behavior and adversely affects the child's educational performance.

Occupational Therapy (OT): A related service to assist a child with motor delays.

Other Health Impaired: A disability which affects learning in due to chronic health problems. (OHI)

Orthopedically Handicapped: A condition involving the neuromuscular skeletal system that affects the ability to move, as in paralysis or cerebral palsy.

People First Language/Diversity Training: Terminology used when describing or talking about anyone with a disability.

Personal Space: The physical space immediately surrounding someone, feels uncomfortable for them.

Physical Therapy: A therapeutic related service to support a child with their gait and mobility.

Process Time: Amount of time takes for athlete to receive and accept information

Spotter: A Coach or Assistant associated with the team that is wearing jeans or dark pants and either a white or black shirt with or without team logo. These additional spotters must be stationary, may not be involved with any other skill or choreography when the transition is initiated and must maintain visual contact with the top person throughout the entire transition.

Socialization: The process by which children and adults learn from others. We begin learning from others during the early days of life; and most people continue their social learning all through life (unless some mental or physical disability slows or stops the learning process).

Seizures: Brief excessive discharge of electrical activity in the brain that alters one or more of the following: Movement, Sensation, Behaviors and Awareness

Support: Parent, Guardian, Aid, Caregiver

Stimuli: Sensitivity to environmental and all four senses - sight, sound, touch, smell.

Traumatic Brain Injury (TBI): A disability characterized by an injury to the brain, such that the injury affects the child's educational performance.

Triggers: Factors that can lead to a seizure.

Visual Schedule: Pictures that help the athlete understand verbal cues.

Visual Impairment (VI): A disability characterized by blindness or limited/partial sight which may impair the child's educational performance.

FREQUENTLY ASKED QUESTIONS

Is there someone I can talk to who has done this before?

YES! A great place to start is by joining the USASF: Teams With Special Needs Facebook group. It's a closed group, so click on "Join Group" and a group administrator will review and approve your request.

Who do I ask when I have questions about performances, like ramps for wheelchairs, strobe lights, awards, etc.?

Contact the Event Producer that is organizing the event your team will be attending.

Are we allowed to pick up the athletes and/or restrain them?

This should be discussed with parent/guardian/support person. There are techniques for restraint and coaches should be trained to handle restraining if authorized or suggested by parent.

Who should go through the Special Olympics Coach training?

The committee recommends every volunteer 18 years of age and older take the training on the Special Olympics website. There is valuable information for everyone to learn and it shows your parents that you have taken measures to ensure a standard of care for their athlete.

Is there an age limit for athletes with special needs?

There is not a minimum or maximum age requirement. Contact your Regional Director for assistance with entering athletes with special needs into your organization profile. (USASF.net /regional_directors/)

How do I register the athletes with the USASF?

Athletes with special needs do not pay athlete membership fees. The program must create the Athlete profile from the home page of the Program profile under ADD ATHLETE. No birth certificate is required since there is no age restrictions. Contact your Regional Director for assistance. (USASF.net /regional_directors/)

How many volunteers should I have?

There is no required or recommended amount of volunteers. Some programs have a volunteer for each individual, but there is no standard requirement.

Am I allowed to share the information collected on the Assessment Form with coaches and assistants?

The committee highly recommends that you get approval in writing from the parent/guardian/supports. There is a section on Assessment Form that gives permission to share all information.

What is the difference between assisted and non-assisted?

Assisted teams have assistants that lead athletes on the floor, move any body part for the athlete, hold building skills or spot tumbling. Non-assisted means there are no assistants on the floor assisting in any capacity other than spotting a building skill.

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B. For competitive Special Athlete divisions, the Assistants are allowed to guide sight impaired athletes and athletes in wheel chairs around the floor during transitions and formation changes.

Where can I find affordable uniforms, shoes and other items for the athletes?

A great resource is the Teams With Special Needs Facebook group mentioned above.

Do special needs athletes pay to perform at events?

Contact the event you plan to attend to inquire about fees.

Do all cheer coaches have to be credentialed to Level 2 or just the Head Coach?

The committee highly recommendeds that all coaches over the age of 18 be credentialed to at least Level 2.

I have been through a complete background screening with fingerprints. May I use that for the background check requirement or do I have to do it again?

The USASF requires a background check through NCSI.

Does the Special Olympics certification expire?

No, this certification does not expire.