



Unified Sports Teammate Guidelines

The best team is one in which all teammates (athletes and partners) play a meaningful role and contribute to the success of that team.

On a good Unified Sports team, everyone:

Makes a Commitment – Joining a team is fun, but it also comes with a serious commitment as others rely on you. Regardless of the Unified Sports model, each Special Olympics Unified Sports team is expected to train and compete at least eight to ten weeks before the culminating competition. Practice is essential to the development of physical conditioning, sports skills, game strategies, teamwork and team spirit. Each team member must attend practice regularly.

Knows the Rules – All Special Olympics Unified Sports competitions are conducted according to a specific set of rules. Learning these rules and competing by them in a sportsmanlike manner ensures a positive experience. This also applies to rules that may be modified by the Special Olympics Program for the Unified Sports Player Development teams. Contact your local Program to determine if there are additional rules modifications being used.

Does their Best – Every competitor on a Unified Sports team should compete to the best of his or her abilities within the framework of the team. Team members who are unable to meaningfully contribute to the team should be placed on a Unified Sports Player Development team or asked to support the team in another manner (such as Fans in the Stands, team manager, assistant coach, etc.) as appropriate. The coach should then recruit another individual whose abilities are similar to the other members on the team.

Is a Good Teammate and Team Player – It is the teammate's responsibility to establish peer relationships with the other team members and to compete within the framework established by the coach. Practices and competitions are only part of the experience of sports. Utilize time before or after organized team activities to get to know teammates.

Suggested Standards for Unified Sports Team Membership (athletes and partners):

- 1) Each team member must attend a minimum of 80 percent of team practices.
- 2) Transportation to practices is typically the responsibility of each individual. Participants who drive may help transport others on the team, but this is not one of the criteria for membership on the team.
- 3) Determining team strategy and directing individual involvement is the role of the coach, not the partners. All players must respect each other's equality as teammates and allow the coach to provide primary leadership of the team.
- 4) When the Unified Sports team attends a game tournament or other event:
- 5) The coach will make exceptions to Guideline#4 on an individual basis. Under no circumstances will exceptions be made that significantly diminish the goals of team unity.
 - a) All members are expected to travel together as a team.
 - b) All members are expected to stay together as a team.
 - c) All members are expected to attend related activities (such as Opening Ceremonies, Olympic Town, Dances and Clinics) as a team.
 - d) If an overnight stay is involved, all team members will be housed together in the same hotel, dormitory, etc. the coach, based on input from team members, makes room assignments.

Note: During extended events (for example, World Games), policies and procedures may be established that allow team members to participate in some activities outside of the delegation.

"Within a short amount of time, it gets blended together and teammates are off to the job of playing basketball or softball. The idea of being 'special' gets lost." – Fred McNulty, Special Education Director