

SPECIAL OLYMPICS NEW JERSEY TERMINOLOGY GUIDELINES

Words can open doors to enable persons with disabilities to lead fuller, more independent lives. Words can also create barriers or stereotypes that are not only demeaning to persons with disabilities, but which may rob them of their individuality.

Experts in developmental disability for use have developed the following language guidelines by anyone writing or speaking about persons with disabilities to ensure that all people are portrayed with individuality and dignity.

Correct Terminology

A person has a developmental disability, rather than is suffering from, afflicted with, or a victim of developmental disability. **Correct terminology is "individuals, persons or people with developmental disabilities."**

A person uses a wheelchair rather than is confined or restricted to a wheelchair.

Down syndrome has replaced "Down's Syndrome" or Mongoloid.

A person is physically challenged or disabled rather than crippled.

Someone who is partially-sighted is visually impaired rather than blind.

A person is hearing impaired rather than deaf or deaf mute.

A person has a seizure rather than a fit.

A person has a seizure disorder or epilepsy; he/she is not epileptic.

Refer to participants in Special Olympics as athletes. [DO NOT REFER TO THEM AS SPECIAL OLYMPIANS BUT RATHER SPECIAL OLYMPICS ATHLETES]. In no case should the word appear in quotation marks.

In writing, refer to persons with disabilities in the same style as persons without disabilities: full name on first reference and last name on subsequent references. Resist the temptation to refer an individual with developmental disability as "Bill" rather than in journalistically correct "Bill Smith" or "Smith".

Do Not Use the Following Terminology

Do not use "kids" when referring to Special Olympics athletes, as it does not appropriately represent our athlete population. Adult athletes are an integral part of the Special Olympics program, and they should receive the respect that is awarded to adults.

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Do Not Use the Following Terminology (continued)

Do not use the adjective unfortunate when speaking about persons with developmental disabilities. Disabling conditions need not be life defining in a negative way.

Do not use the word "the" before Special Olympics unless describing a specific Special Olympics event.

Do not sensationalize the accomplishments of people with disabilities. While these accomplishments should be recognized and applauded, people in the disability rights movement have tried to make the public aware of the negative impact of referring to the achievements of or mentally challenged people with excessive hyperbole.

Do not use the word "special" when talking about people with developmental disabilities.

What to Emphasize When Writing or Speaking About Special Olympics

- * Special Olympics provides year-round sports -training and competition for children and adults with mental retardation or closely related developmental disabilities.
- * These athletes, who may or may not have a physical disability, represent programs from over 165 countries from all the major continents.
- * Special Olympics operates on funds raised at the international, national, state and local levels from corporations, individuals, special events and grants.
- * Special Olympics is sports, competitions and socialization; meaning the benefits include fitness, coordination and cardiovascular improvements, and also confidence, self-esteem and fun.
- * From the start, Special Olympics has made training the priority and has established strict guidelines to insure that every athlete receives quality training before competing.
- * To improve the quality of training, Special Olympics instituted a program of coaches training and curriculum and certification in 1981.
- * Every athlete who competes in Special Olympics events will compete against athletes of similar ability, since athletes are placed in competition divisions according to previous times scores, age and where appropriate, gender.

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Terminology & Myths

Special Olympics serves the needs of athletes of all ability levels. Including those with more profound mental retardation or closely related development disabilities and those having physical disabilities in addition to mental retardation, as well as, high-functioning athletes who may be able to move into mainstream sports or participate in Unified Sports Leagues.

Special Olympics Outreach is and on-going movement... it's natural evolution of a program which began small and gained momentum rapidly to spread around the world. Special Olympics programs has, in the past five years, achieved goals of improving the quality of competitions and training by offering age appropriate sports and developing programs for all ability levels. And that now - thanks to the dedication and hard work of Special Olympics staff and volunteers - the system is in place to reach out and accommodate all eligible and interested individuals.

Worldwide, there are an estimated 190 million people with mental retardation, seven million in the U.S.

MYTHS

Many people assume that a handicapped person with one disability has multiple disabilities. For example, it is frequently assumed that a person in a wheelchair also possesses a mental impairment. However, most physically handicapped people are not mentally impaired. Similarly, only a small percentage of mentally handicapped people have physical limitations. We can all play an important role in dispelling Myths or popular misconceptions about mentally handicapped people, who are only limited by someone else's unchallenging expectations of them.

Special Olympics has at times been criticized as a program that promotes segregation of individuals with developmental disabilities rather than integration or "mainstreaming" with the rest of society. The fact is that Special Olympics provides competition for individuals with commensurate ability thus giving each athlete a reasonable chance to win. However, participation in the program provides many opportunities for interaction with persons other than athletes (coaches, volunteers, and spectators) during the competitions and special activities. Beyond that, it allows these individuals to be presented to society in the light of achievement focusing on their abilities and not just their disabilities.