



Policy: Athlete and Chaperone Housing

Date: July 2013

Special Olympics is an athlete-centered movement that welcomes athletes with intellectual disabilities of all abilities to participate in sports training and competition. Special Olympics is inclusive for all persons with intellectual disabilities over the age of eight and offers a Young Athletes program for individuals with intellectual disabilities under the age of eight.

The health and safety of all Special Olympics participants is of paramount importance to Special Olympics. Participants should feel that every Special Olympics event is a safe and positive experience and should not be fearful of other athletes, coaches or volunteers.

Arranging housing for overnight events involves the consideration of a variety of factors, including the varying abilities, ages and behaviors of athletes, the availability of housing and the costs associated with overnight accommodations. Special Olympics Virginia area programs and staff are required to meet the minimum policy requirements as outlined below. (*Chaperones refer to any volunteer who is registered with the delegation that has a chaperoning role- coach, chaperone or unified partner.*)

Policy Requirements

- 1.) **Gender** – Athletes and chaperones may not share a room with an athlete or chaperone of the opposite sex. Area programs may allow an exception to this rule if one of the following situations is applicable:
 - a. Married athletes who are both attending the event as members of the registered delegation. This exception does not apply to the spouse of an athlete who is not participating in the event, but attending solely as a spectator.
 - b. Married chaperones who are both attending the event as members of the delegation. This exception does not apply if one of the chaperones is required to share a room with an athlete (other than the married couple's child), as this scenario will create a situation whereby an athlete is housed with a chaperone of the opposite sex.
 - c. Family members or guardians (i.e., group home chaperones) of the opposite sex who serve as a one-to-one chaperone for the athlete.

- d. Housing in a facility that has multiple private rooms in addition to living spaces (such as condominium or dormitory). Both males and females may be assigned to one facility, if necessary, but private rooms may not be shared by individuals of the opposite sex. Chaperones must be housed in the facility and the chaperone/athlete ratio must be maintained.
 - e. Use of barracks or other facility (such as a gym) where a large number of individuals are assigned to the same space. Athletes and chaperones must be separated as much as possible by gender.
- 2.) **Age** – Athletes who are 14 and under may only stay with other athletes 14 and under and athletes who are 15 and over may only stay with athletes 15 and over, even with a chaperone assigned to the room.
- 3.) **Supervision** – The minimum chaperone/athlete ratio of at least one properly registered chaperone to every four athletes must be maintained for all overnight events. Special Olympics Virginia does allow a maximum ratio of one chaperone to three athletes. It is up to the local program to decide on the amount of chaperones that are needed for all overnight events.
- 4.) **Chaperone Eligibility** – All Special Olympics Virginia chaperones attending overnight events must be Class A certified in order to attend with the delegation. Class A certification means that a chaperone must have completed and passed a background check and the online protective behaviors test. This certification must be completed every three years to maintain eligibility. This is mandated by our insurance company, American Specialty, and there are no exceptions to this rule.
- 5.) **Athlete Eligibility** – All Special Olympics Virginia athletes attending overnight events must have a completed Special Olympics Virginia Application and Release on file. This application must be updated every three years in order to maintain eligibility for overnight events.
- 6.) **Young Athletes** – Young Athlete events that involve overnight activities require increased supervision and therefore, Young Athlete participants must be accompanied by a properly registered and screened parent or guardian. Young Athlete chaperone quota will be separate from the other quota so as to not affect the minimum and maximum supervision ratios.
- 7.) **Non registered participants** – Special Olympics Virginia encourages family members and friends to attend all events as spectators. People who are not registered to attend with your delegation are not permitted to stay in housing, even if the person is a family member or guardian. Again, the safety of our athletes and chaperones are of utmost importance not only to your delegation, but others who are staying in the hotel as well. Special Olympics Virginia must ensure that everyone who is staying with the delegation is an approved Class A volunteer. Failure to comply with this will cause your delegation

to incur additional fees and may place yourself and/or your delegation on probation at future events.

- 8.) **Hired Drivers/Bus Drivers** – Hired drivers/bus drivers are not allowed to stay in rooms with athletes or other chaperones. Hired drivers/bus drivers must stay in their own rooms. You may room drivers of the same sex together. Bus driver's names are not needed on registration, but they must be registered as "Bus Driver" on the Unassigned Chaperones registration page and must be labeled on the housing sheet as the same.
- 9.) **Policy Implementation** – The local program's designated HOD is responsible for implementing the policy at events and ensuring the individuals within the delegation are familiar with the policy and are following the policy.

Best Practices

Local programs should consider the following best practices when assigning housing for their delegation.

- 1.) Consider matching athletes by size, level of maturity, ability and age, keeping within the assigned age groupings. (I.e., you may not want to put a 15 year old athlete with a 40 year old athlete.)
- 2.) Whenever possible, each member of the delegation should be assigned their own bed. If bed sharing is required of chaperones and athletes, consider having the chaperone pack a sleeping bag or use extra hotel blankets and sleep on top of the linens on the bed.
- 3.) Ensure that athletes know how to find a chaperone at all hours of the night by putting either color pieces of paper on doors to designate rooms with chaperones or by putting up signs on doors with chaperones and athletes first or last names only. It is not recommended to put anyone's first and last names on doors.
- 4.) Do not prop doors open as this could encourage theft and the possibility of people that athletes are unfamiliar with entering their rooms.