



*Special Olympics*

# Snowshoeing

Coaching  
Guide  
2021



# Acknowledgements

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Special Olympics snowshoeing welcomes your ideas and comments for future revisions of this guide. We apologize, if, for any reason, an acknowledgement has been inadvertently omitted.

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# Welcome

## ***Welcome to the Special Olympics Snowshoe Coaching Guide 2021***

This guide will aim to provide coaches with valuable information to improve their knowledge and skills, or to get them started as coaches within Special Olympics (SO) Snowshoe. Throughout this guide you will find a variety of other information relating to coaching the sport, such as safety, preparation and sportsmanship.

This guide should be read in conjunction with the [Special Olympics Snowshoe Sport Rules](#) document and the [Special Olympics Sports Rules Article 1](#).

Keep in mind, that this guide is just one resource which may be useful to you as you progress through your career as a coach. As you develop your own style of coaching, you will find other books, websites, magazines and coaches, which will help to shape your approach to coaching. Always be curious! Always be open to new ideas! Always keep your athletes at the heart of your coaching!



# What is Snowshoeing?

Snowshoeing is quickly becoming a favorite for outdoor winter activity. Combining aerobic activity with ease of walking over snow without sinking in, snowshoeing is an activity for all ages. Snowshoe races are part of the Arctic Winter Games and the winter Special Olympics.

Special Olympics snowshoeing is a track and running competition on snow. Part of the appeal of snowshoeing is its simplicity. If you can walk, you can snowshoe! If you can run, you can snowshoe faster. Many of the techniques to better snowshoeing are subtle, and you can become almost an expert by mastering the skills here. Then it becomes a matter of practice and conditioning if your athletes wish to improve.

## Events Offered in Sport

25 Meter Race	5K Race
50 Meter Race	10 K Race
100 Meter Race	4 x 100 Meter Relay Race
200 Meter Race	4 x 400 Meter Relay Race
400 Meter Race	4 x 100 Meter Unified Sports Relay Race
800 Meter Race	4 x 400 Meter Unified Sports Relay Race
1600 Meter Race	

The [Official Special Olympics Sports Rules for Snowshoeing](#) provides details of the rules, but to get started, the coach and athletes will need to know the basics.



# Basics of Snowshoeing

## **Snowshoe Attire:**

Clothing must be appropriate to the weather conditions. It is best to dress in layers so you can add or subtract clothes as needed. Always bring too many clothes instead of too few.

## **Socks**

It is suggested that a wool or blended-material ski or hiking sock be used for snowshoeing. It is recommended that liner socks made of synthetic or natural fibers be worn underneath insulated socks. The liners will help wick away perspiration and moisture from the foot and add more insulation layers of air. The liners will also absorb the friction between the feet and outer socks to prevent blisters.

## **Footwear**

Any type of shoe can be used for snowshoeing. Lightweight shoes such as running shoes are popular for snowshoe athletes.

The heavier the shoe, the more weight the back will feel while running.

Boots may be used in colder weather, but be sure that there is flexibility in the ankles and that the boot can remain securely attached to the foot while walking and running.



*i: Boots for snowshoeing*

The most important thing is to keep the feet dry and comfortable. It is recommended that the shoes fit comfortably with the socks that will be worn while snowshoeing.



The key in snowshoeing is that the boot or shoe is the interface with the snowshoe. The snowshoer's warmth comes from the exercise and layering, rather than bulky boots.



## Pants and Tops

Incorporate the three-layer system.

### 1. Inside Layer

The inside (or inner or base) layer is the wicking layer. Long underwear made of synthetic materials, natural materials (silk) or treated materials will remove perspiration from the body. A wicking layer should cover both the upper and lower body. A shirt that covers the neck and fits snugly at the wrists is an effective way to conserve body heat.

*ii: Shoe attached to a snowshoe*

### 2. Middle Layer

The middle layer should be an insulating layer and consist of wool (sweater or pants), fleece (top or bottom) or treated material. Synthetic insulations or phase change treatments have also proven to be lightweight but very effective. This layer provides warmth by trapping a layer of air around the body.

**NOTE:** Except in extremely cold conditions, the legs do not need and would be constricted by this layer.

### 3. Outer Layer

Wind and snow are blocked by the weatherproof outer layer. For the legs, nylon wind pants are good. If wind pants are not available, choose looser-fitting synthetic sweatpants.

A lined windbreaker or warm-up jacket works well on top. Clothing that uses laminates that are waterproof, windproof and breathable (allowing perspiration to leave the body) can be useful. Snowshoes tend to kick up loose snow on the legs and back, and this is best shed by a slick and smooth nylon outer layer.

When deciding upon clothing for competition, consider the ability of your athlete, the weather and the distance of the event. For optimal competition, strive to dress your athlete in clothing that is lightweight, breathable, layered and slick on the outer surface, and that allows unrestrictive movement.



### Accessories

Additional accessories can be beneficial for snowshoe athletes during training and competition. Accessories such as:

1. Hats
2. Gloves
3. Goggles/Sunglasses



*iv: Gloves*



*v: Goggles*



*iii: Polarized Sunglasses*



## **Snowshoeing Equipment:**

Securing proper equipment is essential for good, safe snowshoeing, so getting the correct type of snowshoe is the most important decision to make. There are two types of snowshoes: traditional wooden-framed snowshoes and metal snowshoes which are made from aluminum, rubber, and other “high tech” materials. To be competitive, it is recommended that a snowshoe specifically produced for competition be used.

### **Snowshoes**

Shoe weight and size are critical in snowshoeing. A narrower frame is better to keep the weight centered and the legs directly beneath the torso.

Everyone will sink in dry, powdery snow no matter how big the snowshoes are, but even the heaviest athlete will be able to snowshoe in moist, compacted snow in smaller shoes. Keep the snowshoe as small as possible for the snow conditions.

[The Official Special Olympics Rules for Snowshoeing](#) state that the snowshoe frame shall not be smaller than 17.78 cm x 50.8cm (7 inches x 20 inches). This size works best for most adults.

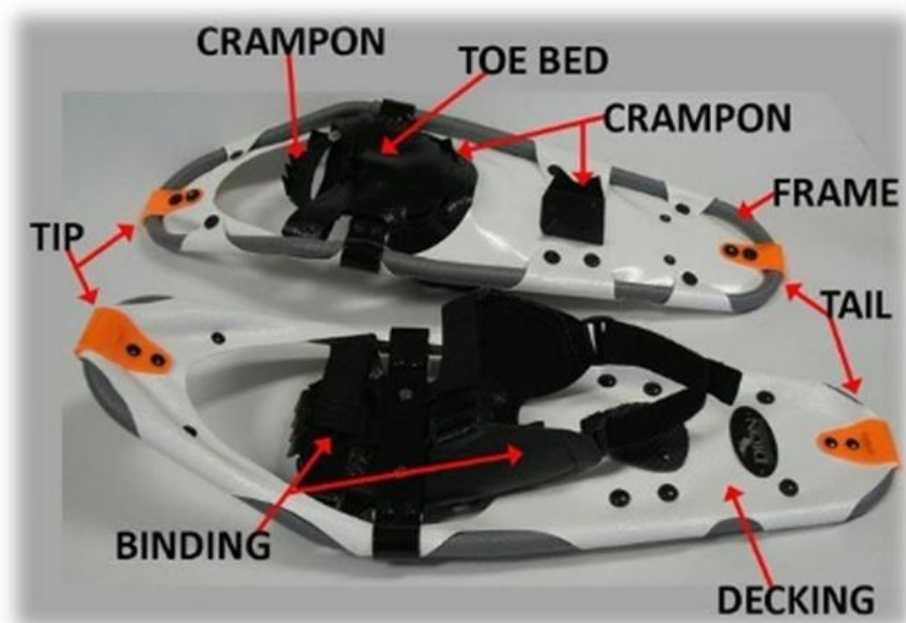


*vi: Different material snowshoes*



*vii: Snowshoe*

## Snowshoe Anatomy



### Frame

- This is the outside of the snowshoe that gives it shape.
- It is made of aluminum, wood or synthetic materials
- In a symmetrical or asymmetrical form.
  - The symmetrical frame centers the foot in the middle of the shoe
  - The asymmetrical frame is more in the shape of the foot, with a right and left shoe, allowing the feet to be closer together and eliminating the “snowshoe waddle.”

- The toe of the frame is raised up
- The tail is weighted to ensure better movement and make sure that snow does not collapse on the shoe.
- Generally, the smallest frame that allows flotation on the snow is best for racing.

### Binding System

This secures the athlete's shoe to the snowshoe. Look for a solid landing platform, little movement inside the binding, comfort and no contact with the frame.

### Pivot System

This allows for normal walking motion. There is a hole in the decking that allows the toe of the foot to go into the snow and push off while the frame remains on the surface of the snow. The pivot system on a wooden snowshoe is formed when the binding is attached to the snowshoe.

### Toe Cords

Toe cords are the part of snowshoes that connect the outer frame to the binding.

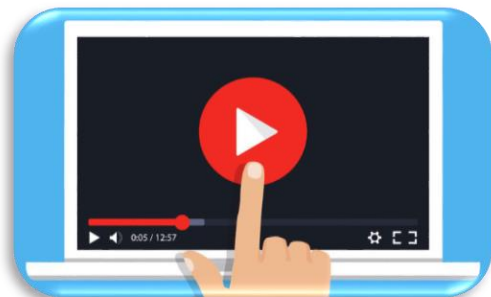
### Crampons/ Cleats or Claws (Metal Snowshoe Only)

Spikes and claws grab the snow and provide traction when conditions are slippery. They are located beneath the binding, which also allows them to aid in pushing off. Rear traction devices under the snowshoe where the heel strikes are important for downhill traction and safety.

### Putting on Snowshoes

Most modern snowshoes have nylon strap binding systems. Allow athletes to master the binding systems in warm, dry indoor areas before doing it on snow.

It is important to note that your athletes should not move on hard surfaces with snowshoes on.



*Click here to watch a video on Putting on Snowshoes*

## Teaching Points

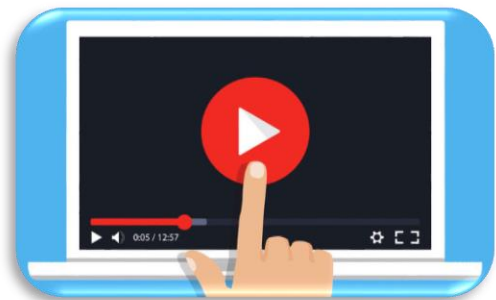
1. Begin by determining the left snowshoe from the right snowshoe. Generally, most toe and heel binding straps pull to the outside.
2. Loosen binding straps so that there is sufficient space to insert your shoe.
3. Place your foot/shoe on the snowshoe so that the ball of the foot is centered over the toe cord.
4. Most snowshoe bindings work best if you snugly tighten the straps from front to back.
5. Place the heel strap around the back of your shoe in the notch or indentation in the back of the shoe.
  - i. Keep the strap off your sock to avoid irritating your leg but high enough from the bottom sole to keep it from slipping off.
6. Pull the straps snug but not so tight that they pinch the toes and/or restrict movement and circulation.
7. Check the tightness of straps again after 3-5 minutes of snowshoeing warm-up.
8. If the snowshoes do not point straight ahead while walking or running, reposition the feet in the snowshoes at an angle and then firmly tighten the straps so the snowshoes point straight ahead.

## Removing Snowshoes

To remove snowshoes, simply reverse the order of binding-strap tightening used to put on the snowshoes.

The skill of removing snowshoes should be practiced numerous times indoors when fingers are warm.

It is important to note that your athletes should not move on hard surfaces with snowshoes on.



*Click here to watch a video on Removing Snowshoes*

## Teaching Points

1. Loosen all binding straps. Don't pull binding strap completely out.
2. Move heel strap down, off heel of shoe/ boot.
3. Take weight off foot, slide foot out of binding.
4. Repeat on other foot.
5. Make sure athletes only wear snowshoes outdoors

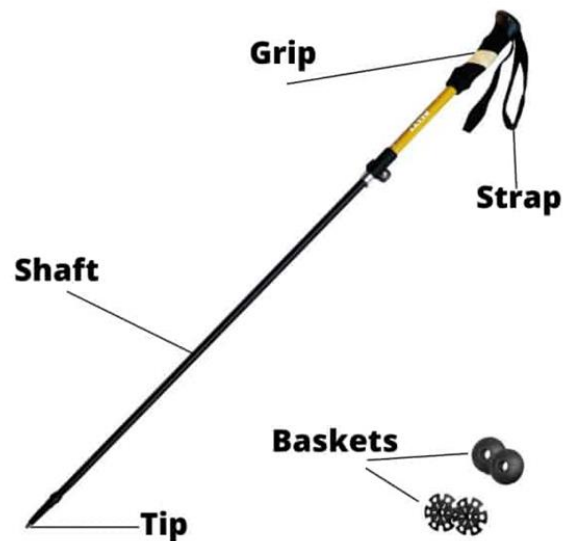


## Poles

Most snowshoers do not use poles. Snowshoes provide much more traction, flotation and stability than a regular shoe, which helps most athletes negotiate slick, loose, deep and uneven snow with ease.

Try to get your athletes to snowshoe without poles, if possible. Using poles is another action to coordinate when snowshoeing, and this will take more energy and motor control. If an individual can walk and run without poles when not wearing snowshoes, then he or she can snowshoe without poles.

Certain athletes with very poor balance, strength or coordination may benefit from using poles. Ski poles that are long enough to reach from the ground to the elbow when the arm is hanging at rest are the proper length.



# Snowshoe Fitness Section

## Fit 5 + Other Special Olympics Resources

Special Olympics provides a range of fantastic fitness resources that coaches and athletes can use to educate themselves on best practice around physical activity, nutrition and hydration.

There are many health-related and performance-related benefits of fitness for Special Olympics athletes.

### **Benefits of Fitness for Athletes**

- Enhanced sport performance through improved
  - Endurance/stamina.
  - Speed and agility.
  - Strength and power.
  - Flexibility.
  - Healthy weight.
- Increased energy level, improved focus, and better recovery after practices & games.
- Reduced risk for sport-related injuries.
- Decreased risk for illnesses and chronic diseases.

## Physical Activity Outside of Special Olympics

It is vital that Special Olympics programs are not the only source of physical activity and exercise for athletes. As a coach, you should be encouraging your athletes to exercise every day and educate them on ways to stay active outside of organized sport practice.

There are numerous ways that athletes can exercise to stay healthy when they are at home. Walking, running, and biking are simple ways an athlete can exercise on their own and work on their cardiovascular fitness. Fitness classes like yoga, core strength,



HIIT and many others are great ways for athlete to work on their fitness and physical health outside of organized sports practice.

Special Olympics offers the Fit 5 Guide for athletes and coaches to use. As a coach it is a great resource to use when educating your athletes on the benefits of physical activity to their overall health and to their sports performance.

## **Fit 5**

The [Fit 5 Guide](#) is a plan for physical activity, nutrition and hydration that can help to improve athletes' health and fitness and make them the best athlete they can be. The Fit 5 Guide and accompanying [Fitness Cards](#) provide a fantastic collection of exercises that athletes should do to assist them to improve the skills needed for their sport. The exercises included focus on Endurance, Strength, Flexibility and Balance.



*Figure 8: Fit 5 Fitness Cards*

In addition to these resources, there are a number of videos available [here](#) for athletes and coaches to view and use when performing these exercises as part of their training plans.

## **Nutrition**

Eating right is important to your health and your sports performance. Nutrition and hydration are key points of athlete preparation and recovery for all forms of exercise. However, most athletes don't understand the connection between nutrition/hydration and sports performance. As a coach, it is important that you emphasize this connection and educate your athletes on correct habits. This is especially important for Special Olympics athletes, as they are at a higher risk for obesity.

It is vital to educate snowshoers about the importance of timing their meals or snacks prior to training or competition. Inform your athletes of the risk of eating too close to the time they are to train or compete, and educate them on the best times and foods to eat to ensure they are efficiently fuelled to perform.

It is recommended to have your last meal or snack at least 90 minutes before completing any exercise. This ensures the athlete can digest the food and it will be available as a fuel source for them when training or competing.

You can utilize the nutrition and hydration section in the [Fit 5 Guide](#) to educate your athletes on basic principles. The nutrition, hydration and exercise tracker can help your athletes to pay more attention to these elements at home.

**Task:** Consider taking 5 minutes at the end of practice to cover nutrition and hydration tips. Educate parents and carers on the information that's shared with athletes so they can help athletes eat healthy at home.



Figure 10: Nutrition Section - Fit 5 Guide

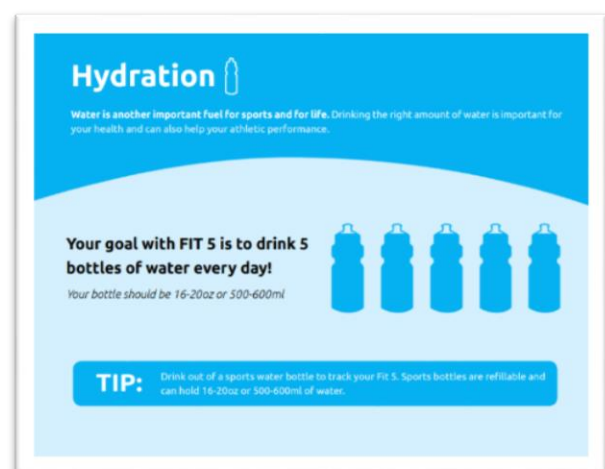


Figure 9: Hydration Section - Fit 5 Guide

## Hydration

Water is another important fuel for sports and for life. Drinking the right amount of water is important for your health and can also help your athletic performance. Coaches should be educating their athletes about the benefits of drinking enough water every day.

The [Fit 5 Guide](#) has a hydration section which provides information for coaches about quantities of water that athletes should be consuming, signs of dehydration in athletes, and the best choice athletes can make when looking for a drink.

As a snowshoe coach it is important to help your athletes keep on track with their hydration. Coaches should encourage athletes to take responsibility for their own hydration before, during and after training.

The body's thirst signals may be a bit delayed in cold weather, but athletes will still be losing water through sweating and open mouth breathing. Encourage athletes to drink one bottle of water (16-20oz/500-600ml) an hour or two before practice so they show up fully hydrated. Remember to pause for drinks breaks during a training session. We would recommend **pausing every 15-20 minutes** to give your athletes the chance to rehydrate as they are losing water while exercising. Encourage your **athletes to drink one bottle of water** (16-20oz/500-600ml) during a training session to make sure they do not get dehydrated. When drinking, athletes should take many small sips of water instead of gulping it down as this can sit in their stomachs and cause discomfort when exercising! Encourage athletes to drink water after practice to help them recover from their workout.



## **Snowshoe Warm-Ups and Cool-Downs**

### **Warm-Up**

Before beginning any form of physical activity you should always carry out a warm-up. A warm-up should be designed to prepare the body and mind for physical activity and reduces the risk of injuries occurring.

#### Purpose of a warm-up

- Gradual increase in body temperature.
- Gradual increase in heart rate.
- Gradual increase in breathing rate.
- Increase in blood flow to working muscles.
- Increase in range of motion of primary muscle groups for their sport.
- Mental preparation.

As you can see, warm-ups are extremely important for athletes' preparation for physical activity. Increasing body temperature and blood flow to working muscles is key for athletes to prevent them from sustaining injuries while exercising. A gradual increase in body temperature reduces the chance of an athlete sustaining muscle and tendon injuries while an increase in blood flow to working muscles ensures a delivery of import fuels that are required for energy production. In addition to this, warming up helps athletes increase the range of motion they have in their muscles. This adequately prepares athletes' working muscles for the movements they will be performing (stretching, generating power, stabilizing the body, etc.). Finally, an adequate warm-up will mentally prepare the athlete for exercise, this includes increased focus at practice or in competition, positive self-talk, or improved motivation knowing they are physically prepared to exercise.

It is recommended to carry out a **comprehensive, sport specific** warm-up for **at-least 15 minutes** prior to starting training activities or competition.

**Comprehensive:** Warming up all parts of the body. Focus especially on the main muscle groups involved in snowshoe, including the legs, hip flexors and abdominals.

**Sport Specific:** Performing movements your athlete will carry out during practice. For snowshoe, you might include high knee lifts, exaggerated arm swings, accelerations and decelerations.



Warm-ups should include three specific components:

1. **Aerobic activity to raise heart rate**
  - This can be walking, jogging, jumping or skipping.
2. **Dynamic Stretching**
  - Dynamic stretching involves active, controlled movements that take body parts through a full range of motion.
3. **Sport Specific Movements**
  - Skills or movements which are core to your sport.
  - Movements that the athlete will complete in training or competition.

See our [Warm-Up and Cool-Down Supplement](#) to learn more information on the components of a warm-up. The [Dynamic Stretches Guide](#) also provides a collection of exercises can be included in your warm-up.

### **Warm-Ups:**

<b>Sample Warm-Up 1</b>	
<b>Aerobic Activity:</b>  5-7 minutes	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>○ High Knees</li> <li>○ Butt Kicks</li> <li>○ Side to Side Bouncing</li> <li>○ Quick Steps</li> </ul>
<b>Dynamic Stretching:</b>  15-20 repetitions of each	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>○ Standing Calf Raises</li> <li>○ Forward Leg Swings</li> <li>○ Lateral Leg Swings</li> <li>○ Arm Circles</li> <li>○ Arm Swings</li> <li>○ Hip Circles</li> </ul>
<b>Sport Specific Movements:</b>  5-10 minutes	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>○ Short 5-10m sprints – race starts</li> <li>○ Quick relays</li> <li>○ Accelerations and passing your pair</li> </ul>





## Sample Warm-Up 2

<b>Aerobic Activity:</b>  5-7 minutes	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>○ Light jog with accelerations</li> <li>○ High Knees</li> <li>○ Butt Kicks</li> </ul>
<b>Dynamic Stretching:</b>  15-20 repetitions of each	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>○ Heel and Toe Walks</li> <li>○ Forward Leg Swings</li> <li>○ Lateral Leg Swings</li> <li>○ Arm Circles</li> <li>○ Arm Swings</li> <li>○ Hip Circles</li> </ul>
<b>Sport Specific Movements:</b>  5-10 minutes	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>○ Longer 15-20m sprints – race starts</li> <li>○ Quick relays</li> <li>○ Side to Side Bouncing</li> </ul>

### Competition Warm-Ups:

Before any athletic competition, an effective warm-up needs to be completed. Warm-ups are essential to preparing the athletes' bodies and minds for physical activity, which will improve their performance and reduce the risk of injury. Here are some tips for competition warm-ups:

- Have athletes do the same warm-up routine that they do during training sessions.
  - Athletes with intellectual disabilities do best when they follow consistent routines. Routines help athletes to build their confidence, skills and time on-task.
- If space is limited, encourage athletes to do aerobic activities in place, or go back and forth between the allotted space.

- Keep athletes active and moving during staging. If they are sedentary during this time, they will lose the benefits of their warm-ups, such as an increased body temperature and blood flow to working muscles.
- It's possible that the aerobic activity and dynamic stretching can be conducted inside a building or facility, if space permits. Make sure the athletes stay warm if they conduct their initial warm-up outside, especially during the dynamic stretching phase.

## **Cool-Down**

When your training, practice or sport session is complete, you should always cool-down. It is just as important to have a good cool-down as it is to have a good warm-up. A good cool-down allows the body to gradually return to a state of rest.

### **Purpose of a cool-down:**

- Decrease heart rate.
- Decrease breathing rate.
- Decrease body and muscle temperature.
- Returns rate of blood flow from the active muscles to resting level.
- Decrease muscle soreness.
- Improve flexibility.
- Increases the rate of recovery from exercise.
- Promote relaxation.

A typical cool-down includes light aerobic activity followed by stretching. The aerobic activity should gradually decrease in intensity/difficulty. It could be a short jog/walk at 50% intensity with some stretches, led by the athletes, at the end.

Cool-downs are perfect opportunities for coaches to carry-out a debrief session with their athletes and review the session they have just had. Ask your athletes some **open**,

**informative** questions that will make them think about the session and what they would have learned. In addition to the athletes reinforcing the coaching points you have given them, it also gives you, as a coach, the opportunity to see what works for each athlete as an individual.

Coaches should also use this time at the end of practice to encourage healthy habits. Educate athletes on the importance of staying active and eating healthy outside of practice.

**Open Questions** – Questions that cannot be answered with ‘Yes’ or ‘No’, for example:

*“What part of the training session did you find challenging today?”*

**Informative Questions** – Questions that provide useful information for you, as a coach, and for the athlete.

*“What part (if any) of the training session did you enjoy most today?”*

Sample Cool-Down 1:	
<b>Low Intensity:</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>○ Starting from the end line, walk the length of the track and back</li> </ul>
<b>Stretching:</b>  30 seconds each	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>○ Side Stretch (Flexibility Level 4 – Fitness Cards)</li> <li>○ Standing Straddle Stretch</li> <li>○ Kneeling Hamstring Stretch (Flexibility Level 4 – Fitness Cards)</li> <li>○ Standing Quadriceps Stretch</li> <li>○ Kneeling Hip Stretch (Flexibility Level 3 – Fitness Cards)</li> </ul>

## Sample Cool-Down 2:

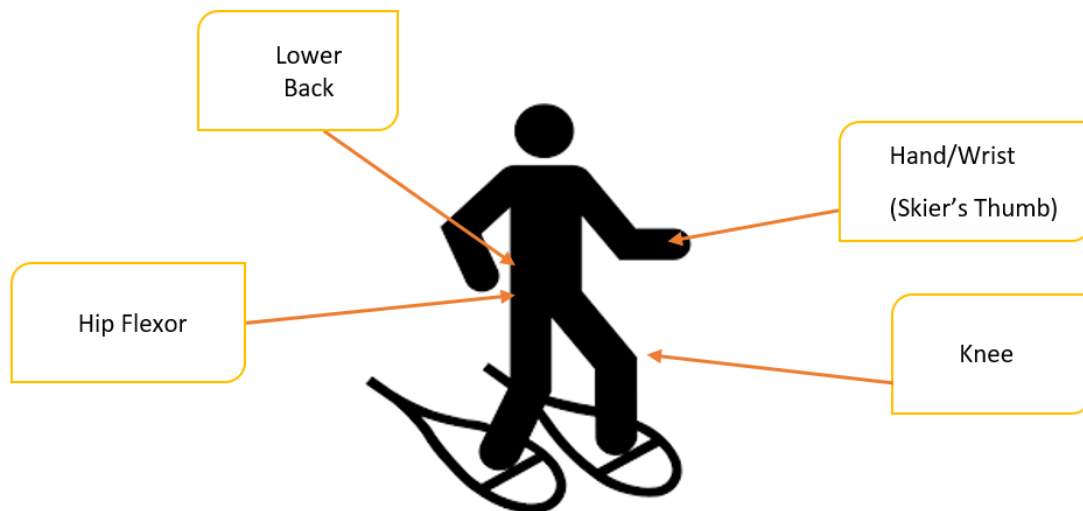
<b>Low Intensity:</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>○ Athletes split into two groups and walk the perimeter of the track in opposite directions</li> </ul>
<b>Stretching:</b>  30 seconds each	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>○ Kneeling Hip Stretch (Flexibility Level 3 – Fitness Cards)</li> <li>○ Kneeling Hamstring Stretch (Flexibility Level 4 – Fitness Cards)</li> <li>○ Calf Stretch (Flexibility Level 1 – Fitness Cards)</li> <li>○ Butterfly Stretch (Flexibility Level 3 – Fitness Cards)</li> <li>○ Seated Rotation Stretch (Flexibility Level 5 – Fitness Cards)</li> </ul>

### Coaches' Notes:

- Think about the stretches that might be easier to do in your particular setting. There are modifications to most stretches in order to do them standing, seated or laying down.
- Develop a standard routine for your cool-down. Not only will it provide an opportunity for you to review the session or provide suggestions leading into the next practice, it will also create a routine you can suggest your athletes to do at home.
- Observe how your athletes are stretching. Ballistic or 'bouncing' movements while stretching can cause injury. Stretching may feel a bit uncomfortable but should not be painful.
- Use the time at the end of practice to encourage healthy habits at home.

## Possible Injuries in Snowshoe

Injuries are problems for athletes in all sports, at all levels. It is beneficial for coaches to be aware of common injuries that athletes could experience in their sport.



*Figure 11: Common Snowshoe Injuries*

The graphic above highlights four of the most common injury sites for snowshoe athletes. Of these injury sites, the knee is likely to be the most common site. **Any injuries that athletes happen to obtain during SO training should be immediately tended to by a healthcare professional** (doctor, nurse, and physiotherapist). If an athlete reports to you with signs or symptoms of any form of injury it is recommended to send them to a healthcare professional.

Appropriate warm-ups and cool-downs can help to reduce the risk of both acute and overuse injuries specific to snowshoe. Additionally, strength and flexibility training either in practice or at home can further prevent injuries and improve performance. Specifically, quadriceps, glutes and hamstring strength and flexibility should be a main focus when trying to prevent injuries.

### **Snowshoe Specific Physical Conditioning**

Physical conditioning is the improvement of physical health through programmed exercises. Snowshoe specific conditioning is the use of exercises specifically related to the movements used by players to develop snowshoe specific fitness. The main components of physical conditioning are cardiovascular endurance, muscular strength and endurance, flexibility, and skill development. A successful conditioning program can be accomplished with very little equipment through bodyweight exercises, jumping drills, etc. Some teams may also like to incorporate equipment like resistance bands, weights, stretching straps.

In snowshoe, these components can be developed **on-snow** or **dry land** through various exercises, activities and drills. A combination of *on-snow* and *dry land* conditioning is optimal for a snowshoer's performance.

### **On-Snow Conditioning:**

*On-snow* conditioning is one conditioning option for coaches for their athletes as replicates what athletes will do while snowshoeing. Examples of *On-Snow* conditioning are:

- High Speed Running (HSR) with snowshoes and poles
- Relay races
- Squats
- Leg Lifts



## Dry Land Conditioning:

*Dry Land* conditioning involves building up strength, endurance and flexibility in the muscles that will be used the most while snowshoeing. This can be done through a variety of methods using bodyweight exercises, those with added resistance, or specific movement patterns that resemble snowshoe. Examples of *Dry Land* conditioning are:

- Core strength exercise
  - Plank hold/side plank
  - Leg raises
  - Curl ups
- Bodyweight strength exercises
  - Squats
  - Lunges – Forward and Lateral
  - Calf Raises
  - Hip Bridges
- Sport-specific actions
  - Short, reactive, sprints
  - Extended HSR (>50m)
  - Bounding



## **Fitness Resources**

Fitness for coaches [link](#).

In addition to the [Fit 5 Guide](#) and other resources available [online](#), Special Olympics also offers online Fitness specific courses where coaches can learn more about Fitness, SO athletes, and how the two work together!

The courses include:

- Fitness for the Sport Coach
  - This module is designed to provide Sport Coaches with information that will help them to introduce fitness into their ongoing sport program.
- Fitness Coach Online Training
  - This module is designed to provide volunteer Fitness Coaches with information that will help them to be effective at engaging our athletes in fitness.

Head coaches could consider bringing in a coach to work specifically on fitness relevant to their sport (fitness coach), or they could utilize their assistant coach and have them trained up on the online courses to gain a greater knowledge of fitness and take the lead on fitness training for their athletes. Either way, we would encourage head coaches to use the online learning modules as a way of improving their knowledge and understanding of fitness.

Check out [learn.specialolympics.org](https://learn.specialolympics.org) to find these courses, along with many other available courses, and get learning today!

# The Role of the Coach

For more information on your role as a coach, read our Special Olympics supplement available here:



# Sports Psychology

## What is Sports Psychology?

Sports Psychology is a name given to a topic that includes many different areas related to sports performance. These include (Association, American Psychological, 2021):

- Goal setting;
- Imagery and performance planning;
- Athlete motivation
- Handling disappointment and poor performance.

Ultimately, Sports Psychology relates to how an athlete's mindset assists or hinders their athletic performance, be that training, competition, or recreationally.

As a coach, your role is to assist an athlete to perform at their best – this includes psychologically as well as physically. This section will briefly discuss a number of Sports Psychology concepts that will assist you in your coaching of Special Olympics Athletes.

For further information on the topic, it is recommended that you explore expert research on the topic such as academic articles, online learning courses, podcasts, and books.

## Key Areas of Sports Psychology:

### Motivation:

What is motivation?

Often we consider motivation to be making that last lift in the gym, doing that last run up the hill, and going out to win in the final of a competition. However, these are only a select few examples. Most of the time motivation can be; going to training, sticking to your exercise routine, or drinking all of your water for the day.

Motivation is goal-dependent. This means that each person will have different motivation because each person will have different goals.

According to Burton and Raedeke in *Sport Psychology for Coaches* (2008), great coaches know that they don't give athletes motivation. Rather, they create the conditions or team climate in which athletes motivate themselves. Coaches do this by recognizing the importance of **intrinsic and extrinsic motivation**.

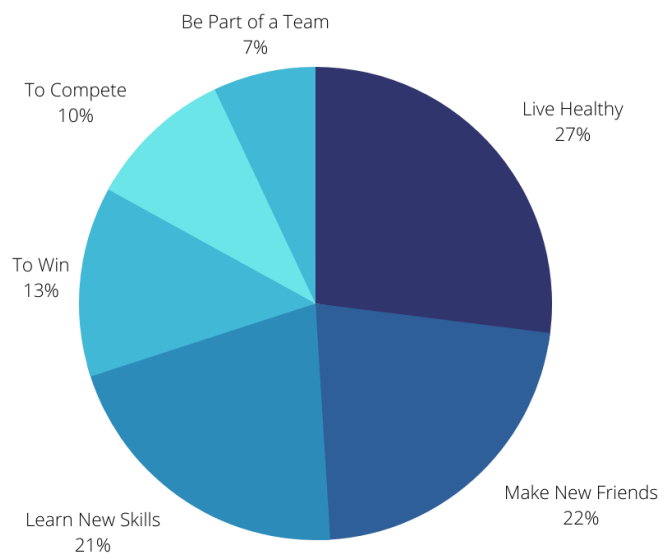
**Intrinsically Motivated Athletes** participate for the love of the sport. They enjoy the process of learning and mastering difficult sport skills and play for the pride they feel when working hard toward accomplishing a challenging goal.

**Extrinsically Motivated Athletes** participate in sport in order to receive praise, to win, or to avoid punishment. The process is often not as enjoyable, they don't enjoy completing difficult tasks and often results in sport drop-out down the line.

Extrinsic motivation can also be useful in assisting athletes to learn a skill or try a new task. Using praise as a motivator can help to encourage athletes to explore or complete a task they normally would not attempt. However, extrinsic motivation should not be used long-term, and should be phased out over time if it is being used to help motivate athletes to complete tasks.

For example, a golfer does not like hitting the ball out of long grass and is willing to take a shot penalty to move the ball. Encourage the athlete attempt the shot out of the long grass and praise them for their effort. Over time, as the athlete becomes more comfortable performing the shot and continues to hit the ball out of the long grass, praise should be reduced.

Special Olympics carried out an Athlete Satisfaction Survey. This survey aimed to find out why athletes participated in Special Olympics sports and their motivation to do so. The results can be seen in the pie chart below.



*Figure xiii: Athlete Satisfaction Survey Results - Why athletes participate in Special Olympics Sport. These can be considered to be sources of motivation for athletes and should be considered in your decision making as a coach*



## **Motivation Myths:**

### **Motivation Myth 1: Athletes are either motivated or not motivated**

Some coaches believe that motivation is simply a personality trait, a static internal characteristic. They believe that an athlete either has motivation or doesn't. They don't believe motivation is something coaches can develop. For these coaches, the key to having a motivated team is to find and recruit athletes who have the right personality. However, while some athletes are, in fact, more motivated than others, this view does not provide any direction or guidance on how coaches can help develop and sustain athletes' motivation. The fact is, coaches can help athletes develop motivation.

### **Motivation Myth 2: Coaches give athletes motivation**

Other coaches view motivation as something they can inject into their athletes on demand, like a flu shot, by means of inspirational pep talks or gimmicks. They may use slogans, posters, and bulletin board quotes from upcoming opponents. These strategies may be helpful, but they are only a small piece of the motivation puzzle. There is much more to the story—motivation is not something coaches can simply give their athletes.

### **Motivation Myth 3: Motivation means sticks and carrots**

Some experts suggest that effective motivation means using carrots (rewards) and sticks (punishments) to drive athletes to do things they would not do on their own. This may seem innocuous, but think about it on a deeper level. It assumes that athletes don't want to do something, so the coach will provide motivation to make them do it through punishments or rewards. Coaches who emphasize the stick, in the form of chastising, criticizing, yelling, coercing, and creating guilt, often find themselves swimming upstream. No matter what they try, they meet resistance and negative attitudes. Not only is this approach ineffective, it saps the enjoyment out of sport. Coaches must understand athletes' needs in order to create a team culture that naturally motivates them.



### **Confidence (through Goal Setting)**

Sports confidence is the belief in yourself to execute or complete a task or skill relevant to the sport or activity you are participating in. Sport confidence should be gained through consistent execution of the skill or task in a controlled environment (training session). This can then be applied in a more chaotic environment (competition). For example; Maureen is confident she can complete the 100m breast stroke in her local competition because she has completed this particular stroke many times in her training.

*An athlete with lack of self-confidence doubts whether they are good enough, whether they have the qualities necessary for success (Plakona, Parčina, Ludvig, & Tuzović, 2014).*

1. Developing sport confidence in athletes helps to make participation fun and is critical to the athlete's motivation.
2. A considerable amount of anxiety is eliminated when athletes know what is expected of them and when they have to be prepared.
3. Mental preparation is just as important as skills training.
4. Progressing to more difficult skills increases the challenge.
5. Dropping back into easier skills increases one's confidence.

### **Developing Self-Confidence through Goal Setting**

Realistic yet challenging goals for each athlete are important for the motivation of the athlete, during both training and competition. Accomplishing goals at practice through repetition in settings that replicate the competition environment instill confidence. Sport confidence in athletes helps make participation fun and is critical to the athlete's motivation. Setting goals is a joint effort between athletes and coaches.

Goal setting must be a collaborative effort. At the end of the day, the goals are set for the athlete for what they want to accomplish, not what their coach, parents, friends, or family want them to accomplish. A coaches' role is to assist the athlete in creating the goals that align to their desires, and to keep the athlete on track to achieve those goals.

**Goals should be:**

1. Structured as short-term, intermediate and long-term.
2. Viewed as stepping stones to success.
3. Created and accepted by the athlete.
4. Used to establish the athlete's training and competition plan.
5. Flexible
6. Written down
7. Identified as either performance goals or practice goals
8. Achievable - Sometimes athletes will need to seek support to accomplish their goals

Following the SMART Goals model is a simple way to set goals for your athlete in a collaborative and logical way.



### **Handling Disappointment (performance/success oriented/injuries)**

Disappointment can present itself in many different ways for an athlete. This can be:

- Poor/Below expected performance (in training or competition)
- Good performance without the desired outcome (winning/scoring/placing)
- Disappointment for others (teammates/friends)
- Acquiring an injury (meaning inability to compete/perform)
- Not receiving praise (from coach/friend/family)

And many more reasons!

As a coach, it is essential that you assist your athletes in handling disappointment. Not only is this beneficial to them in sport, it is a life skill that can be applied in almost any other context (such as job applications, studying for school/college, acquiring an illness, etc.).

How disappointment can be seen in athlete behaviour:

- Anger
- Frustration
- Going within themselves
- Feeling overwhelmed (tears)
- Loss of focus
- Loss of motivation to train/compete
- Loss of interest in the sport

Disappointment often presents itself as stress in athletes. Special Olympics offers the Strong Minds program to assist athletes in learning how to cope with stress. This can be stress from competition or the stress that comes from daily tasks.

Check out the [Strong Minds](#) page for all resources required.

A useful tool for coaches working with athletes showing signs of stress would be the [Strong Minds Coach's Playbook](#). These strategies can help athletes with the stresses of life and sport, and promote healthy thoughts and coping mechanisms.

## Strong Minds Tips for Stress

### Coach's Playbook

Special Olympics  
**Strong Minds**



Strong Minds is an interactive learning activity focused on developing adaptive coping skills. Competition provides a natural opportunity to develop active strategies for maintaining emotional wellness under stress, such as: thinking positive thoughts, releasing stress and connecting with others. During Strong Minds, your athletes will learn the following strategies and will benefit greatly if you can incorporate these strategies into practice and games.

### Station 1

**1** Squeeze the ball for 3 seconds.



**2** Release the ball and any tension.



#### Coach Recommendations

- On the way to a game or competition
- During a pre-game team talk
- After the game during a team talk
- For an athlete sitting on the bench or in between turns/games

### Station 2

**1** Think a good thought.



**2**



- During practice and games, state positive statements to athletes
- Start practices with a song with a positive message
- Ask an athlete to start each practice with a positive statement to the team
- After the game, ask the athletes what went well

### Station 3

**1** Smell the flower [pinwheel].



**2** Blow the flower [pinwheel].



- Encourage deep breathing during stretching
- Teach the athletes to use deep breathing during a stressful situation in a game (ie. Before shooting a foul shot).
- Before a game, do a few rounds of deep breathing as a team

## Strong Minds Tips for Stress

### Coach's Playbook

Special Olympics  
**Strong Minds**



#### Station 4

**1** Try a few stretches



**2** How do you feel?



- Make sure athletes hold static stretches for at least 30 seconds
- Incorporate deep breathing into stretching routines
- Lead stretches that also focus on relaxation
- Encourage athletes to do a few stretches before they go to bed each night

#### Station 5

**1** Support others



**2** Seek support from others



- Set up drills for partner work to allow athletes to build connections
- Encourage athletes to use positive messages to teammates during practices and games
- Remind athletes that their coach and teammates are there to support them
- Encourage family members to also incorporate these strategies with their athletes

#### Station 6

**1** Pick the strategies you like



**2** Use the strategies in everyday life



- Encourage athletes to visit Strong Minds at Healthy Athletes or Game Ready Minds at Performance Stations
- Remind athletes who visited Strong Minds to utilize the skills they learned in practice and games
- Ask the athletes to practice these strategies at home

This Strong Minds Tips for Stress concept was created by Special Olympics Texas

Communication strategies by the coach, fellow athletes, families and friends will help an athlete handle disappointment. Listen to what the athlete says and why they may be disappointed. Offer positive switches – positive comment – correction – positive comment to take the athlete's attention away from their disappointment. The athlete's effort, attitude and preparation should be emphasized, not the result of the competition.



## Athletes in Training

### Self-Talk & Imagery

Self-talk represents the things you say in your head about yourself.

Self-talk can sometimes be negative e.g., “that team is much better than ours”.

Positive self-talk involves repeating a helpful and positive word or phrase such as “I am fit and ready to play”.



Imagery or visualization is a mental process. It allows you to simulate (imagine) experiences in your mind. Often these experiences have the desired outcome e.g. scoring a penalty kick in football.



Imagery also involves using your senses (smell, sound, taste, touch, and feeling) to create an accurate experience in your mind.

Positive self-talk and imagery promotes confidence and success. Coaches should help educate their athletes on the value of positive self-talk and imagery.

One thing coaches can do is help athletes establish a pre-performance routine. At the start of a competition athletes can very briefly

(10-15 seconds) do 4 helpful steps:

1. Close your eyes
2. Take a few deep calming breathes
3. Repeat a positive phrase “I am ready”
4. Picture yourself successfully making a perfect start, or finishing strongly.

This routine can be created and modified at training. Find what works best for the athletes. Take this pre-performance routine into a competition to help athletes best prepare mentally.

## Athletes at Competition

### Psychological Preparation

Just as you train your athletes physically and tactically for competition, you equally need to prepare them psychologically.

Physical Readiness + Psychological Readiness = Competition Readiness



Readiness of the athlete means being focused and prepared for competition.

- **Psychological Readiness:** Being a participant in the sport, showing confidence and an understanding strategy.
- **Physical Readiness:** Being physically conditioned and trained in the skills required for competition.

How to Psychologically Prepare for Competition:

1. Create and Set Competition Goals
2. Prepare for competition setting
  - a. Tell your athletes what to expect
  - b. Use videos of previous competitions
  - c. Have experienced athletes speak with inexperienced athletes
  - d. Have all equipment ready and available before time
3. Train as you plan to compete
  - a. Make sure training is properly preparing your athletes for competition
  - b. This will give athletes confidence going into competition performance
4. Practice Strong Minds Stations

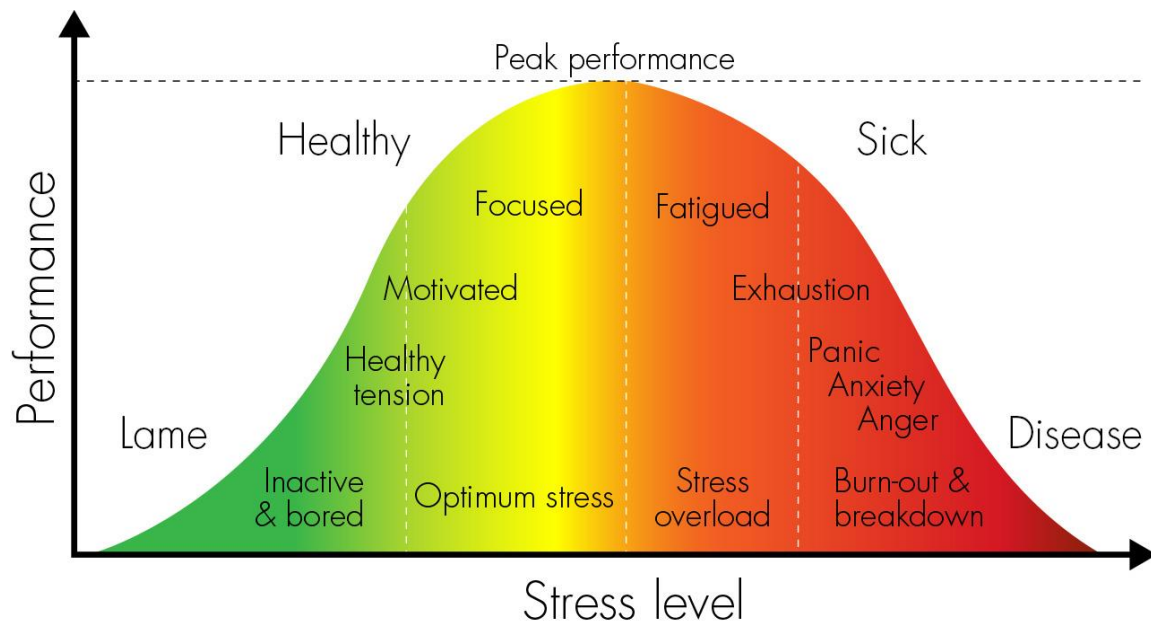
Anxiety or stress is normal before a competition. Athletes who do not suffer from some sort of anxiety or stress before performance would be in the minority.

Competition anxiety occurs when an athlete perceives a competitive situation as potentially threatening, resulting in an aversive emotional response (Schaefer, Vella,





Allen, & Magee, 2016). Although some level of competition anxiety is considered to be normal, when competition anxiety exceeds a threshold level it can become detrimental to performance, motivation, and enjoyment (Schaefer, Vella, Allen, & Magee, 2016).



*Figure xiii: The relationship between stress level and performance. This graph shows where peak performance can be achieved with a moderate stress level. It also shows the dangers of high stress and anxiety. Credit cescasdestinationhealthy.wordpress.com for image.*

As a coach, it is your role to assist your athlete in not exceeding this anxiety threshold.

Simple measures such as:

1. Pre-Performance Routine
2. Strong Minds Stations
3. Alternative tasks to take their mind off of the competition/performance

These measures can be beneficial in the psychological preparation for athletes before competition.

There can be times when anxiety becomes too much for an athlete. They may not want to train or compete. The idea of competition or performing will cause them serious stress. If this is noticeable for an athlete within sport and outside of sport (social life, education, family life, etc.), it is recommended that the athlete talk to a professional. This can be a family doctor, a counsellor, or a psychologist.

## Post-Performance Psychology

### What is success – individual to the athlete

Many athletes will equate winning and losing with success and failure. This is often a self-defeating perspective as athletes only partly control the outcome of competition and often winning is unrealistic.

Coaches should focus on individual effort, self-improvement and learning as barometers of success.

Each athlete will have their own take on what success is to them.

If an athlete feels they are unsuccessful at a competition:

- ✓ Reassure them that winning isn't everything
- ✓ Refer back to the athlete's goals
- ✓ Identify where they have achieved or progressed towards their goals
- ✓ Praise their effort, not performance
- ✓ Remember the Special Olympics athlete oath;  
*"Let me win. But if I cannot win, let me be brave in the attempt."*

### How to win & lose – code of conduct

All athletes should follow the Sportsmanship section of the [Special Olympics Athlete's Code of Conduct](#).

- I will practice good sportsmanship.
- I will act in ways that bring respect to me, my coaches, my team and Special Olympics.
- I will not use bad language.
- I will not swear or insult other persons.
- I will not fight with other athletes, coaches, volunteers or staff.

As a coach, your role is to remind the athletes of their conduct and how to manage themselves win, lose, or draw. The important thing to do when educating athletes on their code of conduct is to explain 'why'.

Explain that athletes should act in the same manner they would want others to act if they were in the same position. If an athlete is successful, congratulate them. If an athlete is unsuccessful, encourage them for next time.

Your role as a coach is to be a role model to your athletes. You should always demonstrate good sportsmanship throughout competition, training, or events. Athletes often ‘feed’ off of their coach’s energy and enthusiasm – make sure yours is always positive and following good etiquette.



*Figure xiv: Some roles a coach may take on in addition to being a role model.*

### **Athletes in a heightened state of anxiety post-performance**

Can be after achieving success (over-excitement) or not achieving desired outcome (disappointment).

If an athlete is excited and celebrating, do not discourage this! This is the feeling we all long for as athletes, coaches, and fans! Help the athlete to celebrate in a positive and safe manner.

It is important to not discount feelings of disappointment. It is appropriate to be disappointed when we lose a game or match. The challenge for the coach is to redirect that disappointment into a renewed commitment to training for the next competition or season. Becoming obsessed with losing is not a healthy or natural reaction for anyone.

Here are some strategies for athletes experiencing heightened states of anxiety:

1. Use Strong Minds stations
  - a. Positive Messaging
  - b. Deep Breathing
  - c. Stretching
2. Offer support – through hi-fives, knuckle touches, other forms of comfort that the athlete is accepting of and comfortable with
3. Have a consistent post-performance routine (win, lose, or draw)
  - a. Stretching

- b. Debrief
- c. Praise for effort

All athletes are different and will have different ways of coping. Work with your athlete what their best post-performance routine should be and when to carry it out.

For some, shortly or immediately afterward is appropriate. If you leave it too long, it becomes forgotten.

For others, they may need more time to decompress – **there is no one size fits all.**

The athlete's effort, attitude and personal skills attainment should be rewarded and positively reinforced.

### **Educating Athletes**

Each athlete is different. Simple guidelines and strategies on how to educate athletes will not be universally applicable to athletes. However, having a knowledge of the foundations as listed above will help you to best prepare your athletes for training and competitions.

Some simple tips for educating athletes about sports psychology are:

1. Introduce elements bit by bit
  - a. Start with goal setting
  - b. Strong Minds stations
  - c. Introduce pre-performance routines
2. Use sporting examples to explain elements of psychology
  - a. Confidence
  - b. Disappointment
3. Work in groups
  - a. Have open discussions about elements before, during, and after training and competition

### **References**

- Association, American Psychological. (2021, March 11). *American Psychological Association*. Retrieved from American Psychological Association: <https://www.apa.org/ed/graduate/specialize/sports>
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- Schaefer, J., Vella, S. A., Allen, M. S., & Magee, C. A. (2016). Competition Anxiety, Motivation, and Mental Toughness in Golf. *Faculty of Social Sciences*, 309-320.

# Teaching Snowshoeing

## Moving Forward

To move forward on snowshoes is as easy as walking. The movement forward is just placing one foot forward while the other foot is stationary.

Once athletes can competently move forward, they will be able to progress to running and sprinting.

## Teaching Points

1. Begin on flat terrain with athlete standing.
2. Move first foot forward.
3. Raise and bring second foot forward allowing for the width of the snowshoe to clear the ankle.
4. Place second foot down ahead of first foot.
5. Repeat steps.
6. To move faster, increase stride rate and/or length.



*[Click here to watch a video on Moving Forward in Snowshoes](#)*

## Avoiding Snowshoe Overlap

A certain amount of distance is required between foot-plants to avoid overlapping the snowshoes. When overlap occurs with a shorter stride, the tail of the leading snowshoe lands on and presses down on some part of the frame of the trailing snowshoe. When the snowshoer tries to bring the trailing snowshoe forward and off the ground to start another stride, he or she cannot since the trailing snowshoe is pinned to the ground by the overlap.



Avoiding this overlap is the primary technique to be learned when snowshoeing. Snowshoe overlap most frequently occurs at slower speeds and when walking. It is technically easier to run in snowshoes than to walk in them, simply because the stride and distance

between foot plants is longer when running. Even when running, though, an athlete's stride may be too short to allow clearance.

### Conditions that may result in snowshoe overlap:

1. Athletes with shorter legs
2. Deeper or looser snow
3. Uphill slopes
4. Fatigue
5. Toes do not point straight ahead when walking
6. The first few steps to accelerate from a stationary position are too short
7. Improper foot placement on snowshoe

Experienced snowshoers recognize these conditions and apply the required technique to compensate. It does not take much, as you only need about five or six inches between the feet to clear eight-inch-wide snowshoes. Most people walk or run best with one foot planted in front of the other. Some athletes must focus on spreading the snowshoes apart constantly when moving.

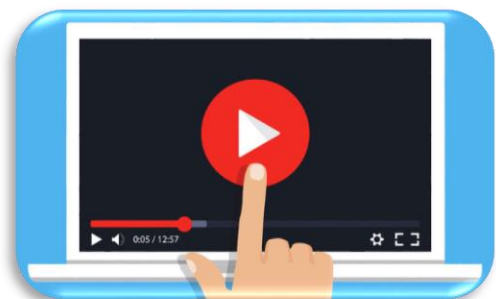
### Stopping

Many athletes may have a fear of slick snow that resulted in a fall or an unpleasant experience with a sliding sport (skating, skiing) because stopping required a skill they did not have. You may not see this until the snowshoers come to the top of their first hill and freeze, refusing to descend.

Stopping is the same as when stopping while running or walking without snowshoes. Athlete must de-accelerate if they are moving fast by taking gradually smaller steps/strides until they can just cease taking any further steps.

### Teaching Points

1. Gradually, over a few strides, decrease stride length and rate.
2. Teach athlete to keep weight forward, off of tails of snowshoes.
3. Teach athlete not to use other object to stop.
4. Gradually slow down; don't stop abruptly.
5. Show athlete that a snowshoe does not slide like a ski.



*Click here to watch a video on Stopping in Snowshoes*

## Falling

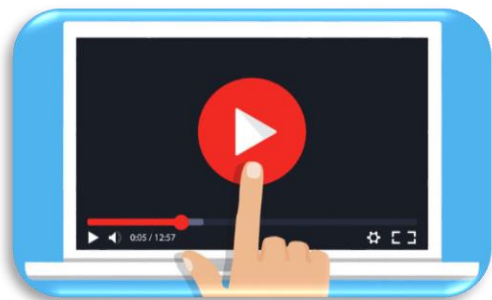
Before you begin the on-snow portion, it is important to teach your athlete the proper way to fall. Falls are a natural part of snowshoeing and falling in the correct way can prevent injury.

Take some time to talk to your athlete, letting them know that it is okay for a fall to occur. By practicing falling, an athlete will become less apprehensive if a fall does occur. Be sure that the athlete also has all of the proper protective equipment prior to practicing falls.

90% of the injuries from falling in snowshoeing are to the wrist and shoulder. Most injuries happen when a snowshoer falls forward in the incorrect way. Practice these movements side by side with your athlete.

## Teaching Points

1. Start on your knees and let yourself fall forward onto your forearms.
2. Catch your weight with the forearms away from the body slightly with the elbows bent.
3. Allow your forearms to touch the ground first.
4. Try to resist reaching out toward the ground, or placing the hands out in front.
5. As contact is made, absorb the fall with your arms.



*[Click here to watch a video on Falling Safely in Snowshoes](#)*

You may want to practice this movement with your athlete until he or she is completely comfortable with the movement.

## Getting Up

Because falling can be a common issue in snowshoeing, it is important to teach the athlete how to get up from the snow. Many times this can be more frustrating than the fall itself, especially on an incline.

The easiest way for a snowshoer to get up is to rise from a kneeling position where the athlete can then slowly rise to a standing position.

Even an athlete in good condition may have problems getting up from a fall. It is important to work until the athlete is comfortable with this task. During lessons, it is a good idea to have the athlete practice getting up if they fall.



### Teaching Points

1. If athlete falls completely to ground, roll onto side.
2. Get up to the hands and knees.
3. Raise one knee and set the shoe flat on the snow.
4. Plant poles (if using poles) in front and stand up.
5. Without poles, the athlete may plant hands on one knee for a boost, if necessary, to regain standing position.
6. Make sure the athlete is not physically injured.

### Turning

Turning on snowshoes is as easy as turning when walking or running without them, as long as the turn is not too sharp and the speed is not too high. Simply make each successive step a bit farther to the side in the direction the athlete wants to go.

At high speeds or on sharp (90 degrees or greater) turns, some snowshoes may slip sideways, as most snowshoes do not “edge” well. In these situations, the athlete must plant the snowshoe flat on the snow, not angling it into the snow. The tendency is to allow the snowshoe to make contact with the snow at an angle when one leans the rest of the body into a sharp turn or at high speeds to maintain balance. To counteract this, athletes should concentrate on landing on the balls of their feet (on front claws) and not angling the snowshoe.

### Teaching Points

1. Teach athletes to take successive steps to the side.
2. Teach athletes to land on the balls of their feet with the snowshoe flat on the snow.
3. Teach athletes not to cause overlap on tips and tails of their snowshoes.
4. Teach athletes not to back up in snowshoes, but to take small steps when making a 180-degree turn.

### Climbing Hills

The ability to go up a hill is a part of the sport that makes snowshoeing fun. Snowshoeing is the fastest and easiest way to go up snow-covered hills. There are many different ways to go uphill depending on the snow conditions and size of the hill.

### Teaching Points

1. Show the athlete where the fall line is (the line a ball would take as it rolls down the hill).
2. The fall line is usually the most direct route possible up a hill.
3. Take shorter steps, keeping the head up.
4. Keep weight on the balls of the feet.
5. Keep feet spread apart to avoid overlapping snowshoes.
6. Stamp with the toe to dig the crampon into the snow for better traction.
7. Pump arms to power up the hill.
8. Lean slightly into the hill.
9. On short steep hills with loose or deep snow, crawling forward using the hands for balance and traction can help.

### Descending Hills

Descending hills can be done safely using the proper techniques.



*Click here to watch a video on Descending  
Hills in Snowshoes*

### Teaching Points

1. Do not lean back.
2. Try to keep the upper body perpendicular to the slope, and point the toes down to maintain traction.
3. Extend arms out to help maintain balance.
4. Keep knees bent to cushion the impact.
5. It is easiest to run down a hill to get maximum traction and prevent snowshoe overlap, and it is important to do this on icy slopes.
6. It is easier to go straight down the fall line of packed snow hills than to traverse across slopes.
7. Avoid over striding. Brake and slow down by not leaning forward as much and taking shorter, quicker strides.

## Sprint Starts

A good start can make all the difference in a sprint because the athletes want to start the race strong and fast.

In a sprint start, the athlete puts the “power foot” forward for a strong launch. Determining the power foot can be easily done by

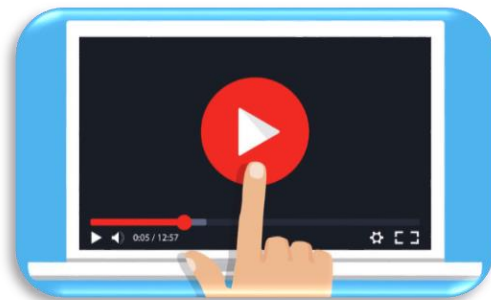


having the athlete pretend to kick a ball. The foot that is used to kick the ball is the back foot. The foot that is used to support the body is the front foot, the power foot. Another way to determine the power foot is to stand behind the athlete and give a little nudge. The foot that the athlete steps out with is the back foot for the start.

## Teaching Points

### At Start Line

1. Stand behind start line, relaxed, with power leg in front and tips of snowshoes behind line.



*Click here to watch a video on Sprint Starts in Snowshoes*

### “Ready” Command

2. Lean forward slightly at hips and bend front knee slightly (about 120 degrees), placing weight on ball of front foot.
3. Hold opposite arm, from front foot, flexed in front of body.
4. Hold other arm back slightly past the hip and bent.
5. Stand as still as possible.

### “Go” Command

6. Drive back leg forward, leading with knee, swinging front arm back.
7. Push strongly off ball of front foot, swinging the back arm forward forcefully.
8. Stay low, using arms to drive body forward.
9. Take wider steps when leaving the start line to avoid overlapping snowshoes.

## Acceleration to Top Speed

10. Use short, quick steps off the start line, allowing stride to increase in length as velocity increases.

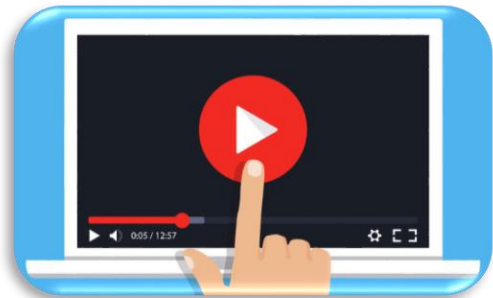
11. Gradually transition to a more upright sprinting position.

## Sprinting

Sprinting is the art of running as fast as possible. Sprinting happens when an athlete's legs move faster to propel them forward at a greater rate of speed. Sprinting is when more steps are taken and/or longer steps are taken.

### Teaching Points

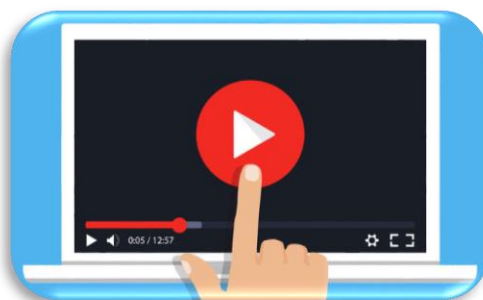
1. Run in an upright position so the maximum distance is attained with each stride.
2. The forearm and upper arm should form a 90-degree angle at the elbow.
3. Pump the arms (forward and back) with every stride.
4. The arm and leg movements should be synchronized. Move the right arm forward as left leg goes forward.
5. Increasing stride length or stride rate or both will increase speed.
6. Stay in lanes (25m, 50m and 100m). For other races, athletes need to keep moving forward toward the inside lane of track.



*[Click here to watch a video on Sprinting in Snowshoes](#)*

## Relay Races

Relay races are the 'team' events in snowshoeing. It is the art of running as fast as possible while making a successful Baton exchange with the next runner on your team. Relays develop a friendship and sense of team. Relay teams consist of four teammates who proceed around the track in order. The proper baton exchange between incoming and outgoing runner must take place within the exchange zone.



*[Click here to watch a video on Relay Races in Snowshoes](#)*

### Teaching Points

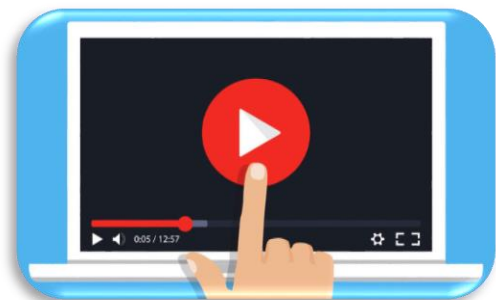
1. Receiving athlete is positioned in exchange area a few meters in from the start of the exchange area.
2. Receiving athlete is standing in ready position with body slightly turned, arm extended to the side and back, with palm facing up.
3. Receiving athlete watches for approaching teammate.
4. Receiving athlete starts to move forward when approaching athlete reaches the exchange zone or a predetermined point.
5. The approaching teammate runs up to the extended-arm side of receiving athlete and passes the baton into the hand of the receiving athlete.
6. Approaching athlete continues to move in a straight line until coming to a gradual stop.
7. Approaching athlete turns to look that there are no other approaching athletes. When track is clear, proceed off track into the infield area.

### Distance Snowshoeing

These are the longer races that really test an athlete's endurance. It combines cardiovascular endurance and endurance to elements such as wind and cold. These events require specific training to ensure that athletes have the endurance to train and compete at the longer distance and not be at risk for injury.

### Teaching Points

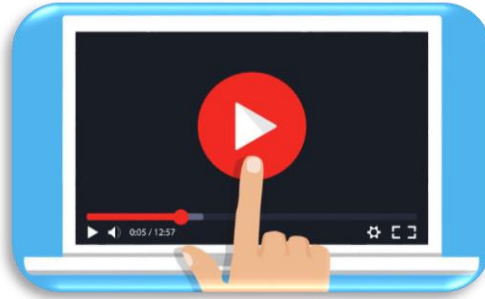
1. Keep tall, in an upright position.
2. Have controlled relaxed arm movement.
3. Keep shoulders not hunched and elbows tucked in
4. Try to maintain same speed throughout the entire distance of the race.
5. Keep body relaxed.
6. Appropriate aerobic conditioning is required – athletes should increase duration first, then intensity, to improve conditioning.



*Click here to watch a video on Distance Snowshoeing*

## Waterfall Start

For events involving a turn, 200 meters and up and the relays, a curved “waterfall” starting line is used so that all snowshoers in all lanes of the track cover an equal distance to a point at the start of the first turn. Snowshoers are lined up starting from the inside lane or lane 1. This lane is reserved for the quickest athlete.



*[Click here to watch a video on Waterfall Starts in Snowshoeing](#)*

## Teaching Points

1. Snowshoers should have a good understanding of starting and passing skills, as both will be required.
2. Snowshoers should position themselves at the start line so that they are pointed toward their target point at the first corner.
3. The target point should be the last point along the inside edge of the track visible to an athlete positioned at the start line.
4. Snowshoers need to judge the minimum distance to the athlete(s) ahead and beside them to avoid collisions and blocking.

Following the race start, the snowshoer should take the shortest path to the target point based on the position relative to other snowshoers. Passing can occur during this section but generally requires the athlete to pass on the right. This results in a longer path which may warrant the snowshoer waiting to pass on the straight to minimize the distance covered to accomplish the pass.

## Pacing

One of the most difficult advanced skills to learn for a snowshoer is proper pacing. It is more efficient and faster to maintain a constant speed during all segments of a race than to move at an uneven pace. Proper pacing is especially important in longer distance races of 800 meters and above.

Depending on the skill and ability level of the athlete, pacing can become important in races as short as 100 meters.



It is sometimes difficult for an athlete to apply correct pacing, as many other athletes will not run with correct pacing. Most athletes start too fast, slow dramatically in the middle, and then sprint to the finish.

## Teaching Points

1. Make sure the snowshoer can move at different speeds and can do this independent of others.
2. Emphasize that it is not always the athlete who starts the fastest who wins a race.
3. Emphasize that a consistent pace and speed over the entire race usually produces the fastest times.
4. Emphasize that the skill at the beginning of a race is to run at their ideal pace, this may require letting other athletes get ahead.
5. These goal pace/distance times are a key tool in allowing athletes to practice even pacing and are useful for athletes to gauge their progress in longer races.
6. As fitness improves, the athletes can increase the number of these repetitions and/or decrease the time/distance resting between them.
7. Coaches should be aware that athletes' best times for a distance may rapidly improve at first, once they learn to pace themselves properly.
8. Goal pace is something that can change weekly/daily for a novice snowshoe athlete, but is more constant for experienced athletes.
9. Be aware that snow conditions, weather, hills and terrain may affect the speed at which a snowshoer might travel in a race. Athletes should learn to base their pacing more on effort than speed.



A workout for distance snowshoers might consist of multiple repetitions over a shorter distance at a speed equal to the pace they want to maintain.

*For example, a 1600-meter snowshoer with a best time of 10:00 minutes.*

*Workout: 6 x 400 meters at a speed of 2:30 minutes per 400m.*

*Rest between reps: Jog of 200 - 400 meters.*

## Passing

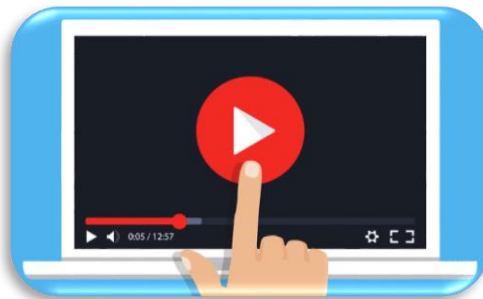
The ability to safely and effectively overtake and pass another snowshoer is a skill all snowshoers should understand and use. Snowshoeing is unique among Special Olympics winter sports in that most of the races involve a mass start and the athletes do not have to stay in lanes.



## Teaching Points

1. A pass is usually required when a faster snowshoer catches up to a slower snowshoer or a snowshoer who has fallen or stopped.
  - i. Near the end of a race, it is sometimes wise to initiate a pass so that the snowshoer has a clear run at the finish in case the leading snowshoer slows.
2. Straight sections of the course or track are the best areas to pass.
  - i. A snowshoer attempting to pass on the outside of a turn will have to cover more distance to pass, and thus will have to be moving significantly faster to make the pass successful.
  - ii. A snowshoer should be able to look ahead to see what is coming up on the course before starting a pass. If the course soon narrows, it may be best to wait until after that to initiate the pass.
3. Athletes should move to the side with sufficient space to pass, and to the side that will position them on the inside of the next turn, if possible.
  - i. Generally, snowshoers on a track will keep to the left edge, and passes will have to be made on the right.
  - ii. It is possible to pass on the left side on a track if the snowshoer in front has strayed from the left side and the pass can be made quickly enough so that the snowshoer in front, who has the right of way, cannot cut off the passing snowshoer.

4. Generally, you need to move at least 50 cm (20 inches) to the side of a snowshoer to pass.
5. Ideally a pass can be made without significant changes in pace.
  - i. Usually, completing a pass involves a slight acceleration in order to compensate for attempts by the leading snowshoer to maintain the lead.
6. The extra length of snowshoes requires that passing snowshoers attain a greater lead before moving in front of the passed athlete.
  - i. Generally, a snowshoer needs to be a minimum of two strides or about 1.5 meters (4 1/2 feet) ahead to move in front without interfering.
7. After taking the lead, the passing athlete should resume their own race. This means moving toward the side of the course so as to be on the inside of the next turn. The passing athlete should not worry about those behind him or her on the course.



*Click here to watch a video on Passing in Snowshoeing*

## Finishing

Finishing a race requires the development of pacing skills and timing to allow the snowshoer the opportunity to maintain or even increase speed just before the finish line. Snowshoers who effectively use finishing skills can improve their final positions relative to other athletes who do not have the endurance or energy to apply the final “push” to the finish line.

## Teaching Points

1. The snowshoer should have a good understanding of pace and passing skills, as both will be required.
2. The snowshoer needs to judge the maximum distance to the athlete(s) ahead and the distance required to catch and pass the athlete(s).
  - i. Sufficient distance to the finish line should be given for any challenges to the passing maneuver by the opposing snowshoer.

3. An allowance of a few meters for these challenges is usually sufficient. Risk of the snowshoer regaining the position increases if the finishing kick and pass are completed too early.
4. Sprinting events require the snowshoer to maintain speed and lean into the finish line with the torso as required in close competition.
  - i. The athlete should be able to lean forward just enough to gain the advantage but not so far forward as to lose balance and fall forward or lose forward speed.
5. Distance events require the snowshoer to use an adequate race pace to maintain an acceptable recovery distance from the leading athlete.

### **Snowshoeing Games/ Drills**

With a few modifications, almost any outdoor game can be played on snow. Popular chase and capture games work well. With imagination, the possibilities are endless. The games should suit the ability and ages of the athletes; races or technical games may be intimidating for beginners.

The names of the games can be changed to make them more appropriate to the level of the athletes while maintaining the principles and skills. In most games, it is a good idea to play without poles. These games will help develop conditioning and coordination at any time of the year. These games are not intended to replace skill training but to enhance the training experience with some fun activities.

#### **Rabbits and Hounds (could be called 'Chase Drill')**

The "rabbits" are released into an open field wearing a streamer or ribbon. The "hounds" are released to chase down the rabbits and collect the ribbons as trophies. Switch roles and repeat the game. Which team can collect the most ribbons?

#### **Relays**

Teams of two racers take turns snowshoeing a loop and to each other. Incorporate a variety of terrains in the loops and increase the number of total loops per athlete over time. Variation: Practice snowshoe skills with the relays. For example, run to a designated point, remove and replace a snowshoe, then return.

#### **Sharks and Minnows (could call it "Zone Tag")**

"Minnows" line up on a beach (edge of a field or open area) with one "shark" in the ocean (middle of open area). The minnows try to snowshoe across the field without being tagged by

the shark. The beaches are the safety zones. When a minnow is tagged, he or she becomes a shark. Continue the game until there is only one minnow left.

### **Ghostbusters (could be called “Freeze Tag”)**

Spread athletes randomly in a field or open area. Choose one person to be the “Ghostbuster” the others are the “ghosts.” Anyone tagged by the ghostbuster becomes a stationary haunted house, arms and legs out to the sides. Haunted houses are freed when a ghost tags them or runs under their arms.

### **Fox Chase (could be called “Trail Chase”)**

One snowshoer or a group goes out snowshoeing with a head start, and the others later try to follow the trail by the tracks in the snow.

### **Snow Write**

Have athletes try to write their names in big letters in the snow (using cursive style) by snowshoeing a trail, and then run back over it quickly.

### **Stomp**

Athletes each get an area delineated by a line in the snow. Then they try to stomp down all the snow in the space. Bigger spaces should be given to more advanced athletes.

### **Trail Making**

Given untracked snow four or more inches deep and some open land (a park, athletic field, or similar area), it is possible to design, create and maintain snowshoe trails simply by snowshoeing through untracked snow. You can delineate a route quickly and easily. This can be used for a number of games.

### **Snowball Drill**

Coach places several snowballs on the ground. Then athletes try to stomp on all the snowballs. Can be used to develop skills based on how far apart the snowballs are placed.

# Rules & Regulations

## Teaching the Rules of Snowshoeing

The best time to teach the rules of snowshoeing is during practice. Please refer to [The Official Special Olympics Sports Rules](#) for the complete listing of snowshoeing rules. As coach, it is your responsibility to know and understand the rules of the game. It is equally important to teach your athletes the rules and to make them play within the spirit of the game.

Maintain current copies of [The Official Special Olympics Sports Rules](#) and your national and/or international federation snowshoeing rulebooks. Know the differences and carry these rulebooks to every competition.

## Divisioning

It is important that you as a coach learn and understand the rules and procedures of divisioning before attending competitions. Understanding the divisioning process will have a direct impact on your athletes' performance. The fundamental difference between Special Olympics competitions and those of other sports organizations is that athletes of all ability levels are encouraged to participate, and every athlete is recognized for his/her performance. Competitions are structured so that athletes compete with other athletes of similar ability in equitable divisions.

Special Olympics has suggested that all divisions be created so that the variance between the highest and lowest scores within that division does not differ by more than 15 percent. This 15 percent statement is not a rule but should be used as a guideline for establishing equitable divisions when the number of athletes competing is appropriate.

Coaches are critical in helping competition management teams make divisioning work. Divisioning works best when coaches submit preliminary scores. This helps athletes get into the proper division as well as gain additional competition experience.



*Click here to watch a video on Special Olympics Divisioning*



## Special Olympics **Divisioning**

Like all athletes, Special Olympics athletes love **the thrill of competition** and pushing their limits to achieve a new personal best.



Special Olympics uses a unique system called **'divisioning'** to give athletes of all abilities the chance for exciting competition.

### **Stage 1** usually happens ahead of World Games competition



Coaches **submit a time** or distance for each athlete in individual sports



For team and judged sports, coaches submit **athlete or team ratings** and/or skills assessments

### **Stage 2** usually happens in the opening days of World Games



Divisioning races, judged events or short team matches are held to assess the athletes' or teams' **ability levels** in competition



GENDER



AGE



ABILITY  
LEVEL

Athletes or teams are grouped into competitive divisions according to **three** criteria

### **HOW MANY ATHLETES OR TEAMS ARE IN A DIVISION?**

minimum of

**3**

maximum of

**8**

### **HOW ARE DIVISIONS SET?**

There should be no more than a **15%** difference between the most highly skilled athlete or team and the lowest skilled athlete or team in each division

### **WHY DIVISIONING?**



Divisioning makes Special Olympics competitions fair, empowering and exciting

An evenly matched competition makes athletes and teams try harder -- and push farther. It's about athletes rising to a challenge -- and giving it their all!

**All they need to do ... is THEIR very best.**



See our video at [specialolympics.org/divisioning](https://specialolympics.org/divisioning)

## **Unified Sports® Rules**

There are few differences in the rules for [Special Olympics Unified Sports®](#) competition as the rules are mentioned in [The Official Special Olympics Sports Rules](#) and modifications are outlined in the rules book. The additions are highlighted below.

1. A roster consists of a proportionate numbers of athletes and partners.
2. For snowshoeing, a Unified Sports team consists of two athletes and two partners of equal ability competing in the 4 x 100 and the 4 x 400 relay events.

## **Protest Procedures**

Protest procedures are governed by the rules of competition and may change from competition to competition. Only rules violations can be protested. Judgment calls made by officials or Divisioning decisions cannot be protested. The protest must site specific violations from the rulebook and a clear definition of why the coach feels the rule was not followed.

The role of the competition management team is to enforce the rules. As a coach, your duty to your athletes and team is to protest any action or events while your athletes are competing that you think violated [The Official Snowshoeing Rules](#). It is extremely important that you do not make protests because you and your athlete did not get your desired outcome of an event. Filing a protest is a serious matter that can impact a competition's schedule. Check with the competition team prior to a competition to learn the protest procedures for that competition.

## **Snowshoeing Protocol and Etiquette**

### **Courtesy and Safety While Snowshoeing**

- Do not snowshoe too close to other athletes.
- Be careful not to step on the tail of another athlete's snowshoes.
- Get out of the way as quickly as possible if there is a fall.
- Do not cross in front of other moving athletes.
- Remember that the faster snowshoer has the responsibility to warn another snowshoer or skier when overtaking him or her.
- Fill up holes in the snow after falling.
- Give way to beginners.





- Do not hit others with equipment.
- Follow the rules of the facility that you are using; for example, stay off of trails not designated for snowshoeing.
- Remain on marked trails.
- Wear appropriate clothing.
- Always snowshoe with someone else.
- Do not wear snowshoes outside of the designated areas.
- When not using snowshoes, leave them in an appropriate area.

### **Rules of the Trails (If Using Trails)**

1. Snowshoe in a controlled manner.
2. Proceed carefully when passing another snowshoer or skier.
3. Let the person in front know which side (left/right) when passing.
4. Yield the right of way when entering from a side trail.
5. Since snowshoes are easier to control and maneuver than skis or snowmobiles, it is suggested that snowshoers yield the right of way to all other trail users where trails are narrow.
6. Do not stop in a narrow place on the trail.
7. Do not block the trail when stopped.
8. Do not stop abruptly, especially in spots not visible to oncoming athletes.
9. Look before starting again; do not move out in front of others.

### **Sportsmanship**

Good sportsmanship is both the coaches' and the athletes' commitment to fair play, ethical behavior and integrity. In perception and practice, sportsmanship is defined as those qualities which are characterized by generosity and genuine concern for others. Below we highlight a few focus points and ideas on how to teach and coach sportsmanship to your athletes. Lead by example.

#### **Competitive Effort**

- Put forth maximum effort during each event.
- Practice the skills with the same intensity as you would perform them in competition.
- Always finish a race or event: Never quit.

#### **Fair Play at All Times**

- Always comply with the rules.
- Demonstrate sportsmanship and fair play at all times.

- Respect the decision of the officials at all times.

### Expectations of Coaches

1. Always set a good example for participants and fans to follow.
2. Instruct participants in proper sportsmanship responsibilities, and demand that they make sportsmanship and ethics the top priorities.
3. Respect judgment of contest officials, abide by rules of the event and display no behavior that could incite fans.
4. Treat opposing coaches, directors, participants and fans with respect.
5. Shake hands with officials and the opposing coach in public.
6. Develop and enforce penalties for participants who do not abide by sportsmanship standards.

### Expectations of Athletes & Partners in Special Olympics Unified Sports®

1. Treat teammates with respect.
2. Encourage teammates when they make a mistake.
3. Treat opponents with respect: Shake hands prior to and after contests.
4. Respect judgment of contest officials, abide by rules of the contest and display no behavior that could incite fans.
5. Cooperate with officials, coaches or directors and fellow participants to conduct a fair contest.
6. Do not retaliate (verbally or physically) if the other team demonstrates poor behavior.
7. Accept seriously the responsibility and privilege of representing Special Olympics.
8. Define winning as doing your personal best.
9. Live up to the high standard of sportsmanship established by your coach.

### Coaching Tips

- Discuss snowshoeing competition protocol such as congratulating opponent after all events, win or lose; and controlling temper and behavior at all times.
- Give recognition to athletes and assistant coaches.
- Always commend the athletes when they demonstrate sportsmanship.

### Remember

- Sportsmanship is an attitude that is shown in how you and your athletes behave on the course or trail.
- Be positive about competing.
- Respect your opponents and yourself.
- Always stay under control even if you are feeling mad or angry.

# Glossary of Terms

Term	Definition
<b>Binding</b>	The part of a snowshoe that attaches the footwear to the snowshoe.
<b>Carrying Surface</b>	Surface area of a snowshoe; the larger the surface area, the more flotation and support for the snowshoer.
<b>Crampon</b>	The sharp pointed traction device that may be attached to a snowshoe's pivot hinge to prevent slippage. Generally made from heat-treated aluminum or tempered carbon steel.
<b>Claw</b>	Like a crampon but with comparatively short serrations. Claws are an angle traction device attached to snowshoes. They give a "grip" comparable to that provided by the webbing of traditional snowshoes and are used in conditions where ice or steep surfaces are not encountered.
<b>Decking</b>	Solid or webbed pieces of nylon, rawhide or rubber-like material attached to the snowshoe frame that provides flotation for the snowshoer.
<b>Fall Line</b>	Shortest distance down a slope. The direction perpendicular to the ground that an object (you, rock, snow) would fall.
<b>Flotation</b>	Ability of a snowshoe to limit sinking down into soft or deep snow.
<b>Frame</b>	The rigid outer structural component of a snowshoe, usually made of wood, plastic or metal.
<b>Heel Strap</b>	Part of the snowshoe binding that secures the heel. It is a strap that wraps around the back of the snowshoer's footwear.



Lamp Wick	A 1 ½-inch cotton woven cord (oil lamp cord) used for binding snowshoes.
Pivot Rod	Attaches to the frame and allows the foot and binding to rotate as the snowshoer moves forward.
Tail	The rear area of a snowshoe frame.
Tip or Toe	The front area of a snowshoe frame.
Toe Hole	The opening in the front decking that allows the forefoot to pivot through a complete range of motion.
Tuque	A knitted hat adorned with a tassel on the top, the traditional headgear for snowshoers.