

GUIDANCE FOR COACHES

The Special Olympics Programme offers 14 official sports, a non-competitive Motor Activities Training Programme and a Young Athletes Programme. The diversity within this range of sports brings a layer of complexity when implementing the Framework Phases. To overcome this complexity, we recommend that each club reads and understands the guidance issued by Special Olympics Ireland but also review the guidance provided by the relevant National Governing Body (NGB) of the particular sport(s) run in the club.

SOI has developed a series of flowcharts to assist coaches in making good decisions on how training sessions can be organised safely and to take account of COVID-19 guidelines for all attendees. The flowcharts are based on the governments DATE concept - Distance Activity Time and Environment and SOI has added an “S” for Special Olympics specific content. The DATES concept will assist coaches to make good decisions for their athlete group and recognises that no two clubs are the same. These flowcharts should be reviewed prior to reviewing and taking account of the relevant National Governing Body (NGB) for Sport to ensure best practice is employed for Special Olympics club activities.

Floorball, Bocce, Motor Activities Training Programme and Young Athletes are sports/programmes for which Special Olympics Ireland is the National Governing Body. For two of these sports, SOI is signposting coaches to NGB guidance in a sport that is similar in nature, namely Hockey Ireland for Floorball and Irish Lawn Bowls for Bocce. In the case of Motor Activities and Young Athletes Programmes, clubs should refer to the recommendations outlined in the publication “[COVID-19 Interim Recommendations for the Return to Sports Activities for Children and Adolescents](#)”, issued by the Health Protection Surveillance Centre (HPSE).

- Where a difference exists between the relevant NGB guidance and that of Special Olympics Ireland, clubs should follow Special Olympics Ireland guidance. An example of this is in the Orientation Phase in SOI’s Protocol, the number of attendees is likely to be lower than that permitted by some other NGBs.
- Some Special Olympics athletes may need more assistance than others, increasing physical contact than the NGB guidelines may anticipate and it is hoped the ‘S’ in DATES will help identify these situations.

Coaches should be mindful that some athletes will have been relatively inactive for 3-5 months and the level of fitness is unlikely to be at the level it may have been in March 2020. Therefore, the duration and intensity of training should not be at the same level that it was back in March. Sessions will need to be adapted to suit each athlete group and to facilitate a gradual return to fitness and skill level.

It is important to note that some athletes may choose not to return to the club for a variety of reasons, for example, they may require additional assistance, have underlying health issues or be anxious about the situation. We hope that, in time, all athletes will make a return and the club is active again and meeting the needs of all its athlete members.

The following flowcharts should assist coaches when planning their training session. The links to the relevant NGBs and HSE / NHS Protocols Guidelines are contained in the SOI Return to Activities Protocol found on the SOI website – www.specialolympics.ie









