



Understanding Differences Mini-Lessons



Special Olympics
**Unified Champion
Schools®**

Updated November 2020



Special Olympics Mission

The mission of Special Olympics is to provide year-round sports training and athletic competition in a variety of Olympic-type sports for children and adults with intellectual disabilities, giving them continuing opportunities to develop physical fitness, demonstrate courage, experience joy and participate in sharing gifts, skills and friendship with their families, other Special Olympics athletes and the community.

Special Olympics Unified Champion Schools®

Special Olympics Unified Champion Schools® is a program for schools Pre-K through university that intentionally promotes social inclusion by bringing together students with and without intellectual disabilities through sport and education-related activities. There are currently over 7,600 schools in 49 U.S. states, the District of Columbia and the commonwealth of Puerto Rico.

The three-component model offers a unique combination of effective activities that equip young people with the knowledge, skills, tools and training to create classrooms and school climates of acceptance, respect, and meaningful inclusion. These are school climates where students with disabilities feel welcome and are routinely included in -- and feel a part of -- all activities, opportunities, and functions.

This is accomplished by implementing **Special Olympics Unified Sports®, inclusive youth leadership** opportunities (such as clubs, student organizations and leadership teams), and **whole school engagement**. The program is woven into the fabric of the school community, enhancing existing efforts and providing rich opportunities that empower all students to be the agents of genuine change in their schools, creating socially inclusive environments that support and engage all learners. Unified Champion Schools implementation can vary greatly from school to school, based on the needs, goals, schedules, and other factors unique to each school, but the building blocks and framework are the same.



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The contents of this Special Olympics Unified Champion Schools® resource were developed under a grant from the Department of Education. However, those contents do not necessarily represent the policy of the Department of Education, and you should not assume endorsement by the Federal Government.



The mini lessons on Understanding Differences that follow can be used as part of schoolwide PBIS instructional lessons or in preparation for hosting a Spread the Word Campaign. These lessons are meant to assist with developing attitudes and behaviors that are respectful toward all students, regardless of their abilities.

They can be used separately for individual lessons, or the set of three lessons can be used as a sequential set of activities, helping students reflect on their perceptions of disabilities and gain increased understanding. In the first lesson, students will be asked to complete a challenging task and relate the experience to the frustrations and feelings that those with disabilities often face daily. Student groups then will learn about disabilities and revisit their initial perceptions to see if and how they've changed. In the final lesson, students will gain an understanding of social inclusion and will look at the inclusiveness of formal and informal settings in their school. The mini-lessons also connect well with other instructional content that explores civic responsibility, inclusion, and social justice. Used separately or together, the lessons will help students to reflect on their perceptions of disabilities and gain increased understanding of persons with disabilities in their school and community.

The desired outcomes of these activities are as follows. Students will:

- Complete a challenging task and relate the experience to the frustrations and feelings of those with disabilities.
- Learn about disabilities and revisit their initial perceptions to see if they have changed.
- Will gain an understanding of social inclusion and will look at the inclusiveness of formal and informal settings in their school.
- Look at civic responsibilities, inclusion, and social justice.

“Disabilities are yet another manifestation of global diversity. Let us always be committed to the fundamental principles of dignity and equality for all human beings.”

- Kofi A. Annan, Secretary-General, United Nations

Understanding Differences

Mini-lesson 1: Perceptions

Focus: In this lesson students will individually complete several challenging tasks and understand what it is like to have different challenges. Students will also explore what having a disability means to them and how persons with disabilities are perceived by others.

Time Required

30-60 Minutes

Recommended Materials

- Chalk/White Board
- Sheet(s) of paper for each student
- Pens, Pencils
- Use Survey Monkey or Google Forms to format the questions and have the students answer the questions prior to class and be ready to discuss the results

Helpful Links

- Special Olympics Attitudes Research: <https://bit.ly/3evJOIW>
- A Compelling Lesson in Perception: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=VbMWJZfC7kI>
- Implicit Bias: <http://kirwaninstitute.osu.edu/research/understanding-implicit-bias/>

Steps

Part One

1. Define the word “perception” and briefly explain what “implicit bias” is. Use the above links if needed.
2. Pre-print on paper to hand out, or write on the board the following questions prior to the students coming to class:

Option #1: Translate the following Latin phrase into English. You will have 2 minutes.

Aut viam inveniam aut faciam

Answer: Either I shall find a way, or I will make one.

Option #2: Solve the following physics problem. You will have 1 minute.

A pig is launched at a 43- degree angle at a velocity of 35m/s. What is the pig's horizontal velocity?

Answer: 23.86

3. At the end of the time, discreetly distribute answer sheets to a few students, but not others.
4. Ask the class to provide the answers.
5. Follow up group questions could be:
 - How many students sincerely tried to complete the challenge?
 - How did the exercise make you feel?
 - Did your frustration increase when some students received the answers, and you did not?

Part Two:

1. Give the students a new piece of paper or have them use the blank side used in Part One.
2. Have the students write down the first thing that comes to mind when you say the word “disability.”
3. Write or have the students come up and write their responses on the board.
4. Reflecting on the responses written on the board, have the students discuss the following:
 - Are most of the responses perceived as positive or negative?
 - Did the responses emphasize being disabled as a strength or a weakness?
 - Did the responses focus on a person's abilities or their disability?
 - How would you describe your current perception of persons with disabilities?

Understanding Differences

Mini-lesson 2: Facts and Perceptions

Focus: In this lesson, students will learn about disabilities and revisit their initial perceptions to see if they have changed.

Time Required

30-60 Minutes

Recommended Materials

- Chart Paper and markers
- ADA Definition of Disability: <https://adata.org/faq/what-definition-disability-under-ada>

Steps

1. Post chart paper around the room. Mark each paper with a different disability heading. Intellectual Disability, Developmental Disability, Autism, Visual or Hearing Impairment, Physical Disability, etc.
2. Under each heading, write the word "Perceptions." Then, half-way down the page, write the word "Facts."
3. Share with the students the ADA definition of disability, and that the law also says that it is unlawful to discriminate against a person with a disability.
4. Discuss with students the differences in their perception when you use "a disabled person" versus "a person with a disability" and why it is important.
5. Have students move around the room to each of the charts of paper, writing down their perceptions about each category of disability.
6. Divide the class into equal groups. Try to have 3-4 persons per group. Assign each group one or more specific disability category.
7. Students will use various resources to confirm or deny the perceptions listed on the chart paper. They then will list each fact on the bottom of the paper. Each group will then present their finding to the class.
8. Final discussion questions:
 - What were the significant differences between student's perceptions and facts about the different disabilities?
 - What is the impact that inaccurate perceptions have, and ways students might work to overcome them?
 - Identify misperceptions in their class or school and how they could overcome them.

"I've learned so much from Adam, and I'm sure he's learned some from me. If you take the time to make them your friend, they're the same as everyone else."

Understanding Differences

Mini-lesson 3: Social Inclusion

Focus: In this lesson, students will gain understanding of social inclusion and will look at the inclusiveness of formal and informal settings within their classroom/school.

Time Required

30-60 Minutes

Recommended Materials

Internet Access
Chart Paper and Markers
Post it Notes

Helpful Links

Social Inclusion in Action: <https://www.specialolympics.org/inclusion-in-action>

Meaningful Inclusion in Schools: <https://www.generationunified.org/videos/evan-and-jay/>

Steps

1. Introduce students to the term “social inclusion.” Social inclusion in schools means all students are meaningfully engaged in formal and informal settings throughout the school including classrooms, hallways and playing fields; and they have meaningful opportunities to contribute to the school community.
2. Ask students to reflect on social inclusion in their school.
 - Are all students treated fairly and respectfully despite their race, religion, economic status, gender, sexual orientation or disability?
 - Do all students seem to have friends in the school?
 - Do students with and without disabilities share meaningful friendships?
 - What does the membership of school clubs look like? Are school clubs inclusive of students with and without disabilities?
 - Are there students with and without disabilities on the same sports teams? Does the school have opportunities for all students to have an opportunity to play sports, such as intramural teams?
3. Divide the class into equal groups. Each group should develop an “icebreaker” type of activity, that takes no longer than 5 minutes, that can be used in their classroom to increase opportunities for students with and without disabilities to interact in meaningful ways.
4. Share the activities with the class and discuss how these activities could be implemented at a building-wide level.
5. Prepare the activities in a document that can be shared out to enhance school wide engagement.
6. Reflection: Give each student a post it note and have them finish this sentence: “People with disabilities...” Place them on the board in the front of the room.

“My ambition in life is to turn ‘no’ into ‘yes.’ If someone says I can’t do something, I want to prove I can.”

- Suzanne O’Moore, Special Olympics Australia Athlete 6