



Binghamton Hawks Special Hockey Program

A Program of Life Is Washable, Inc. A 501(c)(3) non-profit organization

Introduction

Life Is Washable, Inc. was founded in 2005 to address the need for more inclusive and family-centered opportunities for individuals with disabilities. At the time, few programs allowed families to actively participate alongside their loved ones in therapeutic or recreational activities. Families didn't want to just observe—they wanted to be part of the experience. Siblings, cousins, and friends also wanted to join in. Our programs were developed to provide the tools, materials, and inclusive environments where individuals of all abilities can engage, create, and grow—together.

Mission Statement

Life Is Washable, Inc. provides facilitated programs for special needs individuals of all ages within Central New York and Northeastern Pennsylvania, focusing on family engagement programs that serve individuals with developmental and cognitive disabilities.

Life Is Washable, Inc. seeks to:

- Conduct programs that invite and engage individuals with special needs and their caregivers to use creative solutions for their identified goals and challenges.
- Provide recreation opportunities with purpose for special needs families that are not available in the mainstream.
- Provide inclusive community events that celebrate the special needs community's abilities.
- Support community collaborations that enhance the quality of life for individuals with special needs, their families, and the community at large.

Since its founding, Life Is Washable, Inc. has served over 65,000 participants including individuals (of all ages) diagnosed with a cognitive, physical, or developmental disabilities and their caregivers.

Through its program, Binghamton Hawks, Life Is Washable, Inc. provides the opportunity for adaptive ice hockey and an adaptive hockey team for athletes and their family members have a sense of community and place of belonging. In order to meet the specific daily operational needs of an adaptive sports team, a committee was formed to assist the Binghamton Hawks with its operational needs. This committee operates under the direction Life Is Washable, Inc. to best serve the participants and families.

About the Binghamton Hawks Program

The Binghamton Hawks Special Hockey Program serves individuals with special needs throughout New York's Southern Tier and Northeastern Pennsylvania. This volunteer guide is designed to help you confidently and effectively support our athletes, their families, and caregivers as part of our inclusive hockey community.



Binghamton Hawks Committee & Program Guidelines

Program Structure & Governance

This committee and program guideline outlines the structure and framework for the program currently known as *Binghamton Hawks Special Hockey (BHSB)*. It is intended to support the ongoing operations and governance of the program.

BHSB is operated under the oversight of **Life Is Washable, Inc.**, which provides administrative support and corporate authority. Life Is Washable, Inc. will assist with overall program needs as identified by the BHSB Committee. The program also receives support from the **American Special Hockey Association (ASHA)**, which serves as the sanctioning and governing body for all ASHA member programs.

This document is not a season plan or coaching manual. Specific operational decisions—such as the number of teams in each division (A, B, C), roster formation, and practice scheduling—are part of BHSB best practices and reviewed annually. Any programmatic changes must be approved by a majority vote of the current BHSB Committee. All policies are subject to final approval by Life Is Washable, Inc.

The BHSB Committee reports quarterly to the Life Is Washable, Inc. Board and is expected to maintain regular communication regarding program updates, challenges, or concerns.

This policy was originally drafted and adopted on May 4, 2023 and updated in May of 2025. It will be reviewed and updated at least every three years, or as needed.

BHSB Committee Overview

Meeting Schedule & Participation

- The committee meets 11 months per year, with an annual meeting each June.
- Meetings are held on the first Monday of each month at 7:00 PM, either in-person or via teleconference.
- Committee members may miss up to two meetings per year and still remain active.
- A quorum is defined as over 50% of voting members present.
- Meetings are open to the public, with closed sessions held as needed. Confidentiality is expected for all closed session discussions.
- Leadership positions (President/Chair, Vice President/Chair, Secretary, Budget Coordinator) may not be held by individuals who are related or share a household to prevent conflicts of interest.
- All committee members must remain in good standing and are expected to submit a monthly report at each meeting.

Committee Roles & Responsibilities

- **Chair (may be referred to as President):** Provides direct oversight of the committee and ensures adherence to policies. Reports quarterly to the Life Is Washable, Inc. Board.
- **Vice Chair (may be referred to as Vice President):** Acts as Chair when needed and oversees all program operations and activities.

- **Budget Coordinator (may be referred to as Team Treasurer):** Prepares and submits a monthly budget report to the committee (due 24 hours prior to each meeting). Collaborates with the Fundraising Coordinator and works closely with the Life Is Washable Treasurer and Executive Director to ensure fiscal compliance.
- **Secretary:** Schedules meetings, ensures quorum, and maintains official records. Takes meeting minutes and posts open session minutes to the website at least 72 hours before the next meeting. Coordinates with the Team Manager with Team communication.
- **Team Manager:** Coordinates participant registration, equipment needs, and coach compliance with ASHA policies, including SafeSport/MAAPP, Codes of Conduct, and IDEA Zero Tolerance. Maintains updated registration records and works closely with the Budget Coordinator.
- **Fundraising Coordinator:** Develops fundraising activities in collaboration with the Chair and Team Manager. Ensures compliance with Life Is Washables' fiscal procedures and obtains approval for all activities.
- **Member-at-Large: Head Coach:** Reports to the committee on coaching and participant development. Creates developmentally appropriate practice plans, tailored to age, ability, and cognitive level. Submits a written seasonal plan to the committee during the annual meeting and distributes it to families before the season begins.

Committee Purpose

The Binghamton Hawks Special Hockey program is committed to serving individuals with intellectual, developmental, and physical disabilities through the sport of hockey. In partnership with Life Is Washable, Inc., BSHH creates a welcoming environment where athletes of all ages and abilities experience the pride and joy of participating in ice hockey.

The program fosters learning, mutual respect, and a strong sense of community among athletes, families, and volunteers across New York's Southern Tier and Northeastern Pennsylvania.

Special hockey provides a supportive space for athletes with diverse abilities, with a focus on:

- Sportsmanship
- Teamwork
- Friendship
- Personal growth—on and off the ice

This environment promotes improved physical and mental health, and builds a community of families and peers that positively impacts quality of life for both the athletes and their loved ones.

Membership

The Binghamton Hawks Special Hockey (BSHH) program does not limit the number of members. To be considered a member, an individual must:

- Be registered with the Binghamton Hawks through the American Special Hockey Association
- Be in good standing with both BSHH and ASHA
- Have fulfilled all financial obligations by the designated due dates
- Be appropriately registered for the current season

All registered parents and guardians who meet these criteria are also considered members of BSHH. Non-members—including individuals who regularly attend practices or events but are not registered—are considered guests and may participate only with the approval and ongoing invitation of the BSHH Committee.

Program Goals

The goal of the Binghamton Hawks Special Hockey (BHSB) program is to create an environment where athletes of all ages and abilities can grow—both as hockey players and as individuals.

We focus on developing hockey skills, building confidence, and promoting a positive team experience. Just as importantly, we work to create a culture rooted in teamwork, fairness, and personal integrity—on the ice, in the locker room, and in all our interactions.

Core Values

Being part of the Binghamton Hawks Special Hockey (BHSB) community is a privilege. All registered members—athletes, parents/guardians, coaches, and volunteers—are expected to follow our Code of Conduct. These core values reflect what we stand for as a team and help keep the focus where it belongs: on creating a safe, supportive, and joyful environment for our athletes.

- **Belonging:** Every athlete deserves to feel seen, valued, and safe. Our program exists to create meaningful opportunities for people with disabilities—and it only works when our members foster that sense of belonging for everyone.
 - **Sportsmanship:** We celebrate effort, not just outcomes. Whether we win or lose, we do it with humility and class. That includes how we act in the stands, in the locker room, and during car rides home.
 - **Growth:** Every athlete is here to grow at their own pace. That growth only happens when the adults around them create space for learning, trying, and sometimes failing. Progress, not perfection, is the goal—for all of us.
 - **Joy:** If it's not fun, we're missing the point. Our athletes deserve an experience that's filled with laughter, connection, and pride. Joy is part of the work.
 - **Teamwork:** We're not just a group—we're a team. That means helping each other, assuming good intent, and focusing on what's best for the whole program.
 - **Respect:** Respect isn't optional. We treat athletes, coaches, volunteers, and fellow parents with kindness, patience, and maturity—even when we disagree. Every conversation, every comment, every action matters.
 - **Integrity:** We expect honesty, accountability, and follow-through from our members. That means showing up, pitching in, and doing what's right—even when no one's watching.
 - **Mission-First Mindset:** Everything we do should support the athletes and the heart of this program. As members, we commit to putting the mission ahead of personal agendas. We value collaboration, communication and community. When we stay grounded in that shared purpose, we all thrive.
-

Program Costs

To help cover the costs of ice time, equipment, insurance, and overall operations, BHSB requires a participation fee each season. This fee is significantly lower than the actual cost per athlete, made possible through community support from Life Is Washable, Inc. and team fundraising efforts.

Participation Fee Structure

- The participation fee for the 2024–2025 season is \$300 per athlete if paid in full by October 30, 2024.
 - Payments must be made via check or PayPal (Any online transactions fees are the responsibility of the Payee) Cash is not accepted.
-

- If not paying in full, the total fee must be split into two equal payments:
 - First half due: October 30
 - Second half due: January 15
- If either payment is late, a \$15 monthly late fee may be applied to the athlete's remaining balance.
- If full payment is not received by January 15, the athlete may not be allowed to participate tournaments.

All program fees are set each year as part of the BSHS Annual Budget, approved by the Life Is Washable, Inc. Board of Directors in June.

Refund Policy

- Refunds may be requested within 30 days of registration, but will be subject to deductions for any accrued costs or processing fees.

Equipment Deposits

- A \$100 deposit is required at the start of each season for any borrowed equipment.
- Deposits will be returned when all borrowed equipment is returned clean and in good condition.
- Equipment that is damaged, excessively worn, unclean, or unusable due to misuse may result in the forfeiture of the deposit or replacement charges.

Tournament/Festival Fees

Each family whose athlete is participating in a regular season tournament/festival will be required to pay a \$50 tournament fee, which must be submitted at least 14 days before the event.

- Checks should be made payable to: Life Is Washable, Inc.
- Memo line: "Binghamton Hawks"
- These funds will be used to pay the appropriate festival or tournament fees to the host organization.

Note: Can/Am Festivals and Tournaments have a separate per person fee charged by Can/Am which will be shared with appropriate event registration details.

Scholarships

The Eaton Family Scholarship Fund was generously established to assist families who may not be able to afford the full cost of participation. Scholarships are awarded based on demonstrated financial need and the availability of funds. Full or partial awards may be granted. *Scholarship availability is not guaranteed and depends on annual fundraising and donations designated to the Scholarship Fund.*

To apply:

- Families must submit a confidential written request by October 1 of the current season.
- The letter should briefly outline the reason for the request.
- The BSHS Committee will review all applications within 7 days of the deadline and notify families of the decision by phone or email within 48 hours.

Third-Party Reimbursement

Families seeking reimbursement through a third party may request a donation receipt from Life Is Washable, Inc. Please note:

- BSHS and Life Is Washable, Inc. do not coordinate with third-party agencies, complete paperwork, or communicate with outside entities on behalf of families.
- All third-party reimbursement arrangements are the sole responsibility of the parent or guardian.

Fundraising & Buy-Out Option

The Fundraising Coordinator will provide oversight to all fundraising activities. The Fundraising Coordinator will be made aware of all fundraising activities and will need to inform the Committee and obtain approval to all fundraising activities. The Fundraising Coordinator will work closely with the Committee Finance Coordinator to ensure that all funds are transparent and properly documented.

The BSHH program will support and grow the program for the players and families through various fundraising opportunities. Each family will engage in these fundraising opportunities or choose to buy out. The BSHH will require each family to support the program by earning a minimum of \$100.00 dollars annually through fundraising or buy out.

Families are strongly encouraged to participate in fundraising opportunities throughout the season. Funds raised through these efforts may be applied to directly offset an athlete's participation fee balance.

For families who prefer not to participate in fundraising, the BSHH Committee offers a Buy-Out Option, allowing families to contribute a flat amount of \$100 in place of fundraising participation.

Program Objectives

The primary goal of the Binghamton Hawks Special Hockey (BSHH) program is to help each athlete develop and improve their hockey skills in a supportive and engaging environment. This responsibility falls primarily to the coaches and on-ice volunteers during practices and games. All coaches and volunteers are expected to align their actions with the program's goals and objectives during every session. These objectives include, but are not limited to:

- **Skill Development:** Deliver drills and exercises that are appropriate to each athlete's developmental level, and designed to help them improve during each ice session.
- **Challenging, Supportive Environment:** Create practice environments that challenge players to grow while remaining mindful of each athlete's individual abilities and understanding of the game.
- **Team Spirit and Enjoyment:** Foster a team culture that emphasizes fun, excitement, and a shared love for the sport of hockey.
- **Game and Festival Participation:** Support athlete growth by participating in festivals and scheduling games with other ASHA-affiliated teams whenever possible.

Participation Requirements

Only athletes who are fully registered with both the American Special Hockey Association (ASHA) and the Binghamton Hawks Special Hockey (BSHH) will be permitted to participate in the program.

To remain eligible to play, all program fees must be paid in full or in accordance with the BSHH payment policy. Athletes with outstanding balances will not be allowed on the ice until the issue is resolved.

Registrations submitted after the start of the season will be accepted, provided that all required information is submitted and space is available.

Festival Participation

When BSHH hosts a local festival, participation is mandatory for all parents and guardians of athletes registered to play in that tournament. Due to the scale of these events and the importance of hosting a quality experience for all participants, every family is expected to contribute their time and support.

The BSHS Secretary will distribute an email at the start of the season—and again monthly—prior to any BSHS festival. This email will outline participation details and request confirmation of attendance. Parents are required to respond within 10 business days, indicating:

- Whether their athlete(s) will attend the festival
- Their availability to assist during the event (including any specific dates or times they are not available)

Families are responsible for covering their own lodging and meal costs for away tournaments.

Requests for last-minute entries into a festival will only be considered in extraordinary circumstances.

Team Structure

The Binghamton Hawks Special Hockey (BSHS) program is structured to ensure that players of all ability levels can participate meaningfully. BSHS may consist of one or more teams, depending on the number of players and their skill levels, and shall be formed in accordance with the ASHA Leveled Play Guidelines.

Coaching Requirements

- The Head Coach must possess a working knowledge of the sport of hockey. It is recommended that this individual hold at least a USA Hockey Level 1 coaching certification and have completed ASHA Coach Training.
 - All coaches must be familiar with ASHA's rules of play and the player rating system.
 - The Head Coach must meet all ASHA compliance requirements for the team to remain in good standing. This includes Safe Sport Act compliance (e.g., Background Screening and Abuse Prevention Training every two years) and registration through ASHA.
 - The Head Coach may not simultaneously serve as an officer on the BSHS Committee.
 - All members of the coaching staff must be in good standing at the end of each season to remain eligible for coaching in future seasons.
-

Coach Selection Process

- Head Coaches serve a two-season term.
 - Interested candidates must submit a Letter of Intent to the BSHS Chair no later than April 30 each year. The letter should include:
 - Statement of interest in coaching
 - Coaching experience
 - Experience working with individuals with disabilities
 - Any additional relevant qualifications or information
 - The Vice Chair will lead the Coaches Selection Committee, which will include representatives from the Life Is Washable, Inc. Board of Directors and the BSHS Committee.
 - Coach selections will be reviewed and voted on at the May meeting, typically held on the last Monday of May.
-

Coaching Responsibilities

The Head Coach has authority over:

- Player ratings and positions
- Playing time (as aligned with BSHH Playing Time Guidelines)
- Practice planning, content, and structure
- Team discipline (in consultation with Assistant Coaches)

Primary responsibilities also include:

- Promoting skill development, teamwork, and fair play
- Creating a positive, inclusive, and respectful environment
- Designing practice plans that incorporate fundamental skating, drills, and game concepts
- Selecting Team Captains, either directly or through a method determined by the BSHH Committee
- Distributing and reviewing with all players, coaches, managers, and families the following:
 - BSHH-ASHA Code of Conduct
 - ASHA IDEA Zero Tolerance Policy
 - ASHA Locker Room Policy

Coaches must remain aware of and compliant with the Safe Sport Act and Minor Athlete Abuse Prevention Policies (MAAPP), especially regarding communication methods (e.g., cell phones, social media).

Team Manager

If BSHH includes multiple teams, each team must appoint a Team Manager or Co-Managers, who:

- Serve as the main point of contact for the team
- Coordinate all practice and game updates
- Manage team communication and logistics with Committee Secretary
- Track festival/tournament attendance and participant information
- Communicate attendance details to the BSHH Chair and Head Coach
- Maintain inventory of all BSHH-owned gear
- Process new gear additions and repair requests
- Track distribution and collection of loaned equipment
- Coordinate with ASHA staff to ensure ASHA-shared inventory is accessed only with permission

BSHH currently shares equipment storage space with ASHA. The Equipment Coordinator is required to respect inventory protocols and coordinate directly with ASHA staff regarding shared resources.

The Team Manager is responsible for securing lodging counts and related planning for away festivals and must not be the Head Coach. Team Managers must also meet all ASHA compliance requirements to maintain team eligibility.

Equipment

The Binghamton Hawks Special Hockey (BSHH) program is committed to making hockey accessible by providing as much equipment as possible for our athletes. However, families may be required to purchase some gear directly.

- Helmets: Each player is required to have a helmet that meets current HECC certification standards. Helmets must be within the approved timeframe for safety.
 - Mouthguards & Neck Guards: BSHH strongly recommends that all players wear mouthguards & neck guards.
-

- **Loaned Equipment:** Any equipment borrowed from BSHH must be returned clean and in good condition by the end of the season (typically by April 1, or as otherwise announced).
 - **Equipment Deposit:** A refundable \$100 deposit is required for any loaned equipment. This deposit will be returned once all gear is returned in acceptable condition. Equipment that is damaged, excessively worn, unclean, or lost due to misuse may result in the forfeiture of the deposit.
 - **Requests for Equipment Support:** Families who need additional help accessing gear may request assistance through BSHH. BSHH can request equipment support from ASHA on an as-needed basis.
-

Safety

The safety of our athletes, coaches, and volunteers is a top priority. The following guidelines are designed to reduce the risk of injury and ensure compliance with program and facility policies:

- **Access to On-Ice and Bench Areas:** Only registered coaches are permitted on the ice, benches, or in any area where they may be exposed to pucks, sticks, or other risks. If others (e.g., family members, support staff, or volunteers) need to enter these areas for any reason, they must:
 - Receive prior approval from a BSHH volunteer or committee member.
 - Wear appropriate protective gear, including at minimum a helmet.
 - Eye protection is recommended if the helmet does not include a full shield.
- **Helmet Requirements:** Everyone on the ice—including players, coaches, and volunteers—must wear a helmet that is properly fitted and securely buckled. Non-players may wear a bicycle-style helmet, provided it has no external protrusions (e.g., aero bumps).
- **Footwear on Ice:** Anyone entering the ice surface in shoes (not skates) must wear spiked footwear or proper ice cleats to prevent slipping.

Injury Reporting Protocol: If a player, coach, or volunteer is injured during a practice or game, the Head Coach (or designee) must notify the BSHH Chair as soon as possible.

The BSHH Chair is responsible for notifying:

- The facility where the incident took place, and
- Life Is Washable, Inc., and
- The American Special Hockey Association (ASHA)

These safety standards are in place to protect everyone involved and to uphold our commitment to a safe, inclusive environment.

Rules of Play

The Binghamton Hawks Special Hockey (BSHH) program adheres to the most current version of the ASHA Rules of Play, which can be found at specialhockey.org.

In the event of a conflict between ASHA rules and BSHH-specific policies, the BSHH policies shall take precedence.

All participants—including players, coaches, assistant coaches, team managers, parents, and volunteers—are expected to comply with the following standards at all times:

- BSHH-ASHA Code of Conduct
 - ASHA Locker Room Policy
-

These rules are in place to ensure a safe, respectful, and inclusive environment for everyone involved in the program.

Code of Conduct & Locker Room

The Binghamton Hawks Special Hockey (BHSH) program exists to serve registered athletes with developmental disabilities by fostering a safe, inclusive, and respectful hockey environment. Participation in this program is a privilege, and all registered members—athletes, coaches, parents/guardians, volunteers, and spectators—are expected to model behavior that reflects our mission and values.

A copy of the Codes of Conduct are attached to this document.

Behavioral Expectations

Conduct for all players, coaches, and spectators is governed by:

- The **ASHA Rules of Play**
- The **BHSH-ASHA Code of Conduct**
- The **BHSH-ASHA Locker Room Policy**

The **BHSH Committee** is responsible for enforcing these policies and may administer additional disciplinary measures if needed.

At the start of each season:

- The **Head Coach** will provide a copy of the BHSH-ASHA Code of Conduct and Locker Room Policy to every player, coach, team manager, and parent/guardian.
- Each family is required to **sign an acknowledgment form** confirming they have read and understand these documents prior to participating.

Locker Room Guidelines

Locker rooms are shared, semi-private spaces where conduct expectations are especially important. All behavior in and around locker rooms must follow:

- The ASHA Locker Room Policy
- Applicable MAAPP (Minor Athlete Abuse Prevention Policies)
- BHSH supervision and safety guidelines

Coaches and team managers are responsible for monitoring locker room environments, ensuring they remain safe and inclusive at all times. Detailed Guidelines and Policies are outlined in the Annual ASHA Registration.

A copy of the Codes of Conduct and Locker Room Policies are attached to this document.

Code of Conduct & Oversight

The Binghamton Hawks Special Hockey (BHSH) program is committed to providing a safe, inclusive, and respectful environment for all athletes, coaches, volunteers, and families. Participation in this program is a privilege, and all registered members are expected to uphold the highest standards of conduct in alignment with BHSH's mission and values.

BINGHAMTON HAWKS VOLUNTEER EXPECTATIONS AND RESPONSIBILITIES

As a volunteer with the Binghamton Hawks Special Hockey program, operated in partnership with Life Is Washable, Inc., you are part of a mission-driven community that values inclusion, joy, and safety. This program thrives because of the energy, kindness, and professionalism of individuals like you. Volunteers are the heart of our mission, and your actions—large and small—shape the experience of every athlete, family, and peer in the program. This section outlines expectations, responsibilities, boundaries, and procedures for all volunteers representing the Binghamton Hawks, both during hockey activities and in the community. These guidelines are grounded in the SafeSport Act, MAAPP (Minor Athlete Abuse Prevention Policies), the ASHA Codes of Conduct, and organizational policies set forth by Life Is Washable, Inc. Volunteers are expected to carry out their roles with integrity and a shared commitment to building a safe, respectful, and inclusive program environment.

Our Shared Purpose

Volunteering with the Hawks is more than lending a hand—it's joining a movement of inclusion, empowerment, and joy. Our program exists to create meaningful recreational opportunities for athletes with disabilities. While hockey is our shared activity, our real goal is to foster belonging and connection. That goal is only possible when volunteers approach their roles with open hearts, empathy, and patience. We don't just run practices—we build a community.

Your Impact

Every interaction you have can shape the experience of a participant or family. Whether you're helping someone onto the ice, listening to a caregiver, or stepping in during a moment of uncertainty, your steady presence matters. Volunteers create the tone, energy, and culture of our team. By showing up with consistency and care, you help build trust—and trust is the foundation for everything else we do.

Volunteers are expected to:

- Maintain a professional, positive, and flexible attitude
- Promote safety, encouragement, and respect
- Support caregivers by working alongside them, not in place of them
- Represent the values of BHSH in speech, actions, and demeanor

Volunteers are encouraged to strive toward being:

- Enthusiastic and welcoming
- Compassionate and nonjudgmental
- Reliable, responsible, and ethical
- Supportive to participants, families, and fellow volunteers

Volunteer Roles

Volunteers may participate in a variety of ways across our program. Your specific tasks may vary depending on the event or activity. You may be asked to:

- Support athletes on or off the ice
- Assist with equipment, transitions, or drills
- Help during community outreach or fundraising events
- Represent the program at booths, festivals, or team functions

Because our visibility in the community is growing, volunteers are ambassadors of our mission well beyond the rink. Your words and actions are part of how people experience our program.

Boundaries & Behavior

Strong, healthy boundaries are key to providing a safe environment for all participants. Our athletes have a wide range of communication and support needs, and it's critical that volunteers respond appropriately.

Respecting physical, emotional, and social boundaries builds trust and maintains a safe space.

Volunteers must:

- Never be alone with a participant in a private space
- Avoid unnecessary or non-consensual physical contact
- Use respectful, age-appropriate, non-condescending language
- Refrain from sharing personal frustrations or stories during sessions

Volunteers may never:

- Diagnose, coach, or evaluate a participant's condition
- Offer therapeutic or behavioral advice
- Post content or participant details to social media without consent
- Contact participants online without explicit written approval from a guardian (and never with those under 18)

All media or public relations inquiries must be directed to the Executive Director or Committee Chair.

Supporting Participants

Our volunteers meet participants where they are—not where we expect them to be. Success looks different for every athlete. Some may need assistance getting on the ice; others may just need a listening ear or positive energy. This is not about competition or correction—it's about making space for each individual to shine. When unsure how to best support an athlete, always ask the coach or program lead.

Safety Procedures

Every volunteer is a steward of safety. This means physical, emotional, and environmental safety. Speak up if something feels off. Knowing what to do in the event of an emergency is as important as showing up to help.

Volunteers are expected to:

- Know emergency procedures and where first aid kits are located
- Ensure equipment is used appropriately
- Respond to signs of discomfort or distress

If an incident occurs:

1. Stop the activity
2. Offer aid if trained and appropriate
3. Notify a coach, Program Coordinator, or Committee Chair
4. Complete a written incident report within 24 hours

Cancellations

We understand life gets busy, but your commitment matters. Consistency is essential to both safety and trust. If you are unable to attend a session, please provide at least 48 hours' notice so coverage can be arranged.

Confidentiality

Our participants and families share deeply personal experiences. That information must be protected. Privacy is not just about legal compliance—it is about respect.

You may not:

- Share participant names, diagnoses, or behaviors outside the program
- Post or distribute photos/videos taken during practices or events without sign consent
- Repeat overheard conversations or personal details

Confidentiality includes electronic communication, printed rosters, and verbal disclosures. When in doubt, don't share it.

Interacting with Families & Caregivers

Families are central to our program. Volunteers support—not replace—they. Many caregivers are navigating complex emotional and logistical challenges. A kind word, a listening ear, or a small gesture of respect can go a long way. Avoid advice unless asked. And if a participant connects more with you than their caregiver, gently step back and encourage that connection.

Representing BSHH in the Community

Volunteers are often the first impression someone has of the Binghamton Hawks. Whether you're at a festival booth or speaking to a potential donor, your professionalism reflects the values of our program. Please:

- Dress appropriately for the event
- Speak accurately about the program
- Do not promote unrelated personal ventures
- Greet others warmly and respectfully

Equal Opportunity Statement

Life Is Washable, Inc. and the Binghamton Hawks welcome volunteers of all backgrounds. We do not discriminate based on race, gender identity, sexual orientation, age, disability, religion, or veteran status. Volunteering is a mutual agreement—it is not employment, and volunteers may be released at any time.

Final Thoughts

Being a volunteer with the Binghamton Hawks means showing up for people who rely on you. It means creating joy, safety, and belonging. You don't have to be perfect—just present, prepared, and kind. Our athletes notice. Our families notice. And we notice.

You're not just a volunteer. You're a difference-maker.

Thank you for helping make this community as special as the athletes we serve.

POLICIES AND CONFLICT RESOLUTION

Harassment, Discrimination & Zero Tolerance

We maintain a strict zero-tolerance policy for any form of misconduct. Every person deserves to feel safe, respected, and welcomed. Any behavior that undermines this environment will result in immediate dismissal.

Prohibited behaviors include, but are not limited to:

- Harassment, bullying, or intimidation
- Discrimination based on race, gender, identity, ability, or religion
- Retaliation or exclusion
- Sexual misconduct or inappropriate contact

All reports of misconduct will be investigated swiftly and confidentially in accordance with BSHH policy, Minor Athlete Abuse Prevention Policy standards, and legal obligations.

Complaints and Conflict Resolution

Concerns related to safety, program integrity, or violations of BSHH/ASHA policy should be reported promptly to the Program Coordinator, Committee Chair, or Executive Director. All reports will be handled with care, discretion, and confidentiality.

However, not every conflict requires committee involvement. Volunteers and families are expected to resolve minor personal misunderstandings with each other in an adult and respectful manner. The BSHH Committee will only intervene in complaints that impact the mission, safety, or operation of the program.

Misusing the complaint process to escalate personal drama, disagreements, or interpersonal conflict may result in removal.

Disciplinary Actions

Volunteers or participants who do not meet behavioral expectations may be subject to the following actions:

- Verbal or written warnings
- Temporary removal from programming
- Permanent dismissal for serious violations (e.g., abuse, safety breaches, repeated misconduct)

All disciplinary actions are handled with fairness, confidentiality, and in alignment with BSHH values.

Reporting and Conduct Oversight

- Any violations of the BSHH-ASHA Code of Conduct or Locker Room Policy by a player or coach must be reported to the BSHH Vice Chair within 24 hours by the Head Coach.
- The BSHH Board of Directors reserves the right to review the status of any coach or player with a documented history of violent, disruptive, or uncontrollable behavior, whether on or off the ice.
- Questions regarding BSHH rules or conduct policy should be directed to the BSHH Chair. If not resolved, the matter may be elevated to the Life Is Washable, Inc. Board of Directors for review and decision.
- If needed, ASHA may be consulted for national-level guidance or clarification.

All BSHH participants are subject to the U.S. Center for SafeSport Code, MAAPP, and related regulatory standards. Everyone is expected to act in accordance with BSHH's stated purpose and values, and to understand that misconduct carries consequences.

Conflict Resolution & Communication

BSHH follows a structured process for resolving concerns, while recognizing the unique emotional and developmental needs of the Special Hockey community.

When and how to raise a concern:

- Concerns about coaching decisions, playing time, behavior, or discipline should be raised privately, outside of practices or games, and never in front of athletes.
 - Individuals are encouraged to take time to reflect before initiating a conversation, and to do so respectfully, ideally in writing or by scheduling a conversation through the Head Coach, Team Manager, or a BSHH Committee Member.
-

Requesting a meeting:

1. A meeting may be requested and must include a **neutral third party**, such as a BSHH Committee Member, Team Manager, or impartial adult.
2. Either party may request the **BSHH Chair** or another designated committee member to help mediate.
3. Meetings must remain focused on **resolving concerns constructively** and in line with the BSHH mission.

This process applies equally to **coaches, parents, volunteers, and athletes**. Disregarding this structure or addressing concerns in a hostile or inappropriate way may result in **temporary suspension**, pending a formal review by the BSHH Committee and ASHA if necessary.

To preserve the integrity of the program and remain focused on our mission, **only registered members** of the Binghamton Hawks Special Hockey (BSHH) program and/or the American Special Hockey Association (ASHA) in good standing may formally raise concerns, submit complaints, or participate in any internal conduct, communication, or disciplinary processes.

This policy is designed to maintain organizational focus on providing a safe, inclusive, and mission-aligned experience for our athletes, families, and volunteers.

Exceptions are made only in cases involving allegations of abuse, misconduct, or harm to a minor or vulnerable athlete. In such cases, all concerns—regardless of the reporting party’s registration status—will be taken seriously and directed to the appropriate authorities or reviewed in accordance with SafeSport and MAAPP protocols.

Concerns submitted by individuals who are not currently affiliated with BSHH or ASHA and that do not involve safety, abuse, or welfare-related issues will not be addressed through internal program procedures.

This policy protects the integrity of the program and ensures that our time, energy, and resources remain focused on serving the athletes.

Exception – Mandatory Abuse Reporting: Concerns involving suspected abuse, neglect, or harm must be reported immediately, regardless of the reporting party’s membership status. BSHH and ASHA comply with all applicable SafeSport regulations and mandatory reporting laws.

Reports of suspected abuse should be directed to:

- The U.S. Center for SafeSport (for concerns related to sexual misconduct or abuse in sport)
 - Local law enforcement or child protection agencies (as required by law)
 - ASHA’s designated SafeSport contact for national-level guidance
- Abuse reporting does not require internal approval and must not be delayed. BSHH’s top priority is the safety and wellbeing of every athlete.

BINGHAMTON HAWKS

LOCKER ROOM, CHANGING AREA & RESTROOM POLICY

The Binghamton Hawks Special Hockey program follows the American Special Hockey Association (ASHA) and Minor Athlete Abuse Prevention Policies (MAAPP) to ensure the health, safety, privacy, and dignity of all participants. These guidelines apply to all locker rooms, changing areas, restrooms, and any spaces used for athlete preparation and personal care before, during, or after any BSHS activity.

General Policy

- Locker rooms and changing areas are considered private, controlled spaces.
- No one is permitted in these spaces unless they are an athlete, coach, or authorized volunteer who has completed required background checks and SafeSport/MAAPP training.
- No adult is permitted to be alone with a minor in any locker room, changing area, or restroom unless they are the minor's legal guardian or an approved staff member acting under observed conditions.
- All team personnel and volunteers are responsible for actively monitoring locker rooms while respecting athlete privacy.

Supervision Requirements

- **Two-Adult Rule:** At least two adults (background-checked and SafeSport trained) must be present when supervision is required.
- **Same-Gender Supervision:** Whenever possible, supervisory adults should be the same gender identity as the athletes using the locker room.
- **No Loitering:** Adults should not linger or use locker rooms as social or administrative areas.
- Coaches and volunteers must knock before entering and announce themselves clearly.

Privacy & Respect

- Athletes are expected to respect the personal space and privacy of others.
- Phones, cameras, smartwatches, and recording devices are strictly prohibited in locker rooms, restrooms, and changing areas.
- Athletes who require assistance changing must be assisted only by a parent/guardian or pre-approved adult with appropriate training and clearance.
- If an athlete feels unsafe, uncomfortable, or unsure in a locker room, they should report concerns to a coach or program administrator immediately.

Gender Identity & Accessibility

- BSHS affirms the rights of athletes to access locker rooms and restrooms in alignment with their gender identity.
- Athletes who need additional privacy, time, or support may request use of private or alternate changing areas, including a single-stall restroom or other accommodations arranged with team staff.
- These requests will be honored confidentially, respectfully, and without penalty or delay.

Shower Facilities & Changing Areas

- Base Layer Undergarments must be worn at all times when transitioning in shared spaces, unless in a designated single-use facility.
- BSHS activities do not typically require use of showers. If shower use is necessary:
 - Athletes should shower individually.
 - Group showers or shared shower time is not permitted under any circumstances.

Restroom Use

- Public restrooms at rink facilities are not to be used as changing areas.
- Supervision of minor athletes in public restrooms must follow the two-adult rule or parent-only accompaniment.
- Bathroom breaks during practice or games should be logged or monitored if required by rink policy or team protocol.

Violations and Reporting

- Any violation of this policy must be reported to the BSHS Team Manager, BSHS Committee Chair, or Life Is Washable Executive Director immediately.
- Reports will be reviewed in accordance with BSHS's Incident Response Policy and ASHA's SafeSport procedures.
- Zero tolerance applies for bullying, harassment, pranks, intimidation, or any behavior that undermines safety or dignity in locker rooms or restrooms.

BINGHAMTON HAWKS CODE OF CONDUCT

The Binghamton Hawks Special Hockey (BSHS) program is committed to providing a safe, inclusive, and respectful environment for every athlete, volunteer, coach, official, and family member. Participation in our program is a privilege, not a right—and that privilege comes with the responsibility to uphold the highest standards of behavior.

These updated Codes of Conduct are adapted directly from the American Special Hockey Association (ASHA) and reflect our shared values of safety, inclusion, respect, and joy. Whether you are on the ice, behind the bench, in the stands, or supporting from the community—you are expected to follow these guidelines at all times.

These expectations are not just about rules—they're about protecting our athletes, honoring their growth, and building a positive, fair, and welcoming experience for all. These Codes will be enforced consistently, and violations may result in disciplinary action, including removal from practices, games, or the program.

TEAM MANAGEMENT & ADMINISTRATION

Team managers and administrators are leaders in our community. Your commitment to integrity, communication, and policy implementation sets the tone for the entire season.

You are expected to:

1. Follow all BSHS, ASHA, and Life Is Washable, Inc. policies.
2. Ensure all athletes, staff, and volunteers are properly registered and compliant with required screenings and SafeSport training.
3. Communicate clearly with families—including pre-season orientations and timely updates.
4. Uphold ASHA's athlete leveling system and ensure roster accuracy.
5. Recruit coaches and volunteers who reflect our values of inclusion and safety.
6. Provide a place to play for all registered athletes and support leveled team formation.
7. Enforce all locker room, supervision, and abuse prevention policies.
8. Maintain transparency with all program finances, rosters, and athlete participation.
9. Support education and continued learning opportunities for your team.
10. Mentor and onboard new administrators to grow the program sustainably.

COACHES

Coaches are mentors, role models, and protectors of the game. You shape the athlete experience and hold the responsibility of building safe, developmentally appropriate practices.

You are expected to:

1. Prioritize athlete development and safety over competition or winning.
2. Create inclusive, adaptive practices that meet the needs of all athletes.
3. Enforce locker room and abuse prevention protocols without exception.
4. Model respect, patience, and professionalism at all times.
5. Communicate clearly with athletes and families.
6. Place athletes according to ASHA's leveling guidelines.
7. Give honest, encouraging feedback and support positive reinforcement.
8. Never engage in therapeutic behavior unless licensed to do so.
9. Maintain professional boundaries in all interactions.
10. Attend clinics or trainings when available and required.

PARENTS & GUARDIANS

Parents and guardians are essential partners in the success of every athlete and the tone of our team.

You are expected to:

1. Prioritize your athlete's enjoyment, effort, and progress over outcomes.
2. Remain present at events or assign a responsible adult to attend in your place.
3. Support your team's decisions and policies with positivity and trust.
4. Address concerns respectfully and privately with team staff.
5. Avoid disruptive behavior at games or practices.
6. Celebrate all athlete's efforts and milestones.
7. Comply with BSHS's locker room and supervision policies.
8. Support fair and honest athlete leveling.
9. Learn about special hockey and participate in your team's volunteer culture.
10. Encourage officials, coaches, and all volunteers.

ATHLETES

Every athlete helps create a positive, safe, and inclusive team culture. All athletes are expected to try their best, respect others, and enjoy the game.

You are expected to:

1. Show up on time and ready to participate.
2. Treat teammates, coaches, and opponents with kindness and respect.
3. Follow rules and listen to coaches.
4. Celebrate your progress and support others.
5. Trust coaches to place you on the team that's right for you.
6. Play safely and have fun.

ON-ICE OFFICIALS

Officials are responsible for ensuring safe, fair play. You are not just enforcing rules—you're shaping the game's tone and accessibility.

You are expected to:

1. Know and apply ASHA rules consistently and fairly.
2. Communicate respectfully with coaches and athletes.
3. Intervene in unsafe or abusive behavior.
4. Remain professional, calm, and composed.
5. Follow all BSHS and ASHA procedures for special hockey.
6. Support appropriate athlete leveling and game balance.

SPECTATORS

Spectators are an active part of our team culture. Your energy should reflect the joy, pride, and sportsmanship that define BSHS and ASHA.

You are expected to:

1. Cheer for effort, not just results.
2. Refrain from yelling at athletes, referees, or coaches.
3. Avoid leaning on the glass or interfering with play.
4. Use positive language and remain encouraging—especially during tough moments.
5. Respect all athletes, teams, officials, and fellow spectators.
6. Understand that spectators attend as guests. Disruptive or disrespectful behavior may result in removal.

Life Is Washable, Inc. Employee Protection (Whistleblower) Policy

If any employee reasonably believes that some policy, practice, or activity of Life Is Washable, Inc. is in violation of law, a written complaint must be filed by that employee with the Executive Director or the Board Chair.

It is the intent of Life Is Washable, Inc. to adhere to all laws and regulations that apply to the organization and the underlying purpose of this policy is to support the organization's goal of legal compliance. The support of all employees is necessary to achieving compliance with various laws and regulations. An employee is protected from retaliation only if the employee brings the alleged unlawful activity, policy, or practice to the attention of Life Is Washable, Inc. and provides the Life Is Washable, Inc. with a reasonable opportunity to investigate and correct the alleged unlawful activity. The protection described below is only available to employees that comply with this requirement.

Life Is Washable, Inc. will not retaliate against an employee who in good faith, has made a protest or raised a complaint against some practice of Life Is Washable, Inc., or of another individual or entity with whom Life Is Washable, Inc. has a business relationship, on the basis of a reasonable belief that the practice is in violation of law, or a clear mandate of public policy.

Life Is Washable, Inc. will not retaliate against employees who disclose or threaten to disclose to a supervisor or a public body, any activity, policy, or practice of Life Is Washable, Inc. that the employee reasonably believes is in violation of a law, or a rule, or regulation mandated pursuant to law or is in violation of a clear mandate or public policy concerning the health, safety, welfare, or protection of the environment.

Life Is Washable, Inc. Gift Policy

As part of its conflict-of-interest policy, Life Is Washable, Inc. requires that directors, officers and employees decline to accept certain gifts, consideration or remuneration from individuals or companies that seek to do business with Life Is Washable, Inc or are a competitor of it. This policy and disclosure form is intended to implement that prohibition on gifts.

Section 1. "Responsible Person" is any person serving as an officer, employee or a member of the board of directors of Life Is Washable, Inc.

Section 2. "Family Member" is a spouse, domestic partner, parent, child or spouse of a child, or a brother, sister, or spouse of a brother or sister, of a Responsible Person.

Section 3. "Contract or Transaction" is any agreement or relationship involving the sale or purchase of goods, services or rights of any kind, receipt of a loan or grant, or the establishment of any other pecuniary relationship. The making of a gift to Life Is Washable, Inc. is not a "contract" or "transaction."

Section 4. Prohibited gifts, gratuities and entertainment. Except as approved by the Chairman of the Board or his designee or for gifts of a value less than \$25 which could not be refused without discourtesy, no Responsible Person or Family Member shall accept gifts, entertainment or other favors from any person or entity which:

1. Does or seeks to do business with Life Is Washable, Inc. or,
2. Does or seeks to compete with Life Is Washable, Inc. or,
3. Has received, is receiving, or is seeking to receive a contract or transaction with Life Is Washable, Inc.

Section 5. Participation in Program-Related Activations: From time to time, Life Is Washable, Inc. and its associated programs (including the Binghamton Hawks Special Hockey program) may be invited to participate in community activations, events, or outreach opportunities facilitated by professional hockey organizations, corporate sponsors, or affiliated partners. These activations may include tickets, merchandise, or hospitality access intended to promote inclusion, awareness, and athlete engagement in line with the mission of the organization.

Such tickets or items are not considered personal gifts, gratuities, or entertainment for the purposes of this policy when they are:

- Facilitated through an approved team or program initiative,
- Allocated at the sole discretion of the BSHH Committee or designated program administrator,
- Intended for community-building, outreach, or promotional purposes, and
- Not offered in exchange for influence over organizational decisions, procurement, or contracts.

These activations are considered mission-aligned benefits and not subject to the restrictions on personal gifts outlined in Section 4. However, no individual Responsible Person or Family Member has an inherent right to participate in such activations. All participation is subject to programmatic need, equitable access considerations, and approval by the BSHH Committee or Executive Director of Life Is Washable, Inc.

Life Is Washable Inc. Conflict of Interest Policy

SECTION 1. PURPOSE:

Life Is Washable, Inc. is a nonprofit, tax-exempt organization. Maintenance of its tax-exempt status is important both for its continued financial stability and for public support. Therefore, the IRS as well as state regulatory and tax officials view the operations of Life Is Washable, Inc. as a public trust, which is subject to scrutiny by and accountable to such governmental authorities as well as to members of the public.

Consequently, there exists between Life Is Washable, Inc. and its board, officers, and management employees and the public a fiduciary duty, which carries with it a broad and unbending duty of loyalty and fidelity. The board, officers, and management employees have the responsibility of administering the affairs of Life Is Washable, Inc. honestly and prudently, and of exercising their best care, skill, and judgment for the sole benefit of Life Is Washable, Inc. Those persons shall exercise the utmost good faith in all transactions involved in their duties, and they shall not use their positions with Life Is Washable, Inc. or knowledge gained there from for their personal benefit. The interests of the organization must be the first priority in all decisions and actions.

SECTION 2. PERSONS CONCERNED:

This statement is directed not only to directors and officers, but to all employees who can influence the actions of Life Is Washable, Inc. For example, this would include all who make purchasing decisions, all persons who might be described as "management personnel," and anyone who has proprietary information concerning Life Is Washable, Inc.

SECTION 3. AREAS IN WHICH CONFLICT MAY ARISE:

Conflicts of interest may arise in the relations of directors, officers, and management employees with any of the following third parties:

1. Persons and firms supplying goods and services to Life Is Washable, Inc.
2. Persons and firms from whom Life Is Washable, Inc. leases property and equipment.
3. Persons and firms with whom Life Is Washable, Inc. is dealing or planning to deal in connection with the gift, purchase or sale of real estate, securities, or other property.
4. Competing or affinity organizations.
5. Donors and others supporting Life Is Washable, Inc.
6. Agencies, organizations and associations which affect the operations of Life Is Washable, Inc.
7. Family members, friends, and other employees of Life Is Washable, Inc.

SECTION 4. NATURE OF CONFLICTING INTEREST:

A conflicting interest may be defined as an interest, direct or indirect, with any persons or firms mentioned in Section 3. Such an interest might arise through:

1. Owning stock or holding debt or other proprietary interests in any third party dealing with Life Is Washable, Inc.
2. Holding office, serving on the board, participating in management, or being otherwise employed (or formerly employed) with any third party dealing with Life Is Washable, Inc.
3. Receiving remuneration for services with respect to individual transactions involving Life Is Washable, Inc.
4. Using Life Is Washable, Inc.'s time, personnel, equipment, supplies, or good will for other than Life Is Washable, Inc. approved activities, programs, and purposes.
5. Receiving personal gifts or loans from third parties dealing or competing with Life Is Washable, Inc. Receipt of any gift is disapproved except gifts of a value less than \$50, which could not be refused without discourtesy. No personal gift of money should ever be accepted.

SECTION 5. INTERPRETATION OF THIS STATEMENT OF POLICY:

The areas of conflicting interest listed in Section 3, and the relations in those areas which may give rise to conflict, as listed in Section 4, are not exhaustive. Conflicts might arise in other areas or through other relations. It is assumed that the directors, officers, and management employees will recognize such areas and relation by analogy.

The fact that one of the interests described in Section 4 exists does not necessarily mean that a conflict exists, or that the conflict, if it exists, is material enough to be of practical importance, or if material, that upon full disclosure of all relevant facts and circumstances it is necessarily adverse to the interests of Life Is Washable, Inc.

However, it is the policy of the board that the existence of any of the interests described in Section 4 shall be disclosed before any transaction is consummated. It shall be the continuing responsibility of the board, officers, and management employees to scrutinize their transactions and outside business interests and relationships for potential conflicts and to immediately make such disclosures.

SECTION 6. DISCLOSURE POLICY AND PROCEDURE:

Transactions with parties with whom a conflicting interest exists may be undertaken only if all of the following are observed:

1. The conflicting interest is fully disclosed;
2. The person with the conflict of interest is excluded from the discussion and approval of such transaction;
3. A competitive bid or comparable valuation exists; and
4. The (board or a duly constituted committee thereof) has determined that the transaction is in the best interest of the organization.

Disclosure in the organization should be made to the chief executive officer (or if she or he is the one with the conflict, then to the board chair), who shall bring the matter to the attention of the [board or a duly constituted committee thereof]. Disclosure involving directors should be made to the board chair, (or if she or he is the one with the conflict, then to the board vice-chair) who shall bring these matters to the [board or a duly constituted committee thereof]. The [board or a duly constituted committee thereof] shall determine whether a conflict exists and in the case of an existing conflict, whether the contemplated transaction may be authorized as just, fair, and reasonable to Life Is Washable, Inc. The decision of the [board or a duly constituted committee thereof] on these matters will rest in their sole discretion, and their concern must be the welfare of Life Is Washable, Inc. and the advancement of its purpose.

RESOURCE: An Introduction to Disabilities

Developmental disabilities are a variety of conditions that become apparent during childhood and cause cognitive or physical limitations. These conditions include autism, cerebral palsy, epilepsy, intellectual disability, Down Syndrome, and other neurological impairments. Developmental disabilities have a variety of causes, which can occur before, during, or after birth. Disabilities occurring before birth include genetic problems, poor prenatal care or exposure of the fetus to toxic elements, drugs or alcohol. Occurrences during birth, oxygen cut off to the baby, or accidents after birth, car accidents causing traumatic brain injury, also can cause developmental disabilities. Many individuals with developmental disabilities are not limited to just a single handicap, but are affected in multiple areas of their bodies. To be truly effective, the volunteer must be versatile and knowledgeable about disabilities so that the experience can be both safe and fun.

- Many disorders fall under the autism spectrum. These can include:
- **Pervasive Developmental Disorder (PDD)**, in which an individual exhibits deficit in social interaction but does not show other behaviors associated with autism.
- **Asperger's Syndrome**, in which the individual demonstrates deficits in social development, restricted range of interest, and behaviors associated with autism but have normal development of communication or cognitive skills.
- **Sensory Integration Disorder**, in which individual takes in sensory input but shows difficulty in relaying an appropriate response.

Developmental Challenges

By definition, a developmental disability is a condition resulting from congenital abnormalities, trauma, disease, or deprivation that interrupts or delays normal fetal infantile or juvenile growth and development. The onset is before age 18, and the duration is indefinite (i.e. persisting throughout the remaining lifespan). Some of the more common conditions include cognitive delays, cerebral palsy, autism, epilepsy, and Down's syndrome.

Autism

Autism is a developmental disorder that impacts learning and slows intellectual development. People with autism have increased difficulty relating and responding to persons, events or objects. People who have mild autism may demonstrate some repetitive actions and a marked lack of sensitivity to other people. With more severe autism, the individuals have difficulty listening to and communicating with others. Their interactions with people can be confusing. They may have multiple repetitive behaviors, for example rocking and unusual hand movements, and can be highly resistant to change, including new opportunities and experiences.

Volunteers should be sensitive to the fact that the individual's personality and socialization may be affected. Often, the parent or care giver is the only person who can regularly communicate and understand the individuals' needs, look to this person for guidance on how to establish rapport with the participant.

Some persons with autism- referred to as savants- have advanced skills in music, mathematics, and spatial conceptualization but are very limited in other ways. In severe cases, the participant can be aggressive or self-injurious.

Cerebral Palsy

Cerebral Palsy (CP) is a group of conditions that result in limited or abnormal functioning in the parts of the brain that control movement. CP is usually caused by brain injury before or during birth. However, brain damage or injury at any time in life can have the same effect. People with cerebral palsy primarily have difficulty with muscular coordination; difficulty seeing, hearing, learning and seizures are also common. Speech problems frequently lead others to make the mistake of thinking that people with cerebral palsy have cognitive challenges - this is often not true.

Some individuals with CP may appear rigid (with stiff, uncontrolled movements) or flaccid (with low muscle tone) and exhibit other characteristics such as bladder or bowel incontinence, scoliosis (laterally curved spine), visual impairment, altered speech patterns, fatigue due to the excessive energy needed to overcome the lack of autonomic control, and intellectual disability. However, be careful not to assume cognitive delays.

- **Muscle Tone vs. Muscle Strength**

- Tone is the resting state of a muscle contraction. People with high tone can be very stiff because their brain is involuntarily sending signals to contract the muscle. With low tone, people tend to be more floppy and droopy.
- Strength is the ability where one voluntarily generates force. Someone with high tone does not necessarily mean that they are strong, just as someone with low tone does not necessarily have little muscular strength.

Cognitive Challenges

People with cognitive challenges show delays in learning and difficulty in applying concepts. Cognitive challenges can result from a variety of factors, among them premature birth, genetic abnormalities, malnutrition, exposure to toxic agents, traumatic brain injury and social deprivation.

A cognitive disability consists of damage to, or deterioration of, any portion of the brain that affects the ability to process information, coordinate and control the body, or move in space. Cognitive disabilities are classified as either organic (related to disease such as Alzheimer's, Parkinson's, Huntington's, brain tumors, cerebrovascular disease or non-organic (caused by injury or trauma, such as traumatic brain injury).

Down Syndrome

One of the most common forms of cognitive disability is Down Syndrome. Down Syndrome is a genetic disorder caused by a chromosomal abnormality. Individuals with Down Syndrome have an extra chromosome that causes certain distinct physical characteristics such as short extremities, a small skull, and low or poor muscle tone. These characteristics can cause issues with speech, impulsive behavior, and physical instability.

Neurological Impairment

Neurological impairments are a group of disabilities including disorders of the brain and central nervous system. Neurological impairment considerably limits a person's development, understanding, memory, attention span, fine muscle control, use of language, or ability to adjust to new situations. Generally, these impairments begin during childhood or adolescence. People with neurological impairments may experience a variety of learning difficulties or social/behavioral problems. They may also have special care needs because of problems in muscular control. Neurological impairments can be difficult to diagnose and to treat. While thousands of people in New York State are thought to have some type of severe neurological impairment, many of these people learn to compensate for these disabilities and do very well in life. However, some people with neurological impairments may need specialized services similar to those available for other people with developmental disabilities.