

Managing Athlete Behaviour: Tips for Age Managers & Officials



Centre age managers and officials are often in the 'front line' when it comes to dealing with misbehaving athletes. The following guidelines provide suggestions about how to prevent instances of athlete misbehaviour and deal with it should it occur.

Preventing Misbehaviour

The easiest way to deal with behaviour problems is to take measures in an attempt to prevent them from occurring in the first place. Some steps to achieve this are:

Step 1:

- Establish clearly what is expected in the way of behaviour and that any misbehaviour will be unacceptable and attract consequences. Take control early.
- The consequences of misbehaviour should be clearly defined i.e. What will happen if an athlete misbehaves.
- Make it clear that athletes who misbehave are choosing to accept the consequences.
- Regularly remind the participants of the standard of behaviour expected of them.

NOTE: See your Centre's athlete Code of Conduct which will outline an agreed standard of behaviour required of the athletes.

Step 2:

- Ensure that the Little Athletics environment is fun, exciting and challenging, well-organised and promotes maximum participation in an attempt to prevent any problems. Keep them busy!
- It is best for a supervising adult to portray a friendly, enthusiastic, relaxed, confident, assured authority, which is likely to attract more respect and therefore more cooperation from young athletes. Being overly authoritarian or abrasive can result in a negative environment and inadvertently create and foster behaviour problems.

Step 3:

- Use positive interactions with the participants to support their good behaviour. E.g. Compliment the group if they organise themselves quickly; positively reinforce a participant who is paying attention. Lots of encouragement and praise is an effective way to create and maintain a positive environment and get your group 'on-side'.

Step 4:

- Ensure effective group supervision. (See 'Handy Tips for Supervising Children').

Dealing with misbehaviour

It is important to stop any misbehaviour quickly before it spreads and becomes a bigger problem. When misbehaviour does occur, the adult supervisors should have a plan for dealing with it effectively. The aim is to stop poor behaviour with as little disruption to the activity as possible.

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Generally it will be the responsibility of the age manager or official on the spot to initially deal with an incident of athlete misbehaviour. Some suggestions in this instance are:

Step 1: Ignore mild misbehaviour when possible:

This may seem strange and feel awkward to some, but in cases of mild misbehaviour that is not really disruptive, rather than create a negative atmosphere by continually nagging and chiding participants, *ignore the misbehaviour* and continue. Keep an eye on it, but let it go. This can be an effective way of dealing with an attention-seeking individual.

NOTE: It is important that that such a strategy is used only when the misbehaviour is mild, does not disrupt the session, is not upsetting to other children, does not cause a safety concern, is not disrespectful and the adult group leader is in control. If the misbehaviour continues or becomes worse, intervention will be required.

Step 2: Use positive interactions to decrease misbehaviour:

It has already been discussed that positive interaction can be used in preventing misbehaviour. It is also effective in dealing with mild misbehaviour, particularly with younger children. For example, when you notice a child behaving inappropriately, clearly, publicly and positively interact with a child who is behaving appropriately. This will often lead to the offending child ceasing their misbehaviour as they also wish to receive praise.

Step 3: Use effective verbal reprimands:

If required, swift and decisive action, commensurate with the seriousness of an offence, is vital in stemming misbehaviour.

Initially, an effective verbal reprimand communicating a zero-tolerance, “no nonsense” approach may be all that is needed to stop and prevent the recurrence of misbehaviour.

An effective verbal reprimand should be:

- Clear
- Calm
- Firm (i.e. it is clear to the offender that you mean it. Use the offender’s name, eye contact and even try moving closer.)
- Well-timed
- Not harsh or a put down

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Step 4: Apply consequences to misbehaviour:

Once it has been stated that a consequence will apply to misbehaviour (eg. a 'Time out'), FOLLOW THROUGH. Do not continually threaten to apply consequences next time, then next time, then next time . . . One warning is the maximum number that should be given.

The consequences that you have the power to apply will have been outlined to you by your Centre.

Step 5: Following up misbehaviour:

When an adult supervisor has to applied a consequence to an athlete's behaviour (e.g. a 'time out') it is good practice for the supervisor, shortly after but away from the heat of the moment, to follow up the incident with the athlete. This may take the form of a short conversation in which the adult ensures that the athlete understands why that action resulted. Rather than being a continuation of the incident, it should be seen as a closure of the incident and an opportunity to move on.

It is recommended that records are kept when action is required in response to an incident of misbehaviour (i.e. What happened, who was involved, when the incident/s occurred, how the matter was handled, etc). Such incidents should also be reported to the Centre committee.

Step 6: Managing ongoing or serious misbehaviour

Serious or repeated incidents of misbehaviour by an athlete will require intervention and further action by the Centre Committee.

Such potential actions will be clearly outlined in a relevant constitution or and/or rules and/or guidelines that individuals have agreed to as a condition of participation.

Final tips:

When dealing with an incident of misbehaviour:

Do:

- Remain calm and objective
- Be firm
- Keep a cool head
- Use the participant's name if possible
- Use eye contact
- Apply consequences to disruptive behaviour

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Don't:

- Give any more than one warning of consequences
- Raise your voice unless absolutely necessary
- Be rough or harsh
- Issue threats
- Belittle participants
- Physically handle athletes

Further Information:

Contact the Little Athletics NSW office or see the Little Athletics website for more information.