

## Introduction

Every young person involved in Little Athletics has the right to participate in an environment that is fun, safe and healthy, and to be treated with respect, dignity and fairness.

Bullying denies participants these rights and can result in feelings of disgrace, embarrassment, humiliation, shame, fear, distress or intimidation. Bullying can also affect an individual's athletic performance, their enjoyment, their continuing participation in the sport, and their physical and mental health. Bullying behaviour can have negative long-term effects on all those involved.

Little Athletics NSW does not tolerate unacceptable or unsporting behaviour from athletes. Bullying amongst athletes is prohibited under the Little Athletics NSW Code of Conduct and will not be tolerated.

Everyone involved in Little Athletics has a role to play in addressing bullying behaviour and promoting a positive culture within the sport.

The following guidelines provide some ideas about how to prevent athlete-to-athlete bullying at Little Athletics activities and how to manage it should it occur.

**NOTE:** Little Athletics NSW recognises that athlete-to-athlete bullying is not the only situation in which bullying can and does occur within our sport. Incidents of adult-to-adult, adult-to-athlete, and athlete-to-adult bullying are all potential problems. Preventing and managing these situations however are outside the scope of these guidelines.

## What is Bullying?

Bullying is deliberately hurting a person either physically, verbally, psychologically or socially. Bullying can be a "one-off" incident or can involve repeated actions or incidences. It can be carried out by one person or several people who can be either actively or passively involved.

Bullies may use one or several types of bullying to hurt their victim:

<b>Physical:</b>	Pushing; shoving; punching; pulling; pinching; hitting; kicking; tripping; scratching; spitting.
<b>Verbal:</b>	Name calling; threatening; teasing; intimidating; yelling abuse; using sarcasm; put downs; sledging; insulting; constantly criticising.
<b>Psychological:</b>	Ganging up; preventing a person from going somewhere; taking, hiding or damaging a person's possessions; spreading rumours; dirty looks.
<b>Socially:</b>	Being unfriendly; excluding; alienating; ignoring; isolating; ostracizing; ridiculing; tormenting; humiliating.

Bullying behaviour is damaging to all involved. Athletes, parents, coaches, officials and administrators all have an ethical responsibility to take action to prevent bullying in Little Athletics and to manage it, should it occur.

## Managing Bullying: Responsibilities

An adult who is charged with the supervision of children in a Little Athletics environment assumes a degree of duty of care. They are expected to do everything reasonable and practicable to protect those under their supervision from the risk of harm.

All adults in a supervisory role of young people in a Little Athletics environment (e.g. age managers, officials, coaches, etc) should accept responsibility for preventing and managing bullying situations. Adults should:

- Understand what bullying is and the importance of preventing it.
- Be knowledgeable of, and vigilant for, signs of bullying.
- Show interest and sympathy with every allegation of bullying and provide support.
- Take all signs of bullying seriously and act quickly.
- Role model respectful and caring behaviour.

## Strategies to Prevent Bullying

The easiest way to deal with any bullying problems is to take measures in an attempt to prevent them from happening at all. Some recommendations are:

### Awareness and Education:

- Ensure that everyone has a copy of the Little Athletics NSW Codes of Conduct and Behavioural Guidelines. Bullying is prohibited in these guidelines.
- Require all members to sign and accept the codes of conduct (or equivalent codes of conduct particular to the activity) as a condition of participation.
- Adopt a clear intolerance of bullying. Promote this regularly through handbooks, newsletters, websites, social media etc. Discuss bullying openly and constructively. Clarify what constitutes bullying.
- Ensure that all athletes know that they can talk to someone if they are worried.
- Develop an ethos that encourages members to report bullying if they experience or witness it. Reduction of the problem relies on information getting to those who are most able to act.
- Advertise a clear, safe and secure procedure for lodging complaints and reporting incidents.
- Assure everyone that any incidents will be dealt with promptly and effectively.

### Positive Environment:

- Bullying is more likely to occur in environments that are highly competitive and promote a “win at all cost” mentality. Emphasise and highlight positive aspects of the sport such as enjoyment, team work, social inclusion, respect, sportsmanship and skill development.
- Ensure that Little Athletics is fun, exciting, challenging, well-organised, stimulating and promotes maximum participation in an attempt to prevent any problems.
- Develop an induction program for all new athletes that assists them to fit in and feel comfortable, happy and accepted. Ensure that they are aware of the policies, values and expectations with regards to behaviour and bullying.
- Set up support schemes that encourage children to make friends. Having friends is one of the best defenses against bullying, but not everyone has the right social skills to make friends easily. Remember that unsure, lonely or isolated children are much more at risk of being bullied.
- Set up a peer-support scheme. This could involve buddying with older or more experienced athletes. These schemes can create a happier, friendlier environment and offer much-needed support to children who have problems.

### Rules and Consequences:

Clearly establish with athletes the standard of behaviour expected of them while they are in attendance at a Little Athletics event or activity and that any misbehaviour (e.g. bullying) is unacceptable and will attract consequences. All Little Athletics-aged children can understand consequences. Consequences are: if you do this, then this will happen. The consequences should be clearly defined.

### Supervision:

Effective group supervision will assist in preventing bullying and general misbehaviour.

Some tips for when supervising a group are:

- Try to keep all members of the group for which you are responsible within your field of vision. This prevents any activities from going on behind your back.
- Move around purposefully. Don't remain static. Be mobile, visible and involved.
- Let your group know that you are “with-it” at all times; or have “eyes in the back of your head”. Keep the participants on task and on their toes.

### Quick Action:

Swift and decisive action, commensurate with the seriousness of an offence, is vital in stemming misbehaviour, including bullying incidents. Quick and effective intervention may be enough to stop bullying and prevent it from occurring again. Do not ignore even the most minor incident of pushing, name calling, belittling, etc. Bullying can become a habit if it is ignored.

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 a “one-off” bullying incident that is observed.

An effective verbal reprimand should be:

- Clear
- Firm (i.e. it is clear to the offender that you mean it. Use eye contact and even try moving closer.)
- Well-timed

If the incident is repeated, quickly apply a consequence relevant to the age of the athlete. Do not give any more than one warning.

Some young people are unaware that their actions are considered as bullying so ensure that you speak with the “bully” separately to clearly establish why their behaviour was unacceptable and that it will not be tolerated. Ensure that you get a commitment from the offender not to repeat the behaviour. Also ensure that you reassure the “victim” and encourage them to report any further worries to you.

### Managing Complaints About Bullying

Bullying is very often hidden and not easily observable. Any reports received of bullying must be taken seriously and investigated. Again, swift and decisive action is the key.

A recommended complaints framework would be:

- Record the complaint. Begin by clarifying what is happening. Ask: Who is supposedly doing the bullying? When does it happen? Does it happen to others? Are there any obvious reasons for it to happen?
- Get both sides of the story from the victim and the alleged bully.
- Talk to witnesses and inform parents, as required.
- Decide on any sanction (this could range from mediation, verbal warning, written warning, temporary or permanent ban).
- Make sure that there is a right of appeal.

Actions to prevent the recurrence of bullying may include:

- Speaking to the group involved about their behaviour responsibilities, what bullying is, examples of bullying and its effects and consequences.
- Increasing vigilance of the parties involved and taking preventative action to reduce the opportunities for future incidents of bullying.
- Monitoring the situation closely to ensure that the bullying has stopped.
- Working to change the behaviour of bullies and potential bullies.

### Managing Repeated or Serious Bullying Incidents

Serious or repeated bullying incidents by an athlete or group of athletes will require further action.

In addition to the above, one or more of the below strategies could be used:

- Reassuring the victim/s (and their parents if necessary). Reassure the child that it is not his or her fault.
- Talking with the bully(ies) and trying to get them to understand the impact of the behaviour on the victim.
- Organising a reconciliation between the parties. It may be that a genuine apology solves the problem.
- Organising a formal meeting with the bully(ies) and their parents.
- Warning the bully(ies) and putting them on notice of further action.
- If necessary, imposing sanctions against the bully(ies). (e.g. loss of points towards centre point score, exclusion from representative teams, temporary or permanent suspension)
- Formally monitoring the behaviour of the bully(ies) over a period of time.
- Any serious or repetitive act of bullying by an athlete during a Little Athletics NSW carnival may result in the offending athlete being disqualified from the competition.

Little Athletics NSW anticipates that any bullying matters at a centre level would be dealt with by the centre. It is not envisaged that Little Athletics NSW would become involved unless in extreme circumstances.

### Keeping Records

It is recommended that records are kept when action is required in response to an incident of bullying (i.e. what happened, who was involved, when the incidents occurred, how the matter was handled, etc).

### Final Tips

- It is recommended that anti-bullying measures be discussed and reviewed on a regular basis. Keep programs and practices fresh and active.
- Do not allow bullies to make excuses such as “It was just a bit of fun”, “We weren’t being serious”, “I was only joking”, or “We were only mucking around”. Ensure they understand the seriousness of the consequences of bullying.
- Do not accept bullying as a fact of life. It is not a normal part of growing up and can ruin lives.
- Do not think in stereotypes. If you do, bullying incidents can be missed. Bullies and victims do not come in standard shapes and sizes.
- Be aware of individuals that may be vulnerable to bullying who: are new to the group; are different in appearance, speech or background; suffer low self-esteem; demonstrate ‘entertaining’ reactions when bullied; are nervous or anxious.

## Further Information

Little Athletics NSW has developed a checklist that may be helpful for Little Athletics centres when establishing, implementing or reviewing measures to deal with bullying behaviour.

Contact the Little Athletics NSW office staff, or go to [www.lansw.com.au](http://www.lansw.com.au) for more information.

## References

- Australian Sports Commission – “Bullying” (Harassment-free Sport Information Sheet Series)
- Brisbane North Junior Cricket Association – Anti-Bullying Policy
- Burgmann Anglican School – Bullying Policy
- Catholic Education Office, Parramatta Diocese – Anti-bullying policy for students
- Childline – Bullying: Information for teachers and professionals working with young people
- England Netball – Anti-Bullying and Harassment Policy
- Kidscape – Anti-Bullying for Schools: Some Guidelines
- Mackillop Catholic College – Bullying Policy
- McGrath, Helen (Deakin University) – Making Australian Schools Safer: A Summary Report of the Outcomes from the National Safe Schools Framework Best Practice Grants Program (2004-2005)
- NSW Department of Education and Training – Student Discipline in Government Schools: Anti-bullying Plan for Schools
- <http://www.parra.catholic.edu.au/Student-Support/Emotional-Wellbeing/>
- The Football Association Anti-Bullying Policy for Football Clubs
- Welsh Badminton Anti Bullying Policy
- Wollongong City Little Athletics Centre – Anti-Bullying Policy