

A Guide for Age Managers



The Age Manager has one of the most important roles in Little Athletics. You are responsible for caring for and nurturing our young athletes. Your role is to provide a supportive environment in which athletes can learn and develop. An athlete's enjoyment of the sport will depend upon their experience at the local Centre and you have the ability to ensure that this experience is a positive one.

We appreciate that Age Managers are volunteers and thank you for taking on this significant role. We have compiled this guide to provide you with some tips to help you along the way.

THE BASICS FOR BEING A GOOD AGE MANAGER

- The number 1 thing for an Age Manager to remember is that you must MAKE IT FUN. These 3 words contain possibly the most important piece of advice that can be given to an Age Manager. Make sure that you and the parents are also enjoying yourselves.
- Ensure that you are well-organised and promote maximum participation. Keep the athletes busy! Do not however 'force' any athlete to take part in an event.
- Focus upon the athlete's efforts and individual performances rather than the overall outcome of the event. In Little Athletics, a personal best is more important than a first place or a Centre record.
- Ensure that all athletes receive equal time and attention. Praise all achievements.
- Be fair, considerate and honest, and be a positive role model.

TIPS FOR EFFECTIVE SUPERVISION

- Ensure that all children are within sight and/or hearing at all times, preventing activities from going on behind your back. If the group is too big, ask for assistance.
- Never leave the group unattended and ensure that children know that they should never leave the group without letting you know.
- Incorporate a 'buddy' system when children need to leave the group. Ask them to report back to you when they have returned (i.e. going to the toilet).
- Move around purposefully. Don't remain static. Be mobile, visible and involved.
- Acknowledge good behavior with positive messages e.g. compliment the group if they organise themselves quickly; positively reinforce a participant who is paying attention.
- In the case of misbehaviour, an effective verbal reprimand showing a 'no nonsense' approach may be all that is needed. Such a reprimand should be clear, calm, firm, not harsh or a put down.

SPEED UP THE TIME TAKEN TO CONDUCT EVENTS

Traditionally, athletics is often associated with short bursts of activity and long waiting periods. This will de-motivate young athletes. Our feedback confirms that most Centres need to cut waiting times and speed up the conduct of events. Below are some **ideas/suggestions** to help achieve this:

Throws:

- Allow athletes to have 3 consecutive throws, rather than conducting the competition in rounds.
- Peg all athletes best throw/put and measure it at the end of the competition rather than measuring each throw.
- Always have the next athlete ready to throw with the implement in hand.
- For younger age groups, only allow them to do a standing throw.
- If a group is exceptionally large and the time is a real issue, then only allow athletes to have 2 throws not 3.

High Jump:

- Use greater increments for height rises when conducting the event for large groups.
- With large groups, consider splitting the group based upon ability (e.g. scissor and flop jumpers).
- Only start athletes at a height just below their PB.
- Have the athletes start from a shorter approach for lower heights, and don't allow baulking.
- Use a flexi bar for younger age groups to avoid replacing the bar for missed jumps and to limit injuries and increase confidence.
- Have each athlete nominate only 3 heights that they will be attempting.

Long/Triple Jump:

- Have younger age groups U6-U10 run from a set marker, rather than measure a run-up.
- For younger athletes, have the athletes lined up on or beside the runway ready to go.
- If a group is exceptionally large and time is a real issue, then only allow the athletes to have 2 jumps instead of 3.

DEVELOPING SKILLS

Research and feedback suggests that skill development is the most important outcome for most parents/athletes. It is therefore critical that athletes are 'learning' as well as competing. This can be achieved through basic instruction between throws/jumps etc. or by utilising games and activities between events. Not only will games help to teach the necessary skills, but they will also ensure that the athletes have fun.

Some examples of simple skill development activities include:

Shot Put – whilst athletes are waiting for their turn, set up a target using a hoop and have athletes 'put' a bean bag into the hoop (if space permits).

Discus - whilst athletes are waiting for their turn, have them practice the discus 'slinging action' using a hoop (if space permits).

Javelin – utilise a turbojav or vortex to practice the correct action, whilst aiming at a hoop target.

Long/Triple Jump – turn the event (or at least one jump) into a game by marking a line across the pit and making the area between the edge of the pit and the line the 'river'. The athletes must jump high and long to reach the other side of the 'river'. The 'river' can get wider on consecutive jumps.

High Jump – utilise the flexi bar to encourage athletes to attempt a height slightly beyond their 'comfort zone' or use the flexi bar or a 'skipping rope' as low obstacle (away from the high jump mats) and have the age group continually run around in a circle practicing to 'scissor' over the obstacle.

Running – on the start command/gun, athletes sprint down the track (or designated area) until a whistle is blown, at which time they immediately drop a scrap of material or ribbon. After a short break, athletes use the ribbon as a starting point this time and on the start command race back to the start line (making this race a handicap event). Alternatively they can leave the ribbons, walk back to the start line, then attempt to run further next time.

Hurdles – utilise mini hurdles or plastic training hurdles to encourage athletes to 'run' over the hurdles rather than trying to jump them. If space permits this can be turned into a hurdle shuttle relay by having athletes go over the hurdles, around a marker and sprint straight back to the next person on the team.

For many more great ideas to utilise with your group refer to 'Great Ideas for Group Games'. This book is published by Little Athletics NSW specifically to assist with ideas for skill development games. Copies can be obtained from LANSW.

As stated earlier the role of Age Manager is an important one, but it also can be one of the most rewarding roles in Little Athletics. Hopefully this guide has provided some information that Age Managers can utilise with young athletes across the state. Remember - make sure that you and the athletes have fun!!!

