

Policy #2

# Inclusion Policy

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Tasmanian Little  
Athletics Association Inc.  
ABN 18 754 156 567

PO Box 812  
Moonah TAS 7009

Tel 1300 888 713  
office@taslittleathletics.com.au

[littleathletics.com.au](http://littleathletics.com.au)

**Foundation for all sports**

## MISSION

The mission of LATAS and its Centres in respect to inclusion is to guarantee all children and adults access to a complete range of participation, training and competition opportunities, whilst also ensuring their effective participation in all aspects of athletics, including the provisions of rewards and incentives, access to coaching and opportunities to officiate at athletics competition and/or play an administrative role in their Centre. LATAs recognises seven areas where it is able to promote fairness and equity, and thereby inclusion, and these are: -

- gender
- athletes with disabilities (refer page 3)
- older adults
- Aboriginals and Torres Strait Islanders
- culturally and linguistically diverse people
- employment status
- isolated communities

## INTRODUCTION

Social inclusion is about making sure everyone is able to participate as valued, respected and contributing members of society. It is also about the acceptance and equal treatment of members of the wider community regardless of their gender, gender identity, sexuality, age, disability, religious or cultural background, or other attributes that may lead to people feeling excluded or isolated. LATAS supports and facilitates the inclusion of all people.

## RATIONALE

Sport can play a powerful role in:

- Contributing to the development of healthier communities and individuals
- Increasing social connection and shaping acceptable social norms
- Promoting multiculturalism

It is important that LATAS takes an active leadership role in supporting and encouraging diverse participation in all aspects of Little Athletics, including in coaching, officiating and administrative roles.

## PRINCIPLES

This policy is based on:

- Inclusion principles - access, participation and support
- Essence of Australian Sport principles – fair play, respect, responsibility and safety
- Requirements under anti-discrimination and equal opportunity laws

This policy promotes:

- Social and community values
- The importance of valuing both participation and competition
- A respectful approach that values difference and diversity between people
- Treatment of people with respect, dignity and courtesy
- Good behavior on and off the field (in line with LATAs Codes of Conduct and LATAs Rules & Regulations)
- Equal opportunity and a fair go for all members

## POLICY COVERAGE

This policy covers all LATAS's areas of authority and applies to everyone involved in the activities of LATAS, including Centre Committee's, volunteers, athletes, coaches, administrators, parents/ guardians and stakeholders.

## PURPOSE

The purpose of this policy is to help LATAS take action to promote inclusion and proactively manage potential occurrence of discrimination within Little Athletics. Our aim is to provide an environment where all people feel:

- Welcome
- Represented
- Included in decision making
- Able to participate
- Safe and free from discrimination, bullying, harassment and vilification.

## POSITION STATEMENT

LATAS embraces diversity and difference and is committed to providing healthy sporting environments that are safe, inclusive, accessible and equitable. This commitment includes a focused approach to actively encouraging and supporting the inclusion of, people of different genders, age, ethnicity, ability, religion, income, sexuality and race in all aspects of our sport. Our approach will be meaningful to each individual and equitable to all participants involved in Little Athletics.

## LATAS COMMITMENT

LATAS has adopted the following strategies to ensure its' commitment to being an accessible and inclusive organisation. LATAS will:

- Actively identify and reduce barriers to participation.
- Consult with community groups, affiliates and make strong relationships with other organisations to facilitate inclusive practices and remove barriers to participation.
- Ensure all members of the community are given equitable opportunity to participate in all aspects of Little Athletics.
- Provide opportunities for all in coaching, officiating and leadership positions.
- Continue to provide promote Member Protection training for LATAS's administrators.
- Require our members to undertake practices that actively encourage and support participation by all, ensuring diversity is recognised, respected, valued and welcomed.
- With appropriate consent, cater for specific individual needs be seeking and utilising external expertise where required to aid in the facilitation of equitable participation and inclusion.

The above strategies will be applied provided a safe environment can be maintained for all participants in Little Athletics.

## ATHLETES WITH A DISABILITY

LATAs recognises that people with a disability have the same rights to equality as the rest of the community.

People with a disability become involved in sport for exactly the same reasons as their able-bodied peers: -

- Fun
- Social contact
- Fitness
- Self esteem
- Increased skills

The Disability Discrimination Act 1992 (Section 28 - Sport) states that it is unlawful to discriminate against another person on the grounds of that person's disability or a disability of any of that person's associates by excluding that other person from a sporting activity.

LATAs aims to provide an inclusive environment in which barriers to involvement are removed and all people with a disability feel welcome and comfortable to participate. LATAs will provide the necessary ongoing leadership and direction to achieve this objective.

LATAs also believes that it is the responsibility of all affiliated Little Athletics Centres to make a reasonable effort to accommodate people with a disability. LATAs will provide relevant advice, support, resources and training to assist in this process. LATAs recognises that such efforts need not place undue or unjustifiable hardship on, or threaten the operational viability of Centres.

In order for Centres to assess their own practices in relation to athletes with a disability, LATAs has provided a Centre Disability Checklist.

LATAs has also provided a number of Disability Fact Sheets, to provide specific information for Centre volunteers.

# Athletes

## with an intellectual disability

### *What is an Intellectual Disability?*

Intellectual Disability is characterised both by a significant below average intelligence level (based on an IQ test) and by difficulties in ability to function in areas of everyday living eg communication, self care, social situation and school activities (identified before the child is 18 years of age).

It is estimated that about 1% of the population has an intellectual disability. People with an intellectual disability have more difficulty than others in understanding concepts, solving problems, concentrating, remembering and learning new skills. About three quarters of these people are affected mildly, and outwardly appear no different from their peers, while the rest are moderately, severely or profoundly affected.

There are many causes of intellectual disability, but in the majority of cases, the reasons are still unknown. Intellectual disability is not a psychiatric or mental health problem, but a person with an intellectual disability may have other disabilities as well. These include cerebral palsy, epilepsy, vision impairment, hearing impairment, psychiatric disorder, etc.

Children with an intellectual disability, can and do learn new skills, but they develop more slowly than children with average intelligence and adaptive skills.

### **Common Facets of Intellectual Disability**

Some characteristics which may occur with considerably varying degrees of severity among people with an intellectual disability include:

- Learning difficulties and generally poor literacy/numeracy skills.
- A lack of decision making ability.
- Poor short term memory.
- An inability to think in abstract terms.
- A lack of opportunity to be aware of and explore their own physical capabilities.
- Concentration is not consistent.
- A lack of self esteem and generally poor attitudes to their own social competence.



## Impact of Intellectual Disability

Generally, compared with other children, those with an intellectual disability may:

- Need longer time to learn and extra time to practice a skill.
- Have greater difficulty in learning complex or difficult skills.
- Require the skills and tasks to be broken down into small steps.
- Need instructors to use simplified language and repeat instructions.

## General tips for officials and age managers

*Note: many of these tips apply to all children participating in Little Athletics.*

- Firstly, it is vital that the child is treated as a “Little Athlete” first, with the focus on their ability and due respect for what they can do.
- Develop a good understanding of the nature of the person’s intellectual disability and the impact this has on their development.
- Enquire if there are any associated conditions which may impact on their training or participation e.g. sensory impairment, epilepsy, heart defects etc.
- When designing programs or activities, focus on the individual’s unique abilities. Focus on what they can achieve rather than on what they are unable to do.
- It is vital to set realistic goals relating to the person’s physical ability and sport skill proficiency.
- Be prepared to be flexible with your expectations of the athlete’s participation. Break skills/tasks down into smaller parts wherever possible, and if necessary modify the requirement of the skills.
- The physical fitness and basic motor skills of people with an intellectual disability can be poor because of a lack of opportunity to participate in physical activity.
- Keep directions simple, brief and to the point. Use verbal cues such as “Jump like a frog”. Remember that your words will often be taken literally so choose them carefully.
- Use repetition to assist the learning process.
- Keep the athlete busy by using a variety of short tasks.
- Check to make sure that your instructions are understood by having athletes repeat directions back to you rather than asking “Do you understand?”.
- Be quick with praise and give it often.
- Provide immediate and specific feedback to the athlete. Comments such as : “You kept your arms bent while running” are more effective than “Your arms were good”.
- Be prepared to adapt activities (rules, equipment etc) to allow the athlete to participate. This may require some creativity and thinking “outside the box”. The extent of the modifications will depend on the athlete’s ability. Some athletes may not require any modifications. Others may require extensive modifications to become involved. Modifications can also be made in view of phasing these out over time.
- Be flexible, positive, patient and understanding.
- Set clear rules and boundaries.
- Close supervision is often required for athletes with an intellectual disability, particularly in situations that pose potential risks.
- Have a “Buddy” accompany the athlete initially.
- Consider initially allowing a parent/guardian to accompany the athlete out onto the field if you believe it is appropriate and necessary for learning, supervision or safety purposes.

# Tips for Participation in Little Athletic Events

## Sprints

- Use visual cues to assist the athletes with keeping in their lane and where to run. Cones, witches hats, arrows, parents/guardians etc. can all be used as focus points.
- “Start” and “Finish” signs or markers can be used to help guide the athletes.
- Allow the athlete to run with a “Buddy” while in the learning stages.
- Change distances and introduce “handicap” events if you feel it is necessary.
- Prior to competition, provide practice opportunities for running in lanes, starting to the sound of the gun and running past the finish line.

## Middle Distance

- Similar to sprints

## Race Walking

- Similar to sprints.
- Athletes may have difficulties race walking within the strict definition of the rules. Change your expectations and consider accepting an approximate attempt at the skill.

## Hurdles

- An athlete may experience balance, coordination and timing problems.
- Introduce the event with lower and/or modified foam hurdles. Allow time for practice before formal competition.

## High Jump

- If necessary, use visual cues to assist the athlete with the high jumping skills. These may include markers that indicate the path to use when running in, markings of where to take off and indicators (eg ribbons) of where to cross the bar.
- Beginners can practice without a cross bar, then with a flexible bar until they are proficient with whatever style they intend to use. Allow time for practice before formal competition.
- An athlete with Down Syndrome may have a genetic condition called atlantoaxial instability and should be restricted from high jumping until a clearance has been received from a physician.

“Allow the athlete to run with a Buddy....”

## Long Jump/Triple Jump

- Some athletes may have difficulties jumping from a take off board (board or sand) that is situated back from the edge of the pit. They may also have difficulties understanding foot fouls. Consider allowing them to jump from the edge of the sand pit.
- When coaching an athlete to try to jump further into the pit, ask them to jump past a line or marker rather than saying “try to jump further”.
- For triple jump, teach the athlete to perform the hop-step-jump sequence by instructing them to land on the “same foot, other foot, both feet”. Use coloured markers or mats placed on the ground to indicate this. The colour of the marker/mat can indicate which foot to land on eg red = right; yellow = left. Both markers together = land on both feet.

## Throws

- Demonstrate activities first and then allow the athlete to practice.
- Consider using implements of reduced weight or even alternative equipment, eg bean bags, softballs, light medicine balls or safety shots (shot Put); hoops, quoits or a safety discus (discus); turbo javs or cricket ball (javelin).
- Consider using generously sized targets for throwing activities that provide a directional cue and a concrete measure of success.
- Good supervision and safety measures will be required for those athletes that have poor impulse control, an impaired concept of danger or who are prone to aggression or temper tantrums.

## Safety Considerations

- Be aware that athletes with an intellectual disability may have associated conditions. These can include heart problems, skeletal problems, obesity, hearing problems, vision problems, epilepsy, and behaviour problems. Talk with parents/guardians about what you need to be aware of.
- Approximately 10-20 percent of people with Down Syndrome have a genetic condition called atlantoaxial instability which results in a misalignment of the cervical vertebrae C-1 and C-2. This condition exposes these individuals to the possibility of injury if they participate in activities that hyperextend or radically flex the neck or upper spine. Involvement of an athlete in activities that may place pressure on the neck or spine (eg high jump) should be restricted until a clearance has been received from a physician.
- Some athletes with an intellectual disability may not have a sense of danger or fully understand the consequences of certain behaviours. Positively stated rules such as “Stay with the group” and close adult supervision, are the first steps in minimising risks.

**“Consider using implements of reduced weight...”**

*The Tasmanian Little Athletics Association thank the Little Athletics Association of New South Wales for permission to adopt their Disabled Athletes information sheets, which now form a part of the TLAA Inclusion Policy.*

*LANSW pay acknowledgement to the following for the contributions in preparing this resource:*

- *NSW Sport and Recreation*
- *AUSRAPID*
- *Special Olympics Australia*



# Athletes

## with an vision impairment

### *Types of Vision Impairment*

The most common conditions of visual impairment are:

#### **Tunnel Vision or loss of Peripheral Vision**

The athlete can focus on an object but not the feature around it eg. While looking straight ahead, the person cannot see anything on the ground in front of them. While watching for hazards on the ground, they risk colliding with anyone or anything in front of them. They may see a step, but cannot judge how high or deep it is. They cannot accurately judge height, depth, distance or speed.

#### **Loss of Central Vision**

The athlete can only see a dark area at the centre of vision and loses the ability to focus. This means that although the athlete can see objects at the periphery, objects that can be seen are not clear.

#### **Blurred Vision**

Objects are blurred

#### **Light Perception**

The athlete can only see light.

#### **Total Blindness**

The athlete sees nothing.

#### **General Tips for Officials and Age Managers**

- Ask the athlete what they can see and adjust the activity to their needs.
- Speak clearly and normally – there is no need to raise your voice.
- Don't be embarrassed to use words such as "look" and "see".
- When handling a piece of equipment, such as a discus, to a person with a vision impairment, speak before doing so.

## Tips for Participation in Little Athletics Events

### Sprints

Allow the use of a guide runner, if required. Ensure that the starter is audible.

- Athletes with visual impairments can start the same way as the other athletes; they can be allowed to crouch or block start.
- The wearing of spikes is OK.
- Avoid allocating the inside lane, particularly if there is a lip on the track. The outside lanes also have a gentler curve.
- Brightly coloured witches hats can be placed on the track to help guide the runners.

### Guidelines for Guide Runners

- The method of guidance is the choice of the athlete. They may choose an elbow lead, a tether or to free run (NOTE: for safety reasons, the tether should not be tied, fixed or wrapped to one or both individuals).
- The athlete can receive verbal instruction from the guide.
- At no time may a guide pull an athlete or propel the athlete forward by pushing.
- At no time should the guide and the athlete be more than 0.5m apart.
- Anyone can act as a guide, regardless of age or sex. They do not have to be in the same age group as the athlete that they are guiding.
- For races further than 400m, two guides may be used, but only one exchange of guides should be permitted for each athlete. The exchange must take place without hindering other athletes, and must occur only on a straight. The officials should be made aware if any guide changes will occur.
- In land events, an athlete with a guide needs to be allocated two lanes.

### Middle Distance

- Similar to Sprints. A guide runner may be used.

### Race Walking

- Similar to Sprints. A guide "Walker" may be used.

### Hurdles

- Some caution is obviously required.
- If an athlete with a vision impairment believes that they can participate in hurdles, allow them to try. Introduce the event with lower and/or modified foam hurdles. A guide could run with the athlete in a vacant lane.

### High Jump

- Allow the athlete to touch the bar before commencing their jump, so as to distinguish the height of the bar.
- Hang a bright ribbon over the bar to assist low vision athletes to sight the bar.

- A “caller” may be used to assist with the athlete’s approach and timing of their jump. The “caller” usually claps to guide the vision-impaired athlete and positions him/herself so that his/her hands are at the position and height that the athlete will cross the bar. The caller steps away at the point when it is necessary to avoid impeding the athlete.
- A guide can be used to assist in positioning the athlete on the runway.
- Beginners can practice without a cross bar, then a flexible bar until they are proficient with whatever style they intend to use.

## Long Jump / Triple Jump

- Athletes with a vision impairment use the same facilities as everyone else.
- Place big, bright white hats next to the long or triple jump take off mat/board to assist the athlete to sight the take off point.
- “Callers” may be used to assist the athlete to negotiate their way down the runway and signal them when to take off. A guide can be used to assist in positioning the athlete on the runway.
- Consider allowing athletes with very low vision or no vision, to use a 1m square take off area.
- When teaching an athlete with a vision impairment the run up, ask them to stand on the take off point and run away from the pit, counting the number of running strides. They may begin with only 3 or 5 strides, gradually working to the full run up as they become more confident. If the athlete counts the same number of strides towards the pit, having placed a marker at the beginning of their run up, they should arrive at the desired take off point, knowing when to jump, without having to visually locate the take off mat/board.

## Keeping athletes straight on the runway

- Athletes who are totally blind or who have a severe vision impairment will have the most difficulty in negotiating the runway. Athletes with a less severe vision impairment will have little difficulty keeping straight on the runway as the pit is sufficiently large and of contrasting colour to its surroundings. They will therefore be able to aim for it visually. Their main difficulty will be in sighting the point of take off.
- The most common method of guiding an athlete down the runway is by sound (either voice or hand clapping). With sound guidance, the “caller” stands either at the take-off point or beyond the athlete’s expected landing point in the pit. If at any stage of the run up, it appears that the athlete will miss the pit, the caller must call “ABORT” and the athlete re-starts the attempt.
- There is no requirement that the caller should use any particular words or sounds. However the “coded number system” enables small directional corrections to be made without confusion.
- It is based on the track lane numbers. It assumes that the athlete is in lane 4. While the athlete is running straight, the caller repeats the word “four”; ie 4-4-4-4-4-4-4. If the athlete moves to the right of the centre, the caller shouts “5” or if to the left of the centre, the caller shouts “3”. The caller continues to shout “5” or “3” until the athlete has made the correction, and then resumes calling “4”. If the athlete does not correct sufficiently, the caller must call “ABORT”.
- It is important that before the athlete begins to run in, the caller ensures that the athlete is aware of the correct direction of the pit. This is done by asking the athlete to place both hands together and point to the direction of the pit. If the athlete’s perception of the direction is not correct, the caller asks the athlete to point further to the left or right, as the case may be. It is most important that the athlete is then asked to re-align his/her feet with the new direction. If the feet are not re-aligned, the athlete will inevitably still commence in the direction to which he/she originally pointed.

“Consider allowing athletes with visual impairment to use a 1m take off mat ....”

## Throws

- There are no special rules in the throwing events for people with a vision impairment.
- Take the athlete into the circle or onto the runway.
- Place the throwing implement in their hand, if required.
- Orient the athlete in the circle or on the runway, but leave the circle or runway before the throw begins.
- Verbal instructions may help the athlete during the throw.
- Escort the athlete out of the circle or off the runway after a throw has been completed.
- In the learning stages, teach alternative equipment eg bean bags or softballs (shot put); hoops (discus); turbo javs (javelin).
- Pay particular awareness to the safety of the athlete, officials, other athletes and spectators.
- Athletes with vision impairment can learn to glide/rotate in the shot put, rotate in the discus, and run up in the javelin.

## Safety Considerations

- Be aware of potential risks such as stairs, gutters, drains, slippery surfaces, protrusions, equipment lying on the ground etc.
- Ensure that activity areas and thoroughfares are uncluttered and free of unnecessary equipment.
- Familiarity is important, so try to locate necessary equipment in the same place each time.

A bad track surface can lead to balance problems. Try to provide a visually impaired athlete with a lane that has the best surface (often the outside lanes). Outside lanes also provide a gentler curve and avoid the possible risk of the athlete stepping on the inner lip of the track, if one exists

# Athletes



## With an autism spectrum

### *What is an autism spectrum disorder?*

“Autism spectrum disorder” is a broad definition used to describe the range of different types of autism that exist, including Asperger’s Disorder.

Autism is a lifelong developmental disability, for which there is no cure, although improvements in ability and behaviour can occur over time. Autism affects an individual’s ability to understand their words and what is happening around them.

People with autism vary enormously. The effects of autism may be mild or severe and not every characteristic is evident in every person.

People with autism have what is known as the Triad of Impairments with varying degree of severity.

### **Impairment of Communication**

- May use little facial expression or non-verbal gestures.
- May have little or no speech, or be quite verbal. May use an unusual voice.
- May have difficulty understanding long sentences or speech that is used too quickly.
- May have difficulty switching on, focusing and sustaining attention; or being quiet when required.
- May have difficulty following directions.
- May repeat or echo words or phrases.
- May inappropriately laugh or giggle.
- May understand and use words literally (eg “Jump to it” may literally cause the individual to jump).
- May not understand jokes or irony.

### **Impairment of Social Relating**

- May appear unresponsive to other people.
- May use unusual eye contact eg avoidance or fixed gaze.
- May seem content when left alone.
- May seek social interaction in unusual ways eg touching, smelling. May have little sense of other people’s boundaries/personal space. May be intrusive.
- May have difficulty playing turn-taking or sharing games.
- May pay little attention to the needs and feelings of others.
- May be sensitive to, or defensive of, physical contact initiated by others. May become irritated if bumped or touched by others.
- May have difficulty coping with “being out” or losing in races/games.

## Repetitive and Restricted Interests and Behaviours

- May respond to objects/toys in an unusual and repetitive way (eg lines up cars, blocks, sports equipment etc).
- May show an intense level of interest in one particular area or item or object (eg talks about Thomas the Tank Engine, watches videos of Thomas the Tank Engine, touches toys related to Thomas the Tank Engine, looks intently at pictures of Thomas the Tank Engine, etc).
- May have a need for predictability/ sameness. Likes to listen to the same story, watch the same video, play their favourite game over and over again.
- May lack imagination and ability for symbolic or pretend play (eg “Jumping a river” in the long jump pit).
- May have difficulty waiting, standing in line, transitions between activities or with any unstructured time.
- May be a perfectionist and have problems with “mistakes” or being corrected.
- May lack fear of real danger, but be very fearful of harmless objects or situations.

People with autism often experience overwhelming anxiety, frustration and confusion when faced with the demands of everyday life. This may give rise to behaviours like repetitive movements (finger flicking, rocking, pacing), self-isolating behaviours and sometimes aggression towards others, themselves, or the environment.

Many people with autism also have changing sensory sensitivities. The way that they respond to noise, touch, pain, tastes and odours suggest that, at times, their senses are heightened (they over-react) and at other times their senses are dampened (they under-react).

## The Little Athletics Environment

Of importance is the context of a sporting environment is the fact that people with autism may experience awkwardness when attempting sporting skills. Athletes may exhibit clumsiness, balance problems and stiffness. They may have problems making the body do what it needs to do. They may lack strength and tire easily.

Also relevant to a Little Athletics environment, is that an athlete with an autism spectrum disorder may not cope well with crowds, noise, being surrounded by too much movement and not having enough space.

## General Tips for Officials and Age Managers

- Learn as much as you can from the athlete’s parents/guardians about the typical characteristics that the athlete exhibits. Allow the parent/guardian to accompany the athlete out onto the field if they see this as appropriate.
- Familiarity is very important for an athlete with autism, therefore a very thorough induction, including a tour of facilities, explanation of procedures, getting to know the age manager, officials etc, may assist the athlete’s introduction to the sport.
- As well as possible, provide a predictable weekly routine and structured environment. This may involve using visual schedules at the start of the day (maybe using a map of the facility or pictures of each event), time frame for each activity, a regular place in a queue etc. Give warnings to the athlete about changes of routine. Provide as much information as possible.
- You may need to use simple language and be very specific (eg Don’t say “Hurry up John, you’ll have to stop playing with that ball now because it’s time to go to the long jump and we’ve nearly run out of time”. Say “John, game’s finished: long jump” communicated with a positive tone and body language.
- Develop positively stated rules. Tell the child what you expect him/her to do rather than what you don’t want. Eg “Share, take turns, follow the leader’s instructions, and keep hands and feet to self”, rather than “Don’t do this, don’t do that...” Express the rules visually, eg illustrated on a card.

- Use positive behaviour reinforcement ie praise the athlete for doing the “right” thing rather than admonish him/her for doing the “wrong” thing.
- Build a happy social environment for the individual and work on establishing rapport with him/her by showing interest in his/her “narrow interest area”.
- Don’t try to stop unusual behaviour unless it interferes with learning or threatens the well-being of others.
- Change your expectations of the child’s participation. He/she may not be able to perform skills as well as the other children. Consider accepting approximate attempts at skills.
- Avoid physical contact with the athlete. If physical contact is required in order to teach a skill, let the athlete know ahead of time.
- Keep the child busy when he/she is not participating. Make him/her a “helper” if possible. Avoid having the athlete in a situation where he/she has to wait for too long.
- Don’t take apparent rudeness from the athlete personally.
- Avoid confrontation. Develop a “crises management plan” in case of a major behaviour incident ie who takes what actions.
- Ensure that you enlist additional adult support for the group. Two age managers for a group involving a child with autism are recommended.
- Take steps to prevent teasing and bullying from the other children in the group. Educate the rest of the group about the typical characteristics of the child’s autism. Provide guidelines for their behaviour towards the athlete.
- Be aware that the motivation of a child with autism may vary from week to week. Every child can have a bad day. Don’t feel at fault if things are not going well.
- Be flexible, positive, patient and understanding.

## Tips for participation in Little Athletics Events

### Sprints

- Athletes with autism can understand the concept of running in a lane and can participate in running races.
- They may run with an unusual style.
- Be aware that the noise of a starting gun may frighten an athlete with autism. Consider alternatives.
- Consider providing the athlete with an outside lane so that they don’t feel “boxed in”.
- Be aware that the athlete may have trouble with competition ie winning, losing, being first. Consider ways in which the outcome of a race can be de-emphasised.
- Consider allowing a parent/trusted person to run with the athlete if required.

### Middle Distance

Similar to sprints.

### Race Walking

Similar to Sprints

### Hurdles

- Athletes with autism may have problems with getting both feet off the ground in order to clear a hurdle. They may have problems with height, depth perception (ie how far away a hurdle is from them), and difficulties with their body in space. They may be very anxious or phobic about running or at clearing hurdles.
- Introduce the event with lower and /or modified foam hurdles. Allow time for practice before formal competition.

## High Jump

- As with hurdles, athletes with autism may have problems with getting both feet off the ground in order to attempt to clear the bar. They may have problems with height, depth perception (ie how far away the bar and landing mat are from them) and difficulties with their body in space. They may be very anxious or phobic about running at or clearing a high jump bar.
- Beginners can practice without a cross bar, then with a flexible bar until they are proficient with whatever style they intend to use. Allow time for practice before formal competition.

## Long Jump / Triple Jump

- Athletes with autism may use the same facilities and rules as everyone else.
- If the athlete has problems with depth perception, consider placing big, bright witches hats next to the long or triple jump to assist the athlete to assess where the take off point is.
- Consider allowing an athlete with autism who has problems with depth perception to use a 1m square take off area.
- Be aware that athletes with autism may have difficulties with getting both feet off the ground when long or triple jumping. At a Centre level, consider relaxing the rules to allow the athlete to record a measurement.

## Throws

- Athletes with autism can take part in throwing events.
- If the athlete has low muscle tone, poor motor skills or difficulties in handling or projecting implements, consider allowing him/her to use implements of reduced weight or even alternative equipment eg bean bags or softballs (shot put); hoops or quoits (discus); turbo javs (javelin).
- Good supervision and safety measures will be required for those athletes who have poor impulse control or who are prone to aggression or temper tantrums.

## Safety Considerations

- Be aware that an athlete with autism may attempt to run away or “escape” from the group. Also be aware that the athlete may be attracted to climbing. Combined with the fact that the athlete may be hyperactive and / or impulsive, and also lack fear of any real danger, this may create some potential risks. Positively stated rules such as “Stay with the Group” are the first step in minimising such risks. Close adult supervision, and a plan in case such incidents occur, will assist in managing the risks.
- Be aware that an athlete with autism may be prone to aggression or temper tantrums. Again, positively stated rules, good supervision and a plan in case of an incident are important. Praising/ rewarding appropriate behaviour can also be effective. Finding out and avoiding the “triggers” that set off such behaviour may also assist.
- Be aware that an athlete with autism may have difficulties letting someone know when he/she is hurt or sick. Such an athlete may not make it apparent if he/she has suffered an injury, or be able to provide reliable “yes” or “no” answers to questions about his/her well-being. This makes it vital that a parent/guardian of the athlete is present to be called upon at all times.

*Little Athletics Tasmania acknowledged the valuable contributions of the following individuals and organisations in the preparation of this resource :*

- *Autism Spectrum Australia (Spectrum)*
- *NSW Sport & Recreation*



# Athletes



## With cerebral palsy

### *What is a Cerebral Palsy?*

“Cerebral Palsy” is a broad definition used to describe a group of neurological (brain) disorders that interrupt the communication between the brain and the muscles.

It is a permanent condition that affects an individual’s ability to control body movement, posture, reflexes and muscle tone.

Cerebral Palsy is caused by damage to the areas of the brain which control movement. Such damage will have occurred before, during or shortly after birth.

It is a condition that is not fatal and it is not contagious. It will not worsen over time, however there is no cure. Cerebral palsy is not an intellectual disability however this may be one of a number of other associated conditions. Other conditions may include hearing impairments, vision impairments, or epilepsy.

The effects of cerebral palsy may be very mild (a slight limp or speech impediment) to severe (a total inability to control movement), and different characteristics are evident in each person.

### **The Little Athletics Environment**

Of important in the context of a sporting environment is the fact that athletes with cerebral palsy may require varying degrees of modification to enhance participation. Changing the task, the rules, the equipment, or the environment will help to allow the athlete to achieve success and have fun.

### **General tips for officials and age managers**

- Learn as much as you can from the athlete’s parents/guardians about the typical characteristics that the athlete exhibits. Find out if there are any associated conditions of which you need to be aware.
- Allow the parent/guardian to accompany the athlete out onto the field if they see this as appropriate.
- Ask the athlete what they can and can’t do. Don’t assume.
- Ask the athlete if they would like assistance before helping. They may not want or require your help.
- Be prepared to change your expectations of the athlete’s participation. They may not be able to perform skills as well as the other children. Consider modifying the requirements of the skills.
- Be prepared to adapt activities (rules, equipment etc) to allow the athlete to participate. This may require some creativity and thinking “outside the box”. The extent of the modifications will depend on the athlete’s ability. Some athletes may not require any modifications. Others may require extensive modifications to become involved. Modifications can also be made in view of phasing these out over time.
- Make the athlete and their parents/guardians aware that some of the modifications you may use to allow the athlete to participate at your Centre are permitted at a Centre level only. Ensure they know that if they intend to progress to a higher level of competition, that event rules, equipment and specifications become more formal, and that some events (eg hurdles) will not be offered. This will help to avoid later disappointment.

- Take steps to prevent teasing and bullying from the other children in the group. Educate the rest of the group about the typical characteristics of the child's cerebral palsy. Provide guidelines for their behaviour towards the athlete.
- Be flexible, positive, patient and understanding.

## Tips for Participation in Little Athletics Events

### Sprints

- If required, consider reducing the length of races according to the ability of the athlete.
- "Handicap" races may allow the athlete to compete more fairly. Allow the athlete to start at different times or from different places.
- When moving quickly, an athlete with cerebral palsy may need to use sticks, crutches or a walking frame for balance. On the other hand, balance may actually improve in some athletes with cerebral palsy when they move quickly.
- Try to allocate an athlete with balance problems a lane with level ground.
- The athlete may have difficulties with performing the basic starting positions ie "On your marks" and "Set". Change your expectations here. Relax the starting rules that require complete steadiness in these positions.
- Be aware that the noise of a starting gun may cause a "startle" reflex in some athletes with cerebral palsy. Consider alternatives.
- Some athletes with cerebral palsy may have to use a wheelchair when participating in races. Modify the event accordingly.
- While sticks, crutches or walking frames may be used at a Centre level (assuming that all safety precautions are taken), such devices are not permitted to be used in formal competition e.g. Championships.

### Race Walking

- Similar to sprints and middle distance.
- Many athletes with cerebral palsy will have difficulties race walking within the strict definition of the rules. Change your expectations and consider accepting an approximate attempt at the skill.

### Hurdles

- Many athletes with cerebral palsy will have difficulty with achieving a basic hurdling action and negotiating the standard hurdle heights for their age group.
- Some athletes with cerebral palsy will have a poor ability to assess the relationship between themselves and the objects around them e.g. hurdles. They may misjudge distances when attempting to judge or step over a barrier and have difficulties with their body in space.
- Consider using lower and/or modified soft hurdles.
- Replace the hurdles with other objects e.g. robes, ribbons, mats, etc or simply use lines on the ground.
- Decrease the distance of the race. Reduce the number of hurdlers. Move the hurdles closer together.
- A partner or buddy may be able to provide some balance assistance as the athlete clears the barrier.
- Consider introducing a "slalom" option where the athlete weaves in and out around the barriers rather than being required to go over them.

## High Jump

- An athlete with cerebral palsy may have difficulties with achieving a basic high jump action. They may have difficulties with height and depth perception (ie how far away the bar and landing mat are from them), and difficulties with their body in space. They may not be able to coordinate a series of movements such as running at and then clearing a high jump bar.
- Consider modifying the equipment to allow the athlete to jump without a cross bar or with a flexible bar. If available, use low scissors mats as the landing area. (Athlete to land on his/her feet only).
- Consider allowing a standing jump to decrease the complexity of the movement.
- It may be easier for some athletes with cerebral palsy to coordinate a double leg jump than a single leg jump, so consider relaxing the rules to allow this.

## Long Jump / Triple Jump

- Athletes with cerebral palsy may have the ability to use some facilities and rules as everyone else.
- Some athletes with cerebral palsy may have difficulties performing the series of movements that require a run up followed by a jump. Consider allowing a standing long jump. If there are concerns about them landing safely in the sand pit, allow them to jump from the edge of the pit, rather than the sand/mat or board.
- It may be easier for some athletes with cerebral palsy to coordinate a double leg jump rather than a single leg jump, so consider relaxing the rules to allow this.
- If the athlete has problems with depth perception, consider placing big, bright witches hats next to the long or triple jump take off area to assist the athlete to assess where the take off point is.
- If the athlete is having difficulties jumping from the regulation take off area, consider allowing the athlete to use a 1m square take off zone. Alternatively, measure from where the athlete takes off on the runway (wherever this may be) using a thin layer of sand or powder.
- At a Centre level, generally consider relaxing the rules to allow the athlete to record a measurement.
- In place of an actual long jump, an athlete in a wheelchair can use a single or double arm push for distance on the runway or track. Do this away from the pit. You can measure the distance covered. In place of an actual triple jump, an athlete using a wheelchair can use a single arm push, opposite arm push and a double arm push on the runway or track, again away from the pit. Maybe allow a short approach of 2-3 pushes towards the mark where they have to make their first push to serve as a "run up". Ensure that there is no risk of the wheelchair ending up in the sand pit.

## Throws

- An athlete with cerebral palsy may have difficulties performing movements that require accuracy e.g. throwing into a sector.
- The athlete may have difficulties performing tasks that require a quick grip release i.e. shot, discus, javelin.
- The athlete may have difficulties performing a series of movements e.g. a run up and throw. Allow and encourage standing throws.
- The athlete may have difficulties with movements that involve a lot of movement away from the middle of the body e.g. swinging a discus.
- If the athlete has low muscle tone, poor motor skills or difficulties in handling and projecting implements, consider allowing them to use implements of reduced weight or even alternative equipment e.g. bean bags, softballs or light medicine balls (shot put); hoops or quoits (discus); turbojavs or cricket balls (javelin).
- Some athletes with balance difficulties may need to support themselves with an object (eg a chair) when throwing.

- Some athletes may need to throw from a seated position (ie a wheelchair or regular chair). The chair can simply be anchored by an assistant to prevent it from rolling or tipping. The assistant can make sure the chair is secure by holding on tightly to the back of the chair and keeping well away from the implement and throwing arm.
- Some athletes could roll or send a shot into the throwing sector using a ramp or gutter device.
- Consider relaxing the rules to allow the athletes to be involved. Allow actions such as a two-handed chest push for shot or an underarm toss for discus.

## Characteristics of Cerebral Palsy

Some characteristics which may occur with considerably varying degree of severity among people with cerebral palsy include:

- Movement difficulties / poor coordination
- Tenseness of muscles
- Uncontrolled bending in the arms and/or legs
- Strong, exaggerated muscle contractions
- Repetitive muscle contractions
- Unwanted movements
- Short, rigid, jerky movements
- Broad “floppy” movements
- Tremor / shaking / trembling
- Fixed postures / paralysis
- Problems with balance / unsteadiness; may fall frequently.
- “Weakness” of muscles
- Limited ranges of joint motion
- Difficulties with speech

Some of the above characteristics may lead a person with cerebral palsy to use walking sticks, crutches, a walking frame or a wheelchair.

## Safety Considerations

- Always consider the suitability and gradient of the track surface. A bad or sloping track surface may lead to balance difficulties. Also consider the access routes to the various facilities at the venue.
- Always select equipment that is appropriate for the individual, eg softer and/or lighter throwing equipment may have to be used if the athlete lacks strength or coordination.
- If an athlete is using sticks, crutches or a walking frame during an event it is important to ensure that this does not cause a safety issue to the other competitors or even the athlete themselves. If they are to be used, ensure appropriate modifications are in place to promote a safe environment for the athlete and others.
- Be aware that an athlete with cerebral palsy may be more prone to fatigue. Watch for signs of over-exertion.
- Some athletes with cerebral palsy may be more vulnerable in hot weather. Some may have difficulties with taking in enough fluids to keep adequately hydrated or protecting themselves against the sun. Stay vigilant and take appropriate precautions.

**“Some athletes with cerebral palsy may be more vulnerable in hot weather....”**

# Centre Disability Access Checklist



The following checklist is not exhaustive, but can be used as a guide to assessing your Centre's accessibility to people with a disability. It could also form the basis of an Annual Centre access review.

## 1. Car Parking Yes   Partial   No

- Does your venue feature designated car spaces for people with a disability?
- Are the car spaces located close to the venue entrances /access points?
- Are these car spaces adequately sign posted / clearly identified?
- Does your venue feature a designated vehicle set down / drop off area located to                      the venue entrance?
- Is there a procedure to ensure that people are safe on arrival and departure?

## 2. Venue Access Yes   Partial   No

- Are your vehicles access routes obvious and/or well signed?
- Where obstacles exist (eg stairs, steep slopes) does your venue provide alternate access routes?

## 3. Welcome Procedure Yes   Partial   No

- Is there a welcome procedure in place for new members?
- Is there a check to ensure new members have settled in?

## 4. Signage Yes   Partial   No

- So signs indicate important features, eg toilets, canteen, exit?
- Are they clearly written and visible?

## 5. Pathways and Activity Areas Yes   Partial   No

- Are there safe, clear pathways joining all main features?
- Are all areas easily accessible by people with mobility difficulties?
- Can people move about independently?
- Are all areas adequately lit?

**6. Amenities and Facilities** Yes    Partial    No

- Does your venue feature designated unisex wheelchair accessible toilets?
- Does your venue provide easy access to all amenities and facilities (eg canteen, track, toilets?)

**7. Administration and Organisation Practices** Yes    Partial    No

- Does your Centre actively address the needs of people with a disability?
- Does your Centre have the necessary equipment to support inclusion?
- Is your Centre committee aware of TLAA policies, guidelines and recommendations relating to athletes with a disability?

**8. Promotion and Publicity** Yes    Partial    No

- Are your Centre’s publicity and promotional strategies inclusive (eg brochures, flyers, advertisements?)
- Does your Centre actively advertise to young people with disabilities or disability groups?

**9. Education, Training & Accreditation** Yes    Partial    No

- Have any personnel from your Centre undergone disability training?
- Are your Committee members, officials, coaches encourages to attend approved disability education courses?
- Does your Centre possess and use the disability resources available from the Tasmanian Little Athletics Association?

Signed : .....

Position: .....

Date: ...../...../.....

If you answered YES to all questions, CONGRATULATIONS, your Centre is well on the way to operating an accessible and inclusive Little Athletics Centre. If you answered NO or PARTIAL to any of the questions, then consider taking action to rectify this situation. Why not make it an item at your next committee meeting.

For information, advice and support about disability inclusion, contact the Little Athletics Tasmania Office on 1300 888 713, email [office@taslittleathletics.com.au](mailto:office@taslittleathletics.com.au)