



Inclusion Fact Sheet

A resource for Little Athletics NSW Centres

Developed by Little Athletics NSW with valuable contributions of the following individuals and organisations:

- *NSW Sport & Recreation*
- *Ausrapid*
- *Special Olympics Australia*

References:

- *www.specialolympics.org*
- *"Coaching Athletes with Disabilities: An Australian Resource", Australian Sports Commission, 1995*

ATHLETES

with an

Intellectual Impairment

What is an Intellectual Impairment?

Intellectual impairment is characterised both by a significantly below average intelligence level (based on an IQ test) and by difficulties in ability to function in areas of everyday living e.g. communication, self care, social situations and school activities (identified before they are 18 years old).

Common Facets of Intellectual Impairment

Some characteristics which may occur with considerably varying degrees of severity among people with an intellectual impairment 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 of 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 Impairment

Generally, compared with other children, those with an intellectual impairment 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

- 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 impairment 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 requirements of the skills.
- The physical fitness and basic motor skills of people with an intellectual impairment 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 flexible, positive, patient and understanding.
- Set clear rules and boundaries.
- Close supervision is often required for athletes with an intellectual impairment, particularly in situations that pose potential risks.

General Tips for Officials and Managers cont.

- 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 on 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.
- 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.

Safety Considerations

- Be aware that athletes with an intellectual impairment may have associated conditions. These can include heart problems, muscular/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 per cent of people with **Down Syndrome** have a genetic condition called atlantoaxial instability which results in a misalignment of the cervical vertebrae C1 and C2. This condition exposes the individual 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 (e.g. 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.

Tips for Participation in Little Athletics Events

Sprints, Middle Distance, Walks

- Use visual cues to assist the athlete with keeping in their lane and where to run to. 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.
- Athletes may have difficulties race walking within the strict definition of the rules. Change your expectations and consider accepting the approximate attempt at the skill.

Long Jump, Triple Jump

- Some athletes may have difficulties jumping from the take off area (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 place on the ground to indicate this. The colour of the marker/mat can indicate which foot to land on. E.g. red = right, yellow = left. Both markers together = land on both feet.

Hurdles

- An athlete with an intellectual impairment 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 a high jumping skill. These may include markers that indicate the path to use when running in, markings of where to take off and indicators (e.g. 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. See 'Safety Considerations' for more information.

Throws

- Demonstrate activities first and then allow the athlete to practice.
- Consider using implements of reduced weight or even alternative equipment. E.g., bean bags, softballs, light medicine balls or safety shots (shot put); hoops, quoits or safety discus (discus); Turbojavs 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.

