

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. 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