

MANAGER/UMPIRE COMMUNICATIONS

The official Little League® Baseball & Softball rules and the **Florida - District 13** Code of Conduct clearly state that respectful and sportsmanlike behavior at a game is required of all representatives of **Florida - District 13** (players, managers, coaches, and umpires), as well as the spectators. The interactions between managers/coaches and umpires sets the tone for a game. If the managers/coaches and umpires are “getting along,” the chances for a game to be a positive and rewarding experience for all involved increase dramatically. To help achieve this worthy goal, **Florida - District 13** sets forth in this document the communications mechanism to be used between managers/coaches and umpires in each **Florida - District 13** game.



Reasons for Unsportsmanlike or Disrespectful Behavior

It is important to recognize the factors that contribute to unsportsmanlike and disrespectful behavior. Experience shows that the main factors that contribute to episodes of unsportsmanlike or disrespectful behavior are:

1. **Lack of knowledge or understanding of the rules** – The entirety of the rules of Little League® Baseball & Softball are simply not known or understood by many managers, players, and spectators.
2. **Lack of understanding of umpire authority** – Per the rules, the authority of the umpires during a game is absolute. Once the game is underway, it is in the hands of the umpires. Even the league surrenders its authority over the game to the umpires once the command is given to “Play Ball.” Many people simply do not understand this.
3. **Not acquiescing to umpire authority** – Many managers/coaches simply do not feel they are subject to umpire authority, particularly when youth umpires are calling the game. They think they are in charge of the game. The fact is: the umpires *are* in charge of the game.
4. **Intimidation of youth umpires** – Past episodes of unacceptable behavior in **Florida - District 13** have been noted as occurring more frequently when youth umpires are calling the game. There have been episodes in which managers have used their status as an adult to verbally intimidate or manipulate youth umpires.
5. **Ineffective exercise of umpire authority** – Sometimes umpires go too far in exercising their authority and sometimes they don't go far enough. In either case the game can easily suffer.
6. **Incorrect calls by umpires** – Incorrect calls happen. It is unavoidable. An incorrect call can instantaneously incite the “wronged” team to engage in unsportsmanlike or disrespectful behavior.

7. **Poor communications** – Communication between umpires and managers/coaches often occurs in an already enflamed situation, such as immediately after a “close” call. People’s emotions are running high and the discipline to remember to practice the correct communication protocol in an emotionally charged atmosphere often disappears.
8. **Flaunting of the rules of Little League® Baseball & Softball or the Florida - District 13 local rules** – Managers/coaches often flaunt the rules. For example, some managers ignore the rules about staying in the dugout. Also, many **Florida - District 13** managers routinely question judgment calls by umpires, even though the rules explicitly forbid this.

Manager/Umpire Communications Protocol

The reality of a Little League® baseball game is that managers and umpires communicate throughout a game regarding substitutions, timeouts, and pitching changes. Managers often have questions that they would like the umpire to answer before they make a line-up move so they can be sure they understand the implications of the line-up change they want to make. There are also communications that the manager wants to have regarding proper application of the rules on a given play or to seek input from another umpire because the manager thinks the umpire making the call didn't have a complete view of the play.

The protocol for manager/umpire communications in a **Florida - D13** game is as follows:

- **For Umpires:**

First of all, the umpire’s number one job is player safety. *Don't ever forget this.* Baseball is a difficult sport to play and it is inherently dangerous. Umpires should never let anything happen that unnecessarily increases the danger level for the players.

Achieve an appropriate balance when dispensing your authority. Expect managers to be emotional after a close call and do not “look for” opportunities to eject a manager. Recognize that a game ejection is undeniable evidence that a game has gotten out of control and the umpire bears some responsibility for letting this happen. Nevertheless, do not be afraid to eject a manager if he commits an offense that merits ejection. If a manager physically touches an umpire in any way, the manager will be immediately tossed! This is a line that must never be crossed and never be tolerated in the slightest.

- Always expect that the manager may want to ask a question on any given play. It is human nature. Do not interpret a manager wanting to ask a question as an attack on your integrity or your umpiring ability. **DON'T TAKE IT PERSONALLY!!**
- Never discuss a call with a manager unless time out has been requested and granted.
- Never discuss a call with a manager who is still in the dugout.

- Grant time out when a manager requests it, but only after completion of all possible plays. (**Managers Note:** *The umpire is not obligated to grant your time out and it is truly disruptive to the flow and pace of a game if time out is called after every play or every other play. Umpires have full authority to refuse to grant time out if, in their sole judgment, a manager is abusing this aspect of the communications protocol.*)
 - Listen to the manager's question and answer it as quickly and concisely as you can.
 - If a manager asks you to get help from another umpire and there is any doubt in your mind at all, go ahead and ask for help. If there is no doubt in your mind, then calmly tell the manager that you saw the whole play. When you do ask for help, separate yourselves from the manager and the players and quietly ask the other umpire the following question: "What did you see?" That's it, nothing more.
 - The umpire being asked for help tells the umpire who "owns" the call what he/she saw. For example, "I saw a clean catch" or "I saw the ball bobbled on the tag" or "I saw the first baseman's foot come off the bag" or "I didn't see the play because I was focused on action on another part of the diamond." Do not offer a call of your own. Just tell the requesting ump what you saw.
 - Once the other umpire tells you what he saw, it is still your call and you must decide to either reverse or affirm your original call. Do this as quickly as you can and return an answer quietly and calmly to the manager. Do not be afraid to affirm or reverse your call. THE GOAL IS TO GET THE CALL CORRECT!!
- **For Managers:**
As you well know, baseball is truly a "game of inches" and close calls happen all the time. It is a statistical certainty that some of these close calls will go "against" your team. When this happens, reacting like someone just shot the beloved family dog is unacceptable. Managers, players, and spectators look at plays "with their hearts" instead of their eyes. Umpires are trained to look at plays without regard to emotion or the outcome of the game.

Umpires are NOT REQUIRED to speak with managers about judgment calls (ball/strike, safe/out, fair/foul) and the rules explicitly forbid the questioning of judgment calls. Nevertheless, **Florida – District 13** umpires are trained to be open to dialogue with managers as a mechanism to help reduce tensions as they arise and avoid a lingering or build-up of tensions over the course of a game.

- If you want to talk to the umpire about a call, you must first ask for time out. Do not come walking out of the dugout with your hand raised in a request for time out. You have no business being out of that dugout until timeout has been granted.
- When timeout is granted, calmly meet and speak with the umpire. Speaking to the umpire in a loud or contentious voice will achieve nothing except to incite the other folks, place you in violation of the rules, and subject you to ejection from the game.

- Never touch the umpire. If you do, you will be ejected immediately. **Florida District-13** uses youth umpires. A “friendly” arm-around-the-shoulders by and adult manager/coach to a youth umpire is a FORM OF ADULT-TO-YOUTH INTIMIDATION.
- The only time another umpire can get involved in discussing a call made by an umpire is when the umpire who made the call asks for such involvement. Otherwise, the umpires not making the call are required by the rules to stand there like statues, doing and saying nothing.
- When you get your answer, you simply must accept it. You may indicate to the umpire and the scorekeeper that you disagree with the application of the rules by the umpire and are playing the game under protest. (**Note:** *Protests cannot be lodged regarding judgment calls, only regarding proper application of the rules.*) Even in the case of a protest, you must accept the umpire’s decision at the time, continue on with the game, and not lose your cool.