

Code of Conduct Lesson #2

Youth Soccer Referee Abuse Level 2

A guide for parents, coaches & spectators

Based on U.S. Soccer Policy 531-9



Effective
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LEVEL 2 IS A SERIOUS ESCALATION

Harassment and intimidation — even without physical contact — carry a 4-game minimum suspension.

LEVEL 1 (Comparison)

- Insulting or taunting language
- Mocking competence/appearance
- Dismissive gestures
- Accusations of bias

Penalty: 2-game minimum

LEVEL 2 ← YOU ARE HERE

- Expletives directed at the referee
- Personal attacks and profanity
- Getting in the referee's face
- Intimidating body language
- Escalating intensity / relentless pressure

Penalty: 4-game minimum

WHAT IS LEVEL 2 ABUSE?

Two categories — both carry a 4-game minimum suspension.

NON-PHYSICAL (Verbal/Behavioral)

Harassment, intimidation, retaliation, abusive or threatening (non-physical) language.

- Using expletives at the referee
- Personal attacks with profanity
- Getting in the referee's face
- Relentless badgering / escalating intensity

PENALTY: 4-GAME MINIMUM SUSPENSION

PHYSICAL (Intentional Confrontation)

Pushing, grabbing, pulling, squeezing, pinching, lightly slapping, use of object in non-striking manner, or property damage.

- Shoving the referee
- Forcefully grabbing their arm
- Throwing objects near the referee
- Following referee to the parking lot

PENALTY: 10 GAMES + 6-24 MONTHS BAN

"THAT CALL WAS COMPLETE \$#@%!"

Non-Physical Level 2 Abuse — Using Expletives at the Referee

"That call was complete \$#@%! Are you serious right now?!"

Said loudly in front of players, families, and children on the sideline

✗ Why This Is Abuse

Directing profanity at a referee — even in the heat of the moment — crosses from frustration into abuse. Policy 531-9 classifies expletive-laced outbursts at officials as Level 2 Harassment, regardless of whether they include a personal attack.

✓ Better Approach: Strong emotions are normal in competitive sport. Exhale, look away, or walk to the far end of the sideline before you say something that costs you four games.

PENALTY

4-GAME

SUSPENSION

Minimum Suspension

"YOU'RE A F***ING JOKE!"

Non-Physical Level 2 Abuse — Personal Attack with Profanity

*"You're a f***ing joke! You shouldn't be allowed within a mile of a soccer field."*

Real language reported by youth referees across the country

✗ Why This Is Abuse

Combining profanity with a direct personal attack is a textbook example of Level 2 harassment. It doesn't matter how loudly or quietly it's said — it constitutes abusive language that makes referees feel personally targeted and unsafe.

✓ Better Approach: Disagree with calls? Fine — but keep it to yourself or address it constructively after the match through the coach. Personal attacks solve nothing.

PENALTY

4-GAME

SUSPENSION

Minimum Suspension

CHARGING TOWARD OR GETTING IN THE REFEREE'S FACE

Non-Physical Level 2 Abuse — Intimidating Body Language

"You better look at me when I'm talking to you!"

Spoken while storming toward the referee from 20 yards away

✗ Why This Is Abuse

Moving aggressively toward a referee — even without making contact — is defined as intimidation under Policy 531-9. Closing space rapidly, standing uncomfortably close, or positioning your body in a threatening way qualifies as Level 2 abuse.

✓ Better Approach: Stay on your side of the field. If you must speak to an official, remain calm and at a respectful distance. Anything else is intimidation.

PENALTY

4-GAME

SUSPENSION

Minimum Suspension

NON-STOP BADGERING EVERY CALL

Non-Physical Level 2 Abuse — Harassment Through Escalating Intensity

"You can't make a single good call today! Not one! Every call goes their way — EVERY. SINGLE. ONE."

Said repeatedly over 20+ minutes of a U10 match

✗ Why This Is Abuse

Harassment isn't always one dramatic moment — it can be the cumulative effect of relentless, escalating pressure over the course of a match. Policy 531-9 covers this pattern of behavior explicitly as Level 2 abuse.

✓ Better Approach: One comment after a bad call is human. A running commentary of complaints is harassment. Set a personal rule: maximum one reaction per half, and keep it clean.

PENALTY

4-GAME

SUSPENSION

Minimum Suspension

"I KNOW WHO YOU ARE — I'LL GET YOU REMOVED"

Non-Physical Level 2 Abuse — Retaliation and Threatening Consequences

"I'm going to find out your name, report you to the league, and make sure you never referee again."

Retaliation threats — even implied — are explicitly covered under Level 2

✗ Why This Is Abuse

Threatening a referee with professional consequences, blacklisting, or retaliatory reporting is classified as Level 2 abuse under Policy 531-9. This behavior is designed to intimidate and silence officials — which is exactly why it is penalized.

✓ Better Approach: Legitimate concerns about referee conduct have a legitimate channel — talk to your league after the game. Using it as a weapon during the match is abuse.

PENALTY

4-GAME

SUSPENSION

Minimum Suspension

SHOVING THE REFEREE

Physical Level 2 Abuse — Intentional Confrontation

"I barely pushed him — I was just trying to make a point."

Physical contact at any level of force is abuse

✗ Why This Is Abuse

Even a light shove constitutes Level 2 physical abuse under Policy 531-9. Any forceful contact with a referee — regardless of the intent or how hard — crosses the line from Level 1 minor touching into intentional confrontation, with far more severe consequences.

✓ Better Approach: If you feel the urge to make physical contact, that's your signal to walk away immediately. Remove yourself from the situation before it becomes a criminal matter.

PENALTY

10 GAMES

+ 6–24 MONTHS

Minimum Suspension

FOLLOWING THE REFEREE TO THE PARKING LOT

Physical Level 2 Abuse — Intimidation and Intentional Confrontation

"I just wanted to have a word with him after the game. He can't avoid me forever."

Explicitly listed as a Level 2 Physical Abuse example in Policy 531-9

✗ Why This Is Abuse

Following a referee to their car, the parking lot, or any area after the match is explicitly named as Level 2 physical abuse in Policy 531-9. It constitutes stalking behavior and creates genuine fear for personal safety — regardless of what is actually said.

✓ Better Approach: When the final whistle blows, the referee's shift is over. They are a private person and deserve to go home safely. Any further contact must go through official league channels.

PENALTY

10 GAMES

+ 6–24 MONTHS

Minimum Suspension

THROWING OBJECTS NEAR THE REFEREE

Physical Level 2 Abuse — Use of Object in Non-Striking Manner

"I threw my water bottle on the ground — not AT him. There's a difference."

There isn't. Policy 531-9 covers both.

✗ Why This Is Abuse

Throwing, slamming, or hurling objects in the referee's vicinity — even if the intent is not to strike — is Level 2 physical abuse under Policy 531-9. It's designed to intimidate, and the policy treats it that way.

✓ Better Approach: Frustrated? Find a healthy outlet — cheer for your team, take a walk, or chew gum. Throwing things around match officials creates fear and ends your season.

PENALTY

10 GAMES

+ 6–24 MONTHS

Minimum Suspension

EVERY CHILD ON THAT FIELD IS WATCHING YOU.

Level 2 abuse doesn't just hurt the referee — it shapes how young players see the game.



When you use expletives at the referee, children learn that emotional regulation is optional for adults.



When you get in the referee's face, young players learn that intimidation is an acceptable problem-solving tool.



When adults drive referees away from youth soccer, children lose the game — literally. No referees, no matches.



A 4-game suspension removes you from 4 matches your child plays. That's your family paying the price too.

LEVEL 2 CONSEQUENCES ARE STEEP

And they compound quickly for repeat offenders.

1st

First Offense

Standard Penalties:

Non-physical: 4-game minimum.

Physical: 10 games + 6–24 months.

2nd

Second Offense

Double Punishment:

- 4 games → **8 games**
- 10 games → **20 games**
- Plus extended time bans.

3rd

Third Offense

Ultimate Sanction:

LIFETIME BAN

From all U.S. Soccer-affiliated matches — including as a spectator.

⚠ Offenses against minor referees carry TRIPLE the penalty automatically.

HOW TO HANDLE FRUSTRATION WITHOUT ABUSE

Level 2 abuse almost always follows a moment where you could have chosen differently.

Use the 5-Second Pause



Before reacting to a call you hate, take 5 seconds. Your first instinct is almost always the wrong one.

Walk to the Far End of the Sideline



Physical distance helps emotional distance. Remove yourself from the referee's immediate vicinity.

Keep It Internal



Muttering under your breath is fine. Directing it at the referee — at any volume — is not.

Let the Coach Handle It



If there's a genuine rules question, your coach can ask — calmly, between plays, at a respectful distance.

File a Post-Game Report If Warranted



Serious referee errors can be reported through your league. That's the right channel — not the sideline.

Thank the Referee After the Game



Whatever happened during the match, they showed up. A simple 'thanks for your time' costs nothing and means everything.

**Let's keep the
beautiful game
beautiful for everyone.**

Remember:

The Ref is Human!

