

Code of Conduct Lesson #3

Youth Soccer Referee Abuse Level 3

A guide for parents, coaches & spectators

Based on U.S. Soccer Policy 531-9



Effective
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LEVEL 3: WHERE ABUSE BECOMES ASSAULT

Level 3 abuse is no longer just a soccer matter — it's a legal one.

LEVEL 1

Taunting & Minor Touching

MIN. PENALTY

2 games

LEVEL 2

Harassment & Intentional Contact

MIN. PENALTY

4–10 games

LEVEL 3

Threats, Violence & Assault

MIN. PENALTY

12 games → Lifetime

⚠️ Level 3 abuse can result in criminal charges, civil lawsuits, and permanent lifetime bans.

WHAT IS LEVEL 3 ABUSE?

Two categories — both with the most severe consequences in the policy.

NON-PHYSICAL (Threats / Derogatory)

Aggression, derogatory language, cyberbullying, doxing, or threats of physical violence.

- Threatening to inflict bodily harm
- "I'll see you in the parking lot"
- Doxing or cyberbullying online
- Public social media attacks on the ref

PENALTY: 6 GAMES + 6–24 MONTHS

PHYSICAL (Violent Contact / Assault)

Hitting, punching, elbowing, kicking, biting, spitting, choking, tackling, or striking with an object.

- Punching or elbowing the referee
- Kicking the referee's shin
- Choking or grabbing the neck
- Throwing objects to strike the ref

PENALTY: 12 GAMES → LIFETIME BAN

"I'LL SEE YOU IN THE PARKING LOT"

Non-Physical Level 3 Abuse — Threats of Physical Violence

"I'll see you in the parking lot after this game. You better watch your back."

An explicit threat of violence — a criminal matter, not just a soccer one

✗ Why This Is Level 3 Abuse

This is a direct threat of physical harm. Policy 531-9 treats any statement threatening violence against a referee as Level 3 abuse. It triggers a 6-game minimum suspension and 6–24 month ban — and can constitute criminal threatening or assault under state law.

✓ Better Approach: Walk away. No call on a youth soccer field is worth a criminal record, a lawsuit, or your child watching you be arrested.

PENALTY

6 GAMES

+ 6–24 MONTHS

Minimum Suspension

"YOU'RE GONNA PAY FOR THAT!"

Non-Physical Level 3 Abuse — Threatening to Inflict Harm

"You're gonna pay for that call! I'm going to shove that card down your throat!"

Said within earshot of the children competing on the field

✗ Why This Is Level 3 Abuse

Threatening language that specifies physical harm — even if no action follows — is Level 3 abuse under Policy 531-9. The threat itself is the violation. No contact needs to occur for the full penalty to apply.

✓ Better Approach: If your anger has reached the point where you're threatening someone, it's time to leave the field immediately. No match result is worth that.

PENALTY

6 GAMES

+ 6–24 MONTHS

Minimum Suspension

POSTING ATTACKS ON SOCIAL MEDIA

Non-Physical Level 3 Abuse — Cyberbullying and Public Online Attacks

"Posted to Facebook: 'AVOID REFEREE #47 — total fraud, biased idiot. Here is his home address and phone number.'"

Cyberbullying and doxing are explicitly named in Policy 531-9 Level 3

✗ Why This Is Level 3 Abuse

Online attacks, doxing (publishing someone's personal information), and social media harassment of referees are explicitly covered by Policy 531-9 as Level 3 non-physical abuse. The abuse doesn't have to happen on the field to carry the full penalty.

✓ Better Approach: If you had a bad experience with a referee, report it through your league. Publishing someone's personal information online is doxing — a potentially criminal act.

PENALTY

6 GAMES

+ 6–24 MONTHS

Minimum Suspension

KICKING THE REFEREE'S SHIN

Physical Level 3 Abuse — Violent Contact

"He made one bad call too many. I just kicked him in the shin — it was barely anything."

Explicitly listed as a Level 3 violent contact example in Policy 531-9

✗ Why This Is Level 3 Abuse

Any intentional kick directed at a referee — regardless of force — constitutes Level 3 violent contact under Policy 531-9. This is assault under criminal law. The minimum penalty is 12 games. It can result in a lifetime ban and criminal prosecution.

✓ Better Approach: There is no scenario in youth soccer where kicking another person is acceptable. If this impulse arises, leave the field. Permanently.

PENALTY

12 GAMES

→ **LIFETIME BAN**

Minimum Suspension

THROWING A PUNCH AT THE REFEREE

Physical Level 3 Abuse — Violent Contact / Assault

"I just lost it. He made that call and I swung. I didn't even think about it."

This is not a sports incident — it is assault under criminal law

✗ Why This Is Level 3 Abuse

Punching a referee is assault. Under Policy 531-9 it is the most severe category of physical abuse, carrying a minimum 12-game suspension up to a permanent lifetime ban. Criminal charges, civil lawsuits, and medical liability also apply — independently of the soccer penalty.

✓ Better Approach: You are an adult at a child's game. If you cannot control your physical reactions, you should not be on a soccer sideline — for anyone's safety, including your own.

PENALTY

12 GAMES

→ **LIFETIME BAN**

Minimum Suspension

PLACING HANDS ON THE REFEREE'S NECK

Physical Level 3 Abuse — Violent Contact / Choking

"I grabbed him by the collar to make sure he was listening to me. I wasn't choking him."

Any forceful contact with the neck is among the most serious violations in Policy 531-9

✗ Why This Is Level 3 Abuse

Grabbing, squeezing, or placing hands anywhere near a referee's neck is violent contact under Policy 531-9, and strangulation is a felony in most U.S. states. Lifetime ban is the expected outcome. No framing of intent changes what this is.

✓ Better Approach: This is not a gray area. Physical contact with any person's neck is violent and criminal. Walk off the field — or expect to be escorted off by law enforcement.

PENALTY

LIFETIME

BAN LIKELY

Minimum Suspension

THROWING A WATER BOTTLE TO HIT THE REFEREE

Physical Level 3 Abuse — Striking with an Object

"I threw my water bottle and it hit the ref. I was just angry — I didn't aim that well."

Intent to hit distinguishes this from Level 2 (near-miss) to Level 3 (striking)

✗ Why This Is Level 3 Abuse

When an object is thrown with intent to strike the referee, it crosses from Level 2 intimidation into Level 3 violent contact. This carries a 12-game minimum suspension up to a lifetime ban — plus potential criminal charges for assault with a projectile.

✓ Better Approach: Put the water bottle down. Step back. Breathe. Your child is watching everything you do — and so are the league officials who will process your suspension.

PENALTY

12 GAMES

→ **LIFETIME BAN**

Minimum Suspension

INTENTIONALLY KICKING THE BALL AT THE REFEREE

Physical Level 3 Abuse — Use of Object in Striking Manner

"After the whistle I just blasted the ball — it wasn't directed at anyone."

Intent is assessed from context, not just claimed intent

✗ Why This Is Level 3 Abuse

Deliberately kicking a ball at a referee is treated as using an object in a striking manner under Policy 531-9 — a Level 3 physical abuse violation. Officials, witnesses, and video footage determine intent. Claiming it was random rarely holds up when the ball hits the referee.

✓ Better Approach: After a whistle, the ball stays where it is or is handed to the referee. Blasting it anywhere near an official — especially in anger — will be treated as intentional.

PENALTY

12 GAMES

→ **LIFETIME BAN**

Minimum Suspension

SOCCER IS THE LEAST OF YOUR PROBLEMS.

Level 3 abuse doesn't just get you banned — it can get you arrested.



Criminal Charges

Physical assault and threatening behavior are crimes under state law. You can be arrested, charged, and prosecuted — independently of any soccer league ruling.



Civil Lawsuits

Referees can sue for assault, battery, and emotional distress. Judgments can include compensatory and punitive damages. Your employer and reputation are at risk.



Medical Liability

If a referee is injured, you may be held liable for all medical costs — including emergency care, rehabilitation, and lost wages.



Permanent Lifetime Ban

A lifetime ban means no games, no sidelines, no tournaments — not even as a spectator. It applies to all U.S. Soccer-affiliated activity forever.

⚠ ALWAYS REMEMBER: YOUR CONDUCT HAS CONSEQUENCES BEYOND THE FIELD.

LEVEL 3 PENALTY STRUCTURE

The highest penalties in Policy 531-9 — and they compound fast.

1st

First Offense

Threats: 6 games + 6–24 months.

Violent contact: 12 games minimum to lifetime ban.

2nd

Second Offense

Double punishment.

- 6 games → 12 games
- 12 games → 24 games
- Extended time bans

3rd

Third Offense

Automatic lifetime ban.

No exceptions.

No reinstatement pathway described in the policy.



Offenses against minor referees (under 18) carry TRIPLE the penalty automatically.

STOPPING LEVEL 3 BEFORE IT STARTS

Level 3 never happens without warning signs. Every single one of these steps is a choice.



Recognize Your Own Escalation

When you feel your voice rising and your body tensing, that's the signal to step back — not forward.



Leave the Field

If you are at risk of saying or doing something violent, removing yourself is not weakness — it is the right call.



Don't Issue Threats — Even Jokingly

"I'll see you later" means nothing to you. It means everything to a 16-year-old referee who heard it.



Put the Phone Down

Don't post about the referee during or after the game. Doxing and cyberbullying carry the same penalties as in-person threats.



Report — Don't Retaliate

If a referee behaved badly, file a report through your league. Retaliation gets you banned; a report gets it investigated.



Remember What This Is

This is a youth soccer match. The referee is a human being — often a teenager — doing a job. Your child is watching.

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

Remember:

The Ref is Human!

