

Seven simple guidelines for being an effective parent umpire

1. **The strike zone:** Armpits to top of knee, with any part of the ball crossing the white part of the plate. A big strike zone is a good strike zone, in minors especially. If in doubt, call it a strike. Avoid walkathons. And if you lack proper equipment, call pitches from behind the mound.
2. **Hit by pitch:** The hands aren't part of the bat. If a pitch hits the batter's hands, award first base unless the batter was swinging or the contact occurred in the strike zone, in which case it's a dead ball strike.
3. **Obstruction:** The *runner* has the right of way unless the fielder possesses the ball or is in the act of fielding a batted ball. A fielder - including the catcher - standing on the bag or in the baseline without the ball is committing Obstruction. Intent is not necessary (clueless fielders frequently obstruct batter-runners rounding 1B). If there is any doubt, call Obstruction *at the end of the play*. Place the runners where you think they would have ended up in the absence of obstruction, which may include scoring. *Do not be afraid to call obstruction.* (Otherwise, coaches may instruct runners to run over clueless fielders, which is not a good outcome.)

ALTERNATIVE SUGGESTION

Obstruction & Interference: When a runner and a fielder get in one another's way during a play, the umpire usually should call either Obstruction (on the fielder) or Interference (on the runner). To make the right call, first ask yourself "Who has the Right of Way?"

The *fielder* has the Right of Way while in the act of making a play on a runner or fielding a batted ball, and the runner must allow the fielder to make the play. Collision/Disruption = Interference on the runner, dead ball, and the runner is out.

The *runner* has the Right of Way when the fielder is not in the act of making a play on the runner or fielding a batted ball. The fielder must allow the runner access to the base. Collision/Disruption = Obstruction by the fielder. Intent by the runner is not necessary. If a play is being made on the runner, play is stopped immediately and the runner is awarded the base. If the obstruction occurs while a play is not being made on the runner (such as when a ball is hit to the outfield and the fielder at 1B obstructs the batter-runner while rounding towards 2B), the Obstruction call is delayed until play stops, then you place the runners where you think they would have ended up in the absence of obstruction, which may include scoring.

4. **"Must slide" myth:** There is no "must slide" rule. If a fielder possesses the ball at a base and is ready to make a tag, the runner must avoid hard contact. What he/she cannot do is run into or through a fielder in possession. Call the runner out - but if and only if the fielder caught the ball before contact. Otherwise, see *Obstruction*, above. Also, remember that advancing runners are out if they slide headfirst (legal only in Juniors and above).
5. **Infield Fly Rule:** The rule is in effect with zero or one out, runners on first and second or bases loaded, a *fair* pop fly that can be caught by an infielder with *ordinary effort*. Yell "Infield fly, batter is out." (Or "Infield fly, if fair.") It doesn't matter whether the infielder actually catches it... or even if the catch is made by an outfielder playing shallow. If an infielder *could have* caught it with ordinary effort - whatever you think that means for a given age group - call the batter out loudly and quickly. The ball is live and runners advance at their peril. If the ball was caught, they must tag up before attempting to run to the next base (just like any other fly ball).
6. **Attitude:** Be firm, polite... and loud. Be approachable and positive. Remember that we are there not just to call the game but also to teach life lessons to children through baseball and softball.
7. **Ask for help:** Standing behind the mound and a batter rips one over the bag? Ask the base coach for help. Lose track of the count? Ask the scorer with the book. Unsure of the rule? Make what you think is the right call, then talk it over with both coaches after the play. Most baseball rules are either straightforward... or so obscure the coaches probably aren't sure either! Even the best umps occasionally have to drag out a rule book... and have gotten it wrong even in MLB.