

Physical Contact Policy

Swim Ireland supports the policy of appropriate physical contact in response to the needs of a child taking into account the child's age and stage of development meaning adults should not do what a child can do for themselves. Any contact should be in an open environment and preferably with the permission of the young person. Misleading or inaccurate information relating to physical contact can undermine the confidence of adults working with children and young people. This can also have serious safety implications for young people.

Appropriate Physical Contact

Understanding the meaning of appropriate physical contact will help leaders and young people feel comfortable working together. Physical contact may be required where the aim is to teach or develop a skill or technique that the child cannot accomplish without help. The leader must explain the nature and the reason for the physical contact to the young person, and the leader must be acting within the scope of their qualification.

Some aquatic sports involve physical contact between participants, e.g. water polo and this should be clear to parents and young people before participation. Any physical contact must be within the rules of the sport.

Where an injury requires treatment, the young person should be informed about what is happening and encouraged to hold dressings etc. In the case of emergency treatment this may not be possible, and any leader should act in the best interests of the young person.

A leader may need to act to prevent an accident or an injury from happening. This is an appropriate course of action if physical contact is required.

Respect for a young person

Young people must be treated with dignity and respect with any level of physical contact required.

A child or young person with a disability may require a greater degree of physical contact, depending on the nature of the disability and the activity. Where lifting and/or support may be required the appropriate health and safety regulations must be observed.

A young person's permission should be requested where any physical contact is required and time taken to clarify what is needed; this will help the adult and the child feel more comfortable. Leaders should show approval with verbal encouragement and praise, rather than the use of repetitive physical contact.

Any contact should be in an open environment and young people should be encouraged to voice any concern if they feel uncomfortable or threatened.

Young people should know they can voice any concerns through an individual they trust, this may be their coach, Club Children's Officer, parent or a friend.

Any form of physical contact as a punishment or as a response to misbehaviour is illegal. Only necessary and appropriate physical intervention may be imposed to prevent a child or young person from harming themselves, others or damaging property. Misbehaviour should be dealt with under breaches of the code of conduct through the complaints and disciplinary procedures.

Distress and Success

A young person may react to success with an expression of affection to an adult, e.g. a hug or in distress a young person may require comfort and reassurance. Adults must ensure that their reaction to distress or success is in response to the young person and is not unnecessary and unjustified physical contact. This is particularly relevant where it involves the same young person over a period of time. Any contact should be in response to the needs of the child and in an open environment.

Medical and Sports Science Practitioners

Sports science or medical staff may be required to treat a young person, and this will often require some form of physical contact. This should only be undertaken by properly trained and qualified personnel who will follow specific guidelines and codes of practice for their particular profession. Young people must still be able to voice any concerns they have with regard to any adult, professional or otherwise.