



PHYSICAL CONTACT GUIDANCE

Play, Active Recreation & Sport

It is sometimes appropriate and necessary to have direct physical contact with children and young people in order to develop their skills in a safe environment. Many national organisations provide useful guidance to their coaches/leaders on this issue, reflecting the specific requirements of their sport and their responsibility to promote a safe and enjoyable environment for all participants. Contact your national organisation for more information and a copy of their guidelines.

Coaches and volunteers should never engage in inappropriate contact such as touching of the groin, genital areas, buttocks, breasts, or any other part of the body that might cause a child or young person distress or embarrassment.

There have been instances where coaches and other adults who are motivated to harm and abuse children and young people have done so by falsely claiming that their behaviours were legitimate teaching, coaching, or caring practices.

Children should be encouraged to voice concerns if any physical contact makes them feel uncomfortable or threatened.

Things to remember...

Physical contact should be in an open environment with the permission and understanding of the participant.

In general, physical contact should:

- Be determined by the age and developmental stage of the participant. Don't do something that a child can do for themselves.
- Meet the child's needs, NOT the adult's.
- Develop skills/ techniques or prevent an injury or accident from occurring.
- Treat an injury (following first aid guidelines).
- Meet the requirements of the activity. The nature and reason for the physical contact explained to the child.
- Be a response to distress or success.

Is it okay to celebrate success or comfort a child?

There are times where a child or young person runs over to you to celebrate things such as scoring a try, winning the game or landing a move. There are also times when a child or young person comes over to you feeling distressed or sad, for example if they have missed a penalty, injured themselves or feel sad about their performance. The young person needs comfort and reassurance which may include physical comforting such as a caring parent would give.

Adults should use their discretion in such cases to ensure that what is normal and natural does not become unnecessary and unjustified contact, particularly if it is with the same young person over a period of time. Contact that an adult may feel is appropriate may be unwanted or uncomfortable to a young person.