

PHYSICAL CONTACT POLICY



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Mountaineering Ireland Version Control			
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NGB: Mountaineering Ireland

Club Name:

Introduction

The term Physical contact is used to describe the use of touch for many purposes in numerous different contexts. This is a controversial and complex area. There may be many circumstances in a sports context when it is appropriate, necessary, and beneficial for an adult to make physical contact with a child, to aid with their safety and development. Physical contact should always be about meeting the needs of the child. Actions that can be ambiguous are open to misinterpretation. You should always think before making any physical contact. You should be clear about why your actions are in the best interest of the child concerned.

Children learn who they are and how the world is, by forming relationships with people and things around them. The quality of a child's relationship with significant adults is vital to their healthy development and emotional health and wellbeing and enjoyment of our sport. Our policy, based on the CPSU Physical contact and young people in sport briefing paper, rests on the belief that everyone needs to know the difference between appropriate and inappropriate touch.

Children should be frequently reminded that they have the right to say what level of contact they are comfortable with and should feel that this is always listened to and respected. A no touch policy is not tenable. Sport can actually offer an opportunity to reaffirm children's right to decide how or if their body is touched and say no to touch that is uncomfortable.

When is physical contact appropriate in sport?

Adults in positions of responsibility should not make gratuitous or unnecessary physical contact with children and young people. Physical contact should always take place in the interests of and for the benefit of the child, rather than the adult involved. It should take place, only, when necessary, to:

- ✚ develop sports skills or techniques.
- ✚ treat an injury.
- ✚ prevent an injury or accident from occurring.
- ✚ meet the requirements of the sport.
- ✚ comfort a distressed child or to celebrate their success – adults should use their discretion to ensure that such contact does not become (or is not observed as) unnecessary or unjustified contact, particularly repeatedly with the same young person over a period of time.

Well-intentioned gestures (e.g., putting a hand on the shoulder or arm), can, if repeated regularly, lead to the possibility of questions being raised by observers, or make the young person feel uncomfortable. It is important to remind all parties that we all have different boundaries and preferences regarding physical space and touching.

Physical contact best practices

Unless the situation is an emergency, adults working with children in sports should:

- ✚ Explain to the child the nature of and reason for the physical contact.
- ✚ Ask for the child's consent to make the contact.
- ✚ Encourage the child to voice any concerns they have if any physical contact makes them feel uncomfortable or threatened.

By proactively seeking their feedback (e.g., “am I holding too tight?”, “is this still okay?”), children may be more likely to open up about when they are uncomfortable, feel hurt or have injuries.

Physical contact with young people should not:

- ✚ Involve touching genital areas, buttocks, breasts, or any other part of the body that might cause a child distress or embarrassment.
- ✚ Take place out of sight of others or in secret.

Sports clubs and coaches should:

- ✚ Monitor contact between young people, where possible and appropriate.
- ✚ Discuss and form guidance about contact between young people together with them.
- ✚ Provide an induction for new young members and their parents that covers guidance about any physical contact that will be required as part of the activity.

Children who need specific assistance due to disability or injury:

- ✚ In the case of a young person with a disability, specific support or assistance may be required. The following guidelines should be followed: Parents or their delegated care providers should be asked to undertake all intimate or personal care tasks for their child – this is not an appropriate role for coaches and others involved in leading activities.
- ✚ Required assistance should be discussed with the child and their parents prior to taking part in the sport, and, where possible, children should be asked or their preferred way of being assisted.
- ✚ When assisted, lifted, or otherwise manually supported, children should be treated with dignity and respect.
- ✚ Adults who will be assisting should receive appropriate training to minimise the risk of injury to both parties. More information can be found in the Child Protection in Sport Unit (CPSU) website under Personal Care Responsibilities for Disabled Athletes <https://thecpsu.org.uk/help-advice/topics/deaf-and-disabled#practical-safeguarding-steps> .

Physical punishment

Any form of physical punishment of children within sport or physical activity is unlawful, including any form of physical response to misbehaviour, unless it is by way of physical intervention to prevent a young person from harming themselves, others, or damaging property.

Medical and Sports Science practitioners

Within our sport there may be a requirement for physical contact from sports science or medical staff. This should only be undertaken by properly trained and qualified personnel who will need to follow the specific guidelines and codes of practice for their profession.