

GUIDELINES FOR PHYSICAL CONTACT WHEN WORKING WITH CHILDREN

There will be times when physical contact with children is necessary, and such contact should always be made in an appropriate manner. An example of this may be when a coach supports a child to ensure no physical harm or injuries are incurred. This guide assists in outlining acceptable physical contact situations and practices, as well as strategies and techniques to limit unnecessary or inappropriate physical contact. This is not an exhaustive list but offers Netball coaches and officials with a framework of good practice guidelines.

Creating a child safe environment does not mean ceasing all physical contact with children, however strategies should be put in place to ensure that all physical contact that occurs is appropriate, related to the sport and only occurs where necessary.

If physical contact is appropriate and required in a particular situation, wherever possible, that physical contact should take place in view of the public by utilising an open space in clear sight of other adults. For everyone's safety, avoid conditions where adults and children are left alone or placed in a 1:1 situation

How should physical contact be undertaken?

- Always seek permission from the child to touch them prior to any contact occurring- for example, "Can I move your forearm to adjust your technique?"
- Be aware of and respect signs indicating the child is uncomfortable with physical contact. This may include limited eye contact or a step away from you.
- Use words to accompany physical contact, explaining what you are doing and why.
- Congratulate children using non-intrusive contact such as a pat on the upper arm, back, high-five or hand shake.
- Provide skill-teaching support to acceptable body regions such as the shoulders or back, providing it is in context for the sport and the skill or technique being demonstrated.
- Congratulating and comforting children should take place in a public setting, in view of other adults.
- Physical restraint and intervention should only occur if there is a serious and imminent risk to an individual's safety. This may include reaching out to grab a child by the arm to move them away from a dangerous situation or holding a child so they don't fall to the floor and injure themselves.



What physical contact is appropriate?

Physical contact may also be required to:

- Provide first aid to treat an injury;
- Comfort a distressed child;
- Assist a child with a disability;
- To provide guidance to develop a particular skill; or
- To prevent an injury.

Avoid:

- Assisting children with uniform fit-out or changing of their clothes;
- Attending to injuries in isolated first-aid rooms without the presence of at least one other adult;
- Physical contact with private body parts and
- Sitting a child on your knee;

PRACTICAL STRATEGIES FOR CREATING A CHILD SAFE CULTURE

Never assume that physical contact with a child is acceptable.

- Unless not practical or possible to do so (e.g. in an emergency) always ask permission before making contact with a child.
- Use words to accompany and explain the reason for any physical contact with a child.
- Have a polite and respectful conversation with parents and children (especially teenagers) to ensure you are aware of any sensitivities specific to:
 - Children from diverse cultures;
 - Children with a disability or medical condition.



Discipline:

From time-to-time there may be a child taking part in a sporting activity who does not behave. Setting clear rules and expectations for everyone's behaviour will assist with the management of this, but not completely prevent it from happening. Strategies your organisation may use include:

- Engage children in the development of codes of conduct or session expectations.
- Adopt positive methods for managing challenging behaviour such as directing other children to move away from the situation and/or talking one on one to the child concerned.

Do not:

- Physically restrain a child for poor behaviour i.e. by grabbing them by the arm; or
- Respond to poor behaviour from a child with poor or aggressive language.

This document was developed utilising and adapting content from Vicsport Promoting Child Safe Resources. Information contained in this document is general in nature and should not be considered as a substitute for legal advice.