



## 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, this means adults should not do what a child can do for themselves. Contact should be in an open environment and preferably with the permission of the young person.

### General

Swim Ireland promotes the use of appropriate physical contact between adults and children and young people. 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 children.

For leaders, coaches, teachers or any adults and children to feel comfortable the following should be followed:

### Appropriate Physical Contact

Appropriate contact is when:

- The aim is to teach or develop a skill or technique that the child cannot accomplish without help; the nature and the reason for the physical contact must be explained by the adult to the child and must be within the scope of the qualification of the adult
- It is required by the nature of the activity — some aquatic sports involve physical contact between
- participants, e.g. water polo; activities requiring physical contact should be identified prior to participation and must be kept within the rules of the sport
- An injury requires treatment — the child should be informed about what is happening and encouraged to hold dressings etc., however for emergency first aid treatment this may not be possible
- An accident can be prevented from occurring — this will be in reaction to an emergency situation

### Respect for a young person

- All children 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, the adult and child involved will feel more comfortable.
- Leaders should convey approval with verbal encouragement and praise, rather than the use of often repetitive physical contact.
- Any contact should be in an open environment and children should be encouraged to voice any concern if they feel uncomfortable or threatened.
- Children should know how to voice any concerns — through their parents or the Club Children's Officer.
- Any form of physical contact as a punishment or as a response to misbehaviour is unlawful. Only necessary and appropriate restraint may be imposed to prevent a child or young person from harming themselves, others or damaging property. Misbehaviour may need to be dealt with under breaches of the code of conduct through the complaints and disciplinary procedures.

**Distress and Success**

A child in distress may require comfort and reassurance as in a manner that would be provided by a parent or guardian. A young person may also react to success with an expression of affection to an adult, a hug for example. Adults must ensure that their reaction to a child in distress or because of a success does not become unnecessary and unjustified physical contact, particularly with 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**

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. Any queries in this regard should be directed to the National Children's Officer.