

G11 – Physical Contact and Young People Guidelines

The policies and guidelines referenced within this document are those of British Canoeing and its Home Nation associations.

Introduction and background

It is important that Coaches and Volunteers are aware of the issues related to physical contact with students/ paddlers during Paddlesport activities.

Concerns have been expressed about what is and what is not acceptable regarding physical contact with children and vulnerable adults in Paddlesport. Some misleading and inaccurate information has been promoted within the sports sector in general and this can undermine the confidence of coaches and others in applying safe and appropriate coaching methods.

In some sports, there have also been instances where some coaches/ volunteers 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.

The purpose of this guidance is to clarify the position of British Canoeing in relation to this issue and provide guidance to all those involved in working with young people in sport. This advice has been adapted from the Child Protection in Sport Unit (CPSU) briefing paper on Physical Contact and Young People in Sport (2005).

Guidance

There are a number of principles that should be followed when the activity involves physical contact. Physical contact during Paddlesport should always be intended to meet the child's needs, not the adult's. The coach/ volunteer should only use physical contact if their aim is to:

- develop skills or techniques
- treat an injury
- prevent an injury or accident from occurring
- meet the requirements of the activity engaged in

The coach/ volunteer should seek to explain the nature and reason for the physical contact to the child reinforcing the teaching or coaching skill. Unless the situation is an emergency, the adult should ask the child for permission. It is good practice for Paddlesport clubs, as part of an induction process or pack for new members, to explain to parents/carers and their child, or give written guidance, about any physical contact that will be required as part of activities they will be involved in. Children should be encouraged to voice concerns if any physical contact makes them feel uncomfortable or threatened. Contact should not involve touching genital areas, buttocks, breasts or any other part of the body that might cause a child distress or embarrassment. Physical contact should always take place in an open or public environment and not take place in secret or out of sight of others. The CPSU has stated that it is not aware of any sports bodies that have stated that any physical contact is not permissible under any circumstances within the context of coaching or teaching.

In the case of a young person with a disability, specific support or assistance may be required. When children with disabilities are lifted or manually supported, the child should be treated with dignity and respect. Relevant health and safety guidelines must be followed to ensure the safety of the child and those assisting. It is recommended that those assisting receive appropriate training.

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Specific situations

Physical punishment

Any form of physical punishment of children is unlawful, as is any form of physical response to misbehaviour unless it is by way of restraint. It is particularly important that coaches /volunteers understand this, both to protect their own position and the overall reputation of the club, event or organisation in which they are involved.

Contact as part of coaching

Some areas of training are more likely to require coaches or teachers to come into physical contact with children and young people from time to time in the course of their duties, for example, showing a novice how to put on their buoyancy aid, land training in the gym, showing a student how to use a piece of equipment or demonstrating an exercise during a coaching or teaching session in order to reduce the risk of injury. Coaches/ volunteers should be aware of the limits within which such contact should properly take place, and of the possibility of such contact being misinterpreted. Even where there is a need to support or touch a child, over-handling should be avoided. It should be recognised that physical contact between a Coach/ volunteer and a child that may occur during legitimate teaching or coaching may be misconstrued or misunderstood by a student, parent or observer. Touching young participants, including well-intentioned informal and formal gestures such as putting a hand on the shoulder or arm, can, if repeated regularly, lead to the possibility of questions being raised. As a general principle, coaches /volunteers in positions of responsibility should not make gratuitous or unnecessary physical contact with children and young people. It is particularly unwise to attribute frequent touching to their teaching or coaching style or as a way of relating to young participants.

Responding to distress and success

There may be occasions where a distressed young person needs comfort and reassurance which may include physical comforting such as a caring parent would give. Physical contact may also be required to prevent an accident or injury and this would be wholly appropriate. A young person or coach may also want to mark a success or achievement with a hug or other gesture. Coaches/ volunteers should use their discretion in such cases to ensure that what is (and what is seen by others present) normal and natural does not become unnecessary and unjustified contact, particularly with the same young person over a period of time. It should also be considered that what as an adult may be felt appropriate may not be shared by a young person.

Sports science and medicine

There may be some roles within Paddlesport where physical contact is commonplace and/ or a requirement of the role, particularly sports science or medicine. These tasks should only be undertaken by properly trained or qualified practitioners. This guidance does not seek to replace the specific guidance and codes of practice developed for those professionals and reference should be made to the appropriate body for that discipline.