

Hands on Adjustment Guidance

Introduction and background

There is a growing concern about what is and what is not permissible in the area of physical contact with children and young people in sport. Some misleading and inaccurate information has been promoted within the sports sector and this can undermine the confidence of coaches and others in applying safe and appropriate coaching methods.

There have also been instances where some 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.

Guidance

There are a number of principles that should be followed when the activity involves physical contact.

Physical contact during sport should always be intended to meet the child's needs, **NOT** the adult's.

The adult should only use physical contact if their aim is to:

- Develop sports skills or techniques
- To treat an injury
- To prevent an injury or accident from occurring
- To meet the requirements of the sport

The adult 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 clubs, either as part of an induction process or pack for new members, to explain to parents/carers and their children or give written guidance about any physical contact that may be required as part of the coaching/training session. Children should be encouraged to voice concerns they have 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.

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 individual 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.

Specific situations

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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 physical intervention to prevent a young person from;

- Harming themselves
- Harming other
- Damaging property

It is important that adults understand this both to protect their own position and the overall reputation of weightlifting and disability powerlifting in which they are involved.

Contact as part of coaching

Some activities are more likely to require coaches to come into physical contact with children and young people from time to time in the course of their coaching. Examples include showing a pupil how to use a piece of equipment or demonstrating a move or exercise during a coaching in order to reduce the risk of injury due to mistakes whilst participating.

Adults should be aware of the limits within which such contact should properly take place, and of the possibility of such contact being misconstrued.

When there is a need to support or touch a child, over – handling should be avoided.

It should be recognised that physical contact between an adult and a child that may occur during legitimate coaching may be misconstrued or misunderstood by a lifter, parent or observer. Touching young people, 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 adults 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. Adults should use their discretion in such cases to ensure that what (and what is seen by others present) is 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.

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Sports science and medicine

There may be some roles within the sport where physical contact is common place 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.

Supporting the Lifter

Supporting and shaping the lifter is an essential part of coaching lifting, in that it helps the lifter to understand movement patterns and complex skills, but also reduces the risk of injury due an error in performance.

The key points on safe spotting and manual support are:

- the coach must ensure that support is only used when necessary and “over-handling” is avoided, however;
- the coach must always be alert to the possibility of performance errors or anxiety, which may increase the risk of injury;
- supporting techniques must not inhibit performance;
- physical contact should not be invasive of sensitive areas of the body i.e. genital areas, buttocks or breasts.

Infrequent non-intentional physical contact can arise out of error on the performer or coach’s part. Such situations should not be ignored and need to be acknowledged through an apology to the lifter and reported to the Club Welfare Officer or head coach and parents.

A written report should be made of any incident.

It is also good practice to explain and provide some written guidance, perhaps as part of an induction pack, to new members and parents that some physical contact will be required but that only appropriate non-invasive techniques should be used. If a lifter or parent has any concerns, they should be raised with the club welfare officer. In any circumstance where abuse is suspected, BWL reporting procedures should be followed.

Flexibility/Stretching exercises

There is a range of techniques and types of exercise for extending flexibility that involve the application of force. These techniques can also lead to the person applying the force coming into close proximity with the lifter and having prolonged contact with areas of the lifter’s body.

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Coaches must follow the following guidelines:

- Use slow, progressive and prolonged stretching exercises, within the “discomfort zone”, rather than what might be considered to be excessive force.
- Avoid exercises that place the coaches and lifters body in “close proximity” and might be seen as unnecessary by the less informed parent or observer.
- Be sensitive to how the exercise might be perceived by the parents and children.
- Consider holding a parents’ forum to explain the flexibility training techniques, so that the parent is more aware and therefore less likely to misinterpret the techniques being used.
- Use partner exercises with more experienced lifters where possible.

High Performance Coaching

Key factors in safeguarding young people include always ensuring there are at least two responsible adults present during training and avoiding situations where a responsible person is alone with a child. However, a small proportion of young people involved in lifting who are training at the high performance levels may find that these principles are in conflict with the practicalities of intensive training.

One-to-one coaching has clear benefits for a small proportion of appropriately prepared and highly experienced lifters and is recognised as the best way to achieve excellence. The number of lifters who would benefit from training in this manner is large. In addition, due to the fact that this training tends to take place during the school day and outside standard club hours it can be very difficult to ensure there are always two responsible adults present. Therefore, while it is always desirable that an additional responsible adult is present, in circumstances where it is not possible lifters within the

National system may train in a one-to-one situation, subject however to prior approval by BWL Performance Manager and National Coaching Staff, and in liaison with parents/guardians. The squad and/or club welfare officer must also confirm the lifter’s readiness to train in this manner and that there are appropriate support mechanisms are in place. Requests will only be confirmed on the proviso that there is additional support staff in the building, available to assist in the event of an emergency.

Requests should be made in writing to the Performance Manager and will only be granted if it is believed that it is in the best interest of the lifter, and the governing body is assured that suitable provision is available to ensure the lifter’s welfare needs are met.