



Physical Contact and Young People in Sports

Introduction and background

At Mudsock Youth Athletics (MYA), we are dedicated to ensuring the safety and well-being of all athletes in our programs. While physical contact between adult volunteers and children is generally not appropriate, there are situations where such contact may be necessary for safety or instructional purposes. This handout aims to provide clear guidance to all volunteers with MYA to help maintain a safe and supportive environment for our young athletes.

Guidance

Physical contact during sports 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 help a child after 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. **Unless it is an emergency, the adult should ask the child for permission first.**

It is good practice for leagues, as part of an info meeting or packet for new players, to explain to parents/caregivers and their child about any physical contact that will be required as part of that activity. Children should be encouraged to voice concerns they have if any physical contact makes them feel uncomfortable or threatened and should be empowered to say no at any time if they are uncomfortable.

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 with other adults present and not take place secretly 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 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

Physical punishment

Any form of physical punishment of children is unlawful, as is any form of physical response to misbehavior unless it is physical intervention to prevent a young person from

- Harming themselves
- Harming others
- Damaging property

Contact as part of coaching

Some sports 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 duties, for reasons of both teaching and the participant's safety. Examples include showing an athlete how to use a piece of equipment or demonstrating a move or exercise during a coaching session to reduce the risk of injury due to falls or errors when performing. **If there is a need to support or touch a child, only do so when necessary and with the child's consent.**

It should be recognized that physical contact between an adult and a child that may occur during legitimate teaching or coaching may be misconstrued or misunderstood by an athlete, 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, adults in positions of responsibility should not make frequent or unnecessary physical contact with children and young people.

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 pat on the back. Physical contact may also be required to prevent an accident or injury, or to help an athlete off the court/field following an injury. If a young person or coach wants to mark an achievement, offer a high five or fist bump. Adults should exercise discretion to ensure that normal and natural interactions do not become unnecessary and unjustified contact, particularly with the same young person over time. It is important to recognize that what may seem appropriate to an adult might not be perceived the same way by a young person. **In general, avoid frequent or unnecessary physical contact and ask for consent first.**

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