

BHS Guidelines on Appropriate Physical Contact

These guidelines have been produced in conjunction with the NSPCC Child Protection in Sport Unit.

There is growing concern about what is and isn't permissible in terms of physical contact with children in sport. Some misleading and inaccurate information has been promoted which can undermine the confidence of instructors and coaches in their ability to use safe, appropriate coaching methods.

Sadly, there have also been instances in which adults who are motivated to harm and abuse children have done so by falsely claiming that their behaviour was part of 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 should be in response to the needs of the child and a good general guideline to keep in mind is:

- **Don't do something that the child can do for themselves**

Physical contact during sport should always be intended to meet the child's needs, **NOT** the adult's. You should only use physical contact if your aim is to:

- **Assist a child to mount or dismount**
- **Coach a child to develop a sports skills or technique**
- **Prevent an injury or accident from occurring**
- **Treat an injury**
- **Meet the requirements of the sport**

You must:

- Explain to the child the nature and reason for any physical contact reinforcing the teaching or coaching
- Unless the situation is an emergency, you should ask the child for permission
- Encourage the children to voice their concerns if any physical contact makes them feel uncomfortable or threatened.

It's good practice to explain to riders and their parents about any physical contact that may occur as a part of them learning to ride or improving and furthering their skills through your coaching.

REMEMBER contact should **NOT** involve touching:

- genital area
- buttocks
- breasts
- or any other part of the body that might cause a child distress or embarrassment

If you need to use physical contact, this should only take place in an open or public environment and not in secret or out of the sight of others.

Physical contact should be kept to a minimum as there is a possibility that over handling could be misinterpreted or misconstrued by the rider, parent or observer.

What can I do if a child is distressed?

There may be occasions where a distressed child needs comfort and reassurance, which may include physical comforting, such as a caring parent would give and this would be wholly appropriate.

What can I do if a child I teach has done well?

A child or an instructor may want to mark a success or achievement with a physical gesture. You must use your discretion in such cases to ensure that what is normal and natural, and seen by others that way, does not become unnecessary or unjustified contact, particularly with the same child over a period of time. A 'high five' to a child who has just achieved a milestone in their learning is not unreasonable.

Physical Punishment

Any form of physical punishment is unlawful, as is any form of physical response to misbehaviour unless it is by way of restraint.

What do I do if a concern or allegation is reported to me?

Even the most experienced coach or instructor may feel a sense of anxiety when receiving information about an incident or allegation that has occurred or is being reported. Your Lead Welfare Officer is there to help. Most concerns arise from observations of adults rather than disclosures by children. Concerns can also be expressed about a child's family or someone else in their community who may not be involved in your particular equestrian activity.

Remember it is NOT your responsibility to determine whether or not the abuse has taken place, it is your responsibility to record the details and to report it.

What do I do if a child or young person is in immediate danger or needs medical attention?

999 should be called. Serious concerns can be reported to Child Protection Units within local Police Forces, Children Social Care Services or Local Safeguarding Children's Boards.

Useful contacts and links

Contacts

BHS Lead Welfare Officer
02476 840481 (Mon – Fri office hours)
Confidential email: cpleadofficer@bhs.org.uk

Childline 0800 1111

NSPCC 0808 800 5000