

Physical Contact and Young People in Netball

Introduction and background

It is sometimes appropriate and necessary to have direct physical contact with children in order to develop their skills in a safe environment. There is growing concern being expressed about what is and what is not permissible in the area of physical contact with children and young people in netball. 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.

England Netball provides the following guidance to all coaches, umpires and other adults working in netball which we believe reflects the requirements of our sport, and ensures we are proportionate in balancing our responsibility to promote a safe and enjoyable environment for all participants.

Guidance

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

Physical contact during netball should always be intended to meet the child's needs, NOT the adult's. The adult should only have physical contact if their aim is:

- To develop netball skills or techniques
- To treat an injury
- To prevent an injury or accident from occurring

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 netball 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 netball activity. 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.

For disabled children

In the case of a young disabled person, specific support or assistance may be required. For those who require assistance with intimate personal care (eg toileting, feeding or changing) arrangements should be agreed in partnership with the child and carers - before the activity commences - to ensure that these tasks are undertaken by the child's parents or carers and not by sports staff, coaches or volunteers. When disabled children 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.

Physical chastisement

It is unlawful for those working with children and young people to administer any form of physical chastisement (eg slapping, hitting and so on). However, on some occasions it may be necessary to physically intervene to prevent a young person from:

- Harming themselves
- Harming others
- Putting themselves or others at risk
- Damaging property

It is particularly important that adults understand this both to protect their own position and the overall reputation of the netball club or association in which they are involved.

Contact as part of coaching

It is unlikely that during a netball coaching session a great deal of physical contact will be required. Examples may include a coach guiding a player's arm to correct a shooting stance, or an umpire moving young people to the correct distance for a toss-up or penalty pass.

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

If there is a need to have direct physical contact with a young person this should not exceed the requirements of teaching the specific skill or technique, or of protecting the child from physical harm.

It should be recognised that physical contact between an adult and a child that may occur during legitimate teaching or coaching may be misconstrued or misunderstood by a pupil, 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 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 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. In all these circumstances physical contact should only be a response to the needs of the child or young person, rather than those of the adult concerned – and any contact should take place in an open environment. It should also be considered that sometimes what to an adult may seem appropriate may not be considered so by a child or young person.

Some children and young people are not comfortable with physical contact from others. This is particularly likely to be the case with those who have experienced sexual abuse, and therefore adults need to ensure that the need for physical contact in these circumstances is led by the child or young person rather than the adult.

Sports science and medicine

There may be some roles within netball where physical contact is common place and/or a requirement of the role, particularly sports science or medicine, for example physiotherapy or professional fitness assessment. 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.

Conclusion and further advice

This guidance has been compiled to give best practice advice and does not constitute an exhaustive list of recommendations and requirements. Netball is a fun and inclusive sport that can be delivered safely by adults working in partnership with young people and effective two way communication.

If you have any questions or concerns please look on the safeguarding pages of the England Netball website:

www.englandnetball.co.uk or email besafe@englandnetball.co.uk

This guidance has been adapted from the Child Protection in Sport Unit guidance: 'Physical Contact and Young People in Sport' and is consistent with CPSU good practice.