Physical contact when coaching

Introduction

This guidance document aims to establish guidelines for appropriate physical contact between coaches and gymnasts within the gymnastics community. The safety and wellbeing of our athletes are of the utmost importance, and this guidance document seeks to maintain a safe and respectful coaching environment while ensuring effective coaching practices.

Purpose

The purpose of this guidance document is to provide clarity and consistency regarding acceptable physical contact between coaches and gymnasts during coaching sessions.

Scope

This guidance document applies to all coaches, athletes, and staff involved in gymnastics affiliated with Scottish Gymnastics. It encompasses all training sessions, competitions and other related activities.

Guidelines for physical contact

Purposeful contact only

Physical contact between coaches and gymnasts should be purposeful and necessary for coaching, spotting, or safety reasons.

Consent

Coaches must obtain consent from gymnasts before engaging in any physical contact.

Transparency

Coaches should clearly communicate the purpose and necessity of any physical contact to the gymnast prior to engaging in it.

Professionalism

All physical contact must be conducted in a professional manner, maintaining appropriate boundaries and respect for the gymnasts' dignity.

Minimal contact

Coaches should strive to minimise physical contact to what is essential for effective coaching, avoiding unnecessary or excessive touching. Coaches should consider other coaching techniques such as demonstrations, verbal explanations and video feedback.

Training and education

Coaches must undergo training, education and regular CPD on appropriate coaching techniques, including spotting, stretching and physical contact guidelines, to ensure compliance with this guidance document.

Comforting a young person who is upset

Coaches should prioritise the gymnast's emotional well-being while maintaining appropriate boundaries. Physical contact for comforting purposes should be limited

to non-invasive gestures such as a pat on the back, a comforting hand on the shoulder, or a supportive hug if the athlete initiates it.

Hugging gymnasts

Sometimes gymnasts will initiate a hug or other forms of happy contact with coaches and other adults. It is important that adults respond to this in an appropriate manner, where they engage with the child in a positive way.

Documentation

Gymnastics is a high-risk sport, sometimes coaches must catch gymnasts in any way they can to prevent a bad fall and may catch the gymnast inappropriately by accident. When this occurs, they should:

- Apologise to the gymnast
- Document the incident with the club safeguarding officer
- Inform the parent or carer at the end of the session

Prohibited conduct

Inappropriate contact

Any form of physical contact that is sexual, exploitative, or otherwise inappropriate is strictly prohibited and will result in disciplinary action, up to and including termination of coaching privileges and legal consequences.

Overly familiar behaviour

Coaches should avoid any behaviour that could be perceived as overly familiar or intimate, always maintaining a professional distance.

Unsupervised one-on-one contact

Unsupervised one-on-one physical contact between a coach and athlete is prohibited, all coaching should occur in an open and observable environment.

Acting as carers

Staff, coaches and volunteers should not act as personal carers for gymnasts. They should work with parents and gymnasts to develop practiced routines for personal care where the gymnast is aided by an appropriate guardian e.g. toileting and changing so that parents and children know what to expect.

Stretching

There are a number of considerations when flexibility training, for more information please see the links below

- Flexibility training, British Gymnastics position statement
- Flexibility training, key recommendations
- Flexibility training, guide for gymnasts

Reporting concerns

Any concerns or incidents regarding inappropriate physical contact should be reported immediately to the safe sport team at Scottish Gymnastics.

- Safeguarding Incident Report Form - Scottish Gymnastics