

Touch

We can all find physical contact potentially difficult, and we each have different boundaries of personal space, which may depend on our background, personality and cultural or ethnic norms. Sympathetic attention, humour, encouragement and appropriate physical contact are needed by children, young people and adults who may be vulnerable as part of their expression and understanding of human relationships. Because child and adult protection issues have become highly emotive, this has led to some people avoiding all occasions of touching children and adults who may be vulnerable. The following points regarding touch are offered as suggestions to follow:

- Be sensitive and sympathetic to the needs and wishes of the individual, and try to respond in a way which is neither patronising nor rejecting
- Keep everything public. A hug in the context of a group is very different from a hug behind closed doors
- Touch should be related to the child's or adult's needs, not the leader's or carer's
- Touch should be age appropriate and generally initiated by the child or adult
- Avoid all physical activity that is, or may be thought to be, sexually stimulating to the child or the adult
- Children and adults have the right to decide how much physical contact they have with others, except in exceptional circumstances where they may need medical attention.

Restraint

Restraint is where a child or adult is being held, moved or prevented from moving, against their will, because not to do so would result in injury to themselves or others, or would cause significant damage to property. You are advised to seek training, from your local police or local authority, for leaders in appropriate restraint techniques and how to diffuse volatile situations.

- Restraint must always be used as a last resort, when all other methods of controlling a situation have been tried and failed
- Restraint should never be used as a punishment or to bring about compliance (except where there is a risk of injury)
- In all cases where restraint is employed, the incident and subsequent actions should be documented and reported, and this should include written and signed accounts of all those involved, including where possible the child, young person or adult. The parents or carers should be informed the same day.

Children or adults in distress

There will be occasions when a distressed child or adult needs comfort and reassurance, and this may involve physical contact. Young children, in particular, may need immediate physical comfort, for instance after a fall, or separation from parent. Leaders should use their judgement to comfort or reassure a child in an age-appropriate way whilst maintaining clear boundaries.

Intimate and personal care

It may sometimes be necessary for leaders to do things of a personal nature for children or adults, particularly if they are very young or are disabled. These tasks should only be carried out with the full understanding and consent of the parents or carers, and every effort should be made to ensure that the child or adult who may be vulnerable also understands and gives informed consent, taking account of their disability or impairment. Adults should avoid any physical contact when children or adults who may be vulnerable are in a state of undress, avoid any visually intrusive behaviour, and where there are changing rooms, and announce their intention of entering. Generally, leaders should not change in the same place as children, shower or bathe with children, or assist with any personal care task which the child or adult who may be vulnerable can undertake by themselves.

Relationships of trust

Genuine relationships may occur between adults, one of whom is in a caring role with another who is more vulnerable. No intimate relationship should begin while the member of staff or voluntary worker is in a position of trust over them. The power and influence that a person in a position of trust has over someone attending a group or activity or in a counselling situation cannot be underestimated; such an abuse of trust with a person under 18 years may be a criminal offence (Sexual Offences (Amendment) Act 2000).

“The inequality at the heart of a relationship of trust should be ended before any sexual relationship begins.” Caring for Young People and the Vulnerable Guidance for preventing abuse of trust (Home Office 1999)

Some specific do's and don'ts for paid staff and volunteers

Do	Don't
Wherever possible work with or within sight of another adult	Inflict physical punishment of any kind,
For activities such as bell-ringing, which require specific physical contact, make sure the person and their parents/carer are aware	Engage in rough physical games including horse-play, or in sexually provocative games
Only use restraint to prevent a child or adult from harming him/herself or others, or doing significant damage to property	Make sexually suggestive comments about or to a child or adult, even in fun
Administer first aid with others around	Allow children or adults to use inappropriate language unchallenged
If young children need comforting, ensure they are responded to warmly but with other adults	Let complaints or allegations made by a child or adult be ignored or go unrecorded
When taking young children or adults to the toilet, make sure another adult is informed or organise a toilet break for the whole group	Do things of a personal nature for children or adults that they can do for themselves