

Physical contact

There are occasions when it is entirely appropriate and proper for leaders to have physical contact with cadets, however, it is crucial that they only do so in ways appropriate to their professional role and in relation to the cadet's individual needs and any agreed care plan.

Not all children feel comfortable about certain types of physical contact; this should be recognised and, wherever possible, leaders should seek the cadet's permission before initiating contact and be sensitive to any signs that they may be uncomfortable or embarrassed. For example, when demonstrating the recovery position, it would be necessary to touch the young person. However by talking through your actions, 'I am going to place the knee in a bent position and use my hand on the knee as a lever to roll the casualty over' you are also explaining what you are doing, what the young person should expect and why you are doing it.

Leaders should acknowledge that some cadets are more comfortable with touch than others and/or may be more comfortable with touch from some leaders than others. Leaders should listen, observe and take note of the cadet's reaction or feelings and, so far as is possible, use a level of contact and/or form of communication which is acceptable to the cadet.

It is not possible to be specific about the appropriateness of each physical contact, since an action that is appropriate with one cadet, in one set of circumstances, may be inappropriate in another, or with a different cadet.

Any physical contact should be in response to the cadet's needs at the time, of limited duration and appropriate to their age, stage of development, gender, ethnicity and background. Leaders should therefore, use their professional judgement at all times.

Physical contact should never be secretive, or for the gratification of the leader, or represent a misuse of authority. If a leader believes that an action by them or a colleague could be misinterpreted, or if an action is observed which is possibly abusive, the incident and circumstances should be immediately reported to the named person responsible for safe-guarding and recorded. Alternatively advice can be sought from the National VPC Safeguarding Manager vpc.safeguarding@vpc.police.uk. Where appropriate, the named person should consult with the Local Authority Designated Officer (the LADO).

Extra caution may be required where it is known that a child has suffered previous abuse or neglect. Leaders need to be aware that the cadet may associate physical contact with such experiences. They also should recognise that these cadets may seek out inappropriate physical contact. In such circumstances leaders should deter the cadet sensitively and help them to understand the importance of personal boundaries.

A general culture of 'safe touch' should be adopted, where appropriate, to the individual requirements of each cadet. Cadets' with special educational needs or disabilities may require more physical contact to assist their everyday learning.

The arrangements should be understood and agreed by all concerned, justified in terms of the cadet's needs, consistently applied and open to scrutiny.

Other activities that require physical contact

In certain areas, such as outdoor activities, leaders may need to initiate some physical contact with cadets, for example, to demonstrate technique in the use of a piece of equipment, adjust posture, or support a cadet so they can perform an activity safely or prevent injury e.g. putting on a harness, assisting with drill.

Physical contact should take place only when it is necessary in relation to a particular activity. It should take place in a safe and open environment i.e. one easily observed by others and last for the minimum time necessary. The extent of the contact should be made clear and undertaken with the permission of the cadet.

Contact should be relevant to their age / understanding and leaders should remain sensitive to any discomfort expressed verbally or non-verbally by the cadet. Guidance and protocols around safe and appropriate physical contact may be provided, for example, by sports governing bodies and should be understood and applied consistently. Any incidents of physical contact that cause concern or fall outside of these protocols and guidance should be reported to the named person and parent/carer.

It is good practice that all parties clearly understand at the outset, what physical contact is necessary and appropriate in undertaking specific activities. Keeping parents/carers and cadets informed of the extent and nature of any physical contact may also prevent allegations of misconduct or abuse arising.

For details on physical contact when it is in relation to poor behaviour and required as a restraint perhaps please see our guidance on [managing behaviour and physical restraint](#)