



OOSH Development Factsheet

Appropriate Physical Contact In OOSH

There will be times when appropriate physical contact with children is necessary at your OOSH Centre, however, it is important to remember that there can be issues surrounding physical contact with children that can be controversial so it is important that all physical contact occurs within guidelines to reduce the risk of inappropriate touching and to ensure that Educators are not placed in situations where they can be accused of abuse.

Physical contact is *appropriate* if Educators:

Non –intrusive touch such as shaking hands or a pat on the back or upper arm is given when congratulating a child. Positive reinforcement with encouraging words should accompany this.	Non-intrusive physical contact is given to comfort a child who is distressed, such as a hand on the upper arm or upper back.
Are required to give practical assistance if children are hurt or need help	Need to assist a child with a disability with toileting and personal care needs. (An individual plan needs to be discussed with the parents and documented)
Need to administer first aid	Need to assist or encourage children

Physical Contact is *inappropriate* if:

Children are distressed or embarrassed by physical contact	It includes touching the groin, genital area, buttocks, breasts or any part of the body that may cause distress or embarrassment.
Children's trust is destroyed	It occurs in a private area of the Centre

Educators need to be aware of the following good practice with school age children:

- Ask the child's permission to touch (remember that a very distressed younger child may not be able to convey this.)
- Avoid being in a one –to-one situation where possible with a child
- Never assume that physical contact is acceptable to a child.
- Respect the signs that the child is uncomfortable with touch.
- Use verbal directions rather than touch. (Ask a child to move to a certain area rather than physically direct the child to that area.)
- Use the above approach with activities such as dance, sport, music or drama
- Educators may need to discourage younger children from inappropriate expectations of hugs or cuddles. Do this sensitively and encourage the child to sit beside you rather than on your knee and a side hug is much more acceptable.
- Some cultures and religions disapprove of physical contact between adults and children, especially if the Educator is a male and the child is female.
- Make sure the physical contact is appropriate to the activity.
- Children must not be left in a distressed state for long periods. Parents need to be contacted.

USE OF PHYSICAL CONTACT FOR THE PURPOSES OF HEALTH AND SAFETY AT THE CENTRE

Educators may make legitimate use of physical restraint if all non- physical interventions have been used unsuccessfully and only as a last resort in the following situations where:

- A child or adult's safety is threatened
- A child is attacking another child or adult
- A child is posing an immediate danger to themselves or others
- Educators duty of care to protect children from risks of injury

Educators need to keep talking to the child throughout the incident. If it is necessary to ever physically restrain a child for safety reasons, grip clothing rather than the body wherever possible.

Document the incident as soon as possible and contact the parents immediately.

EDUCATORS ARE NOT TO USE PHYSICAL RESTRAINT UNLESS A CHILD'S SAFETY IS THREATENED IN RESPONSE TO:

- Property destruction
- Disruption to the Centre
- Verbal threats or abuse
- Leaving the Centre
- Refusal to follow instructions

MANAGEMENT OF UNACCEPTABLE BEHAVIOUR OF CHILDREN

Non-physical intervention is the recognised means of managing the behaviour of children. If there is a problem with behaviour, non-physical interventions include:

- Directing other children to move away from the situation
- Talking one on one to the child concerned
- Directing the child to a safe place away from other children
- Use of verbal directions is always preferred to physical contact
- It is not appropriate to make physical contact with a child to ensure they comply with directions (e.g.: pushing, grabbing, pulling, blocking and poking).

CULTURAL PROTOCOLS AND APPROPRIATE PHYSICAL CONTACT

Different cultures have different beliefs and protocols regarding relationships and body language. Educators should be familiar with the values of the cultural groups enrolled at their Centre. It is important to be aware of indigenous cultural contexts within their area.

Educators need to be aware of:

- Culturally specific expectations so that children are not embarrassed or offended
- Some children from other cultures may have backgrounds of severe trauma
- When administering first aid or giving support to injured or distressed children, keep the cultural implications of physical contact in mind.
- For example it is more usual for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children to touch an adult to communicate a need rather than verbally what they need.
- Some cultures including Aboriginal and Polynesian children prefer not to make direct eye contact.

APPROPRIATE PHYSICAL CONTACT WITH CHILDREN WITH ADDITIONAL NEEDS OR DISABILITIES

Children with diagnosed conditions may engage in a much wider range of physical behaviours towards Educators and children as a result of their condition. Educators may need to engage in more physical contact as a means to their duty of care.

Educators may need to:

- Be more thoughtful about their physical contact with children with additional needs and disabilities
- Be aware that these children have an increased reliance on Educators to keep them safe.
- Involve specialised staff to set up education plans to provide strategies to support the child and minimise the need for physical contact.
- Children with Asperger's like to have the facts. Compile a list of do's and don'ts in relation to appropriate touching. (E.G. I should not touch a person's face, hair, or body without permission and I should stand an arm's space away from another person as people need their own space).

OFFICE OF THE NSW OMBUDSMAN

<https://www.ombo.nsw.gov.au>

Take a look at the Ombudsman's website as they have useful checklists regarding your child protection policies.

SOME EXAMPLES OF CONDUCT THAT WOULD NOT CONSTITUTE REPORTABLE CONDUCT INCLUDE:

- Touching a child to attract their attention
- Guide them or comfort them
- An Educator raising their voice to attract attention or restore order at the Centre
- Conduct that is established to be accidental

MANAGEMENT COMMITTEE RESPONSIBILITY FOR APPROPRIATE PHYSICAL CONTACT

OOSH Centres are responsible for providing a safe environment for children. In order to do this, your Centre needs to have well publicised guidelines outlining expected standards of Conduct of Educators particularly in relation to physical contact with children.

Your Centre should have an "Educator Code of Conduct". This code of conduct (behaviour) is a guide of do's and don'ts so educators, volunteers and students work appropriately with children at your Centre. It sets the rules for Educators to provide Child-Safe Child-friendly environments. (See Network Template coming soon)

APPROPRIATE PHYSICAL CONTACT IN OOSH REMINDERS:

- **When children want comfort, make sure it is given in a public area and within the above guidelines**
- **Signs of children who do not like physical contact such as stiffening, pulling away or walking away should be respected.**
- **Children must not be left in states of prolonged distress – parents to be contacted immediately.**
- **For school age children, the amount of physical contact that is considered appropriate is reduced. Appropriate touching should only be given when the child is injured, upset, for health and safety issues or to demonstrate a skill if essential.**
- **All physical contact should be in clear view of another Educator where possible or tell another Educator.**

USEFUL WEBSITES:

- Department of Education and Development South Australia <http://www.decd.sa.gov.au/>
- Office of the NSW Ombudsman <https://www.ombo.nsw.gov.au>
- Secretariat of National Aboriginal and Islander Child Care (SNAICC) <http://www.healthinfonet.ecu.edu.au/>
- Play by the Rules - <http://www.playbytherules.net.au/>



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