

GUIDANCE ON PHYSICAL CONTACT & FIRST AID

Poolside Vs in the water

The recommended coaching/teaching position for groups comprising more than two participants is from the side of the pool as this provides the best position to oversee the whole group in terms of safety and to provide appropriate feedback on the performance of each person in the group. This does not preclude a coach/teacher being in the water to assist participants either on a 1:1 or 1:2 basis or as an assistant to the coach/teacher. In fact, for groups of more than two participants a fully qualified coach/teacher on the poolside supported by an assistant in the water may be ideal.

In some circumstances, the coach/teacher will have assessed the risk and may feel it is more appropriate to coach from within the water. This practice should only be considered after carrying out a risk assessment considering all the potential factors:

- pool depth
- age
- size and ability of participants
- The use of floatation aids.

At all times the coach/teacher must be able to clearly see all participants and be close enough to provide physical support should this be required. In this way, it may be practical to supervise between two to six participants depending on the previously mentioned safety factors, ratios greater than this should not be considered unless additional helpers are available in the water. If the qualified coach/teacher is delivering in the water an additional observer should be on the poolside to enhance the coaches/teacher's span of supervision that delivering in the water inevitably diminishes.

There may be a greater need to deliver in the water with younger participants under five years of age. Children of that age range may find it difficult to function in larger groups where the swimming coach/teacher gives instructions from the poolside also the coaching/teaching of special needs and less able participants from in the water is common practice.

One of the benefits of coaching/teaching in the water with younger groups is the reassurance this provides to young nervous children. Another benefit is that it allows the swimming coach/teacher to provide physical support to the beginner and physically correct movements for the stroke being taught.

In the first instance, coaching techniques are best delivered by demonstration (by either the coach, a participant or video, which can display the technique being taught). If coaching in the water with physical contact as part of the session the following is recommended:

- Ensure that the child and their parent/carer gives permission for the coach/teacher to handle the children for the purposes of supporting them in the water or manipulating limbs to convey correct stroke techniques
- The swimming coach/teacher should always wear a distinctive top so that they are easily identified in the water
- Ensure that any handling of participants is done within clear sight of parents and others in spectator areas
- Always clearly explain with a description to the participant that you are now going to hold them and why, this should be accompanied by checking if the child is comfortable
- Manual support should be provided openly and must always be proportionate to the circumstances
- Never support pupils in such a way that hands cannot be seen by the spectators (i.e. beneath the water).
- Never support a participant by handling their torso
- Only support participants by holding their hands, head or feet
- It is not the role of staff, coaches/teachers and volunteers to act as carers, if it is necessary to help a child with personal tasks e.g. toileting or changing, then the child's parents or designated carer must stay for the duration of the session.
- Do not take on the responsibility for tasks for which you are not appropriately trained e.g. manual assistance for a child with a physical disability

Physical contact between coaches and athletes in other contexts

There are a range of situations where coaches may come into physical contact with their participants e.g. a child who is upset reaching out for comfort, congratulating an athlete who has done well etc.

The general guidance to follow is:

- All forms of physical contact should respect and be sensitive to the needs and wishes of the child
- Should take place in a culture of dignity and respect
- Children should be encouraged to express their views on physical contact
- Coaches should not initiate unnecessary physical contact with their participants
- Physical contact should be in a reasonable, appropriate manner in an open environment
- Be mindful that to comfort a young person who is upset, it is not always necessary or appropriate to place an arm around them. Sitting down and listening to them, and maybe holding their hand, can show concern for their situation
- Sometimes children will initiate a hug or other forms of excited/happy contact with coaches and other adults, this is a normal form of human expression. It is important that adults respond to this in an appropriate manner, where they engage with the child in a positive way while not prolonging the contact or imitating it. Respond and then re-direct them into a more suitable coach/athlete form of positive expression such as a high 5 or dropping to one knee to speak to them at eye level.

First Aid & the treatment of injuries

All staff/volunteers must ensure:

- Where practicable all parents of children under 18 have provided relevant permission and information before their child participates
- There is an accessible and well-resourced first aid kit at the venue
- They are aware of any pre-existing medical conditions, medicines being taken by participants or existing injuries and treatment required
- Only those with a current, recognised first aid qualification treat injuries. In more serious cases assistance should be obtained from a medically qualified professional as soon as possible
- An Accident Report Form is completed and sent to Scottish Swimming if a child sustains a significant injury along with the details of any treatment given. Common sense should be applied when determining which injuries are significant
- A child's parents are informed of any injury and action taken as soon as possible
- The circumstances in which any accidents occur are reviewed to avoid future repetitions