Triathlon Ireland Physical Contact Policy

The purpose of this document is to ensure best safeguarding practice and procedures exist to protect vulnerable members as well as facilitate and enhance the operations of Triathlon Ireland (hereafter referred to as TI) and its clubs. The procedures following are produced to ensure all TI staff, relevant volunteers and stakeholders have a clear understanding of the policy and how it applies to their role. This document will be reviewed on a regular basis.
These procedures were submitted and approved by the TI Board. All previous procedures are superseded by this version with effect from *October 2026.*

Any issues arising from the transition between previous procedures and these shall be determined by the CEO, in consultation, where such issues are material, with the President.
This document may be amended from time to time by the Safeguarding Committee. The definitive text of this document in force is the version contained on the TI internal server under *Safeguarding Policies*. Any printed text or electronic copy held elsewhere is only a snapshot of the text at the time it is printed, copied or downloaded.

Appropriate Physical Contact

Triathlon Ireland supports the policy of appropriate physical contact which is in response to the needs of a child and not the adult, taking into account the child's age and stage of development. This means adults should not do what a child can do for themselves. Contact should be in an open environment and with the permission of the young person. Adults involved with children and young people in Triathlon should avoid unnecessary physical contact and never engage in inappropriate touching. Misleading or inaccurate information relating to physical contact can undermine the confidence of adults working with children and young people. This can also have serious safety implications for children.
For leaders, coaches, volunteers or any adults and children to feel comfortable the following should be followed:

Appropriate contact is when:

The aim is to teach or develop a skill or technique that the child cannot accomplish without help; the nature and the reason for the physical contact must be explained by the adult to the child and must be within the scope of the qualification of the adult.

It is required by the nature of the activity – Some triathlon skills coaching involves physical contact, from time to time; activities which require physical contact should be identified prior to training sessions and club activities. An example might be if a child is performing a balance drill for the first time on a bike.

An injury requires treatment – the child should be informed about what is happening and encouraged to hold dressings etc., however for emergency first aid treatment this may not be possible.

An accident can be prevented from occurring – this will be in reaction to an emergency situation.

Good Principles to follow:

- All children must be treated with dignity and respect with any level of physical contact required. A young person's permission should be requested where any physical contact is required, the adult and child involved will feel more comfortable.
- Leaders should convey approval with verbal encouragement and praise, rather than the use of repetitive physical contact.
- Any contact should be in an open environment not taking place in secret or out of sight of others.
- Contact should not involve touching genital areas, buttocks, breasts or any other part of the body that might cause a child distress or embarrassment.
- Well intentioned gestures such as putting a hand on the shoulder or arm, can, if repeated regularly, lead to the possibility of questions being raised by observers.
- Adults in positions of responsibility should not make gratuitous or unnecessary physical contact with children and young people.
- Children should be encouraged to voice any concern if they feel uncomfortable or threatened. Children should know how and who to voice any concerns to – through their parents or the Club Child Protection Officer, another coach/leader or a trusted adult.
- Any form of physical contact as a punishment or as a response to misbehaviour is unlawful. Only necessary and appropriate physical intervention may be used to prevent a child or young person from harming themselves, others or damaging property. Misbehaviour may need to be dealt with under breaches of the code of conduct through the complaints and disciplinary procedures.
- Resistance from a child should be respected
- Clubs should provide guidelines about any physical contact which may occur during a session, the reason and the nature of the physical contact as part of their induction.

Managing the Young Person's Emotions

A child in distress may require comfort and reassurance in a manner that would normally be provided by a parent or guardian. A young person may also react to victory or success with an expression of affection to an adult, a hug for example. Adults must ensure that their reaction to the child in distress or because of a success does not become unnecessary and unjustified physical contact, particularly with the same young person over a period of time. Contact that an adult may feel is appropriate may be unwanted or uncomfortable to a young person. Again any contact in this context should be in response to the needs of the child and not the needs of the adult and in an open environment.

Parents/Guardians

Ensure the parents are aware of the need for physical contact from time to time and they are comfortable with what is required, for example the club/coach should inform parents and juniors at the start of the session that there maybe some physical contact during the session by the coach as they are developing a new skill to make sure everyone is comfortable with the nature of the contact.

Medical and Sports Science Practitioners

There may be some roles within sport or physical activities where physical contact is a requirement of the role, particularly sports science or medicine. These tasks should only be undertaken by properly trained or qualified practitioners. This guidance does not seek to replace the specific guidance and codes of practice developed for those professionals and reference should be made to the appropriate body for that discipline.

Children with who need specific assistance due to disability or Injury

What about children who need specific assistance due to disability or injury? In the case of a young person with a disability specific support or assistance may be required. The following guidelines should be followed:

- Efforts should be made to receive as much information as possible on the child to ensure safe inclusion of him/her. There should be clear agreements on what is required.
- Parents/carers or their delegated care providers should be asked to undertake all intimate or personal care tasks for their child. This is not an appropriate role for coaches and others involved in leading activities.
- When children with disabilities are lifted or manually supported, they should be treated with dignity and respect.
- Relevant health and safety guidelines must be followed to ensure the safety of the child and those assisting.
- It is recommended that those assisting receive appropriate training in order to minimise the risk of injury both to themselves and the child.

Direct contact in coaching

Some sports or physical activities are more likely to require coaches or teachers to come into physical contact with children and young people from time to time in the course of their duties. In Triathlon this could arise where a child is unstable on a bike during a skills session or needs assistance taking on or off their wetsuit.

Adults should be aware of the limits within which such contact should properly take place, and of the possibility of such contact being misinterpreted. This guidance should be followed by those coaching these sports. Even in sports where there is a need to support physically or touch a child, over–handling should be avoided

Some Examples of appropriate physical contact within a coaching environment.

It should be noted that children learn in a variety of different ways and sometimes after instruction and demonstration it may be necessary to physically move the child in the correct movement pattern. As long as this is done in accordance with this policy and is not deemed inappropriate in the context of the session this may be done. Below are three examples of where this might be necessary. The child should always be asked in advance.

Running
For example, if a child is performing a running drill and is unsure of the correct movement after being shown and instructed the coach could for example put the child's arm or leg at the correct angle for the drill. This might be a high knees drill for example.

Swimming
For example when performing a bilateral breathing drill for the first time. If a child is repeatedly performing a movement incorrectly or in a way that may cause injury it would be appropriate for the coach to use physical contact to a certain degree. If a child has been instructed and shown/demonstrated but still is unsure the coach could position the child's arms and head (on land) to give them an idea of the movement pattern.

Cycling
For example when a child is learning a new balance technique such as linking arms/shoulders with a partner. The coach may have to demonstrate this new skill by placing two riders into the correct position as this drill can be difficult to describe. This would involve the coach positioning the arms of two children to demonstrate the safe way of doing the drill to the rest of the group. Alternatively the coach could demonstrate with another coach.

Resources: Sport Ireland Guidance for Children and Young People in Sport.