



APPROPRIATE PHYSICAL CONTACT WITH ATHLETES IN GYMNASTICS

Physical contact with children is a necessary and important component of working with and caring for children. However it is important that the contact is appropriate. As a standard of measure, physical contact should be directly related to the individual's job description. Spotting, supporting, and shaping the gymnast is an essential part of coaching gymnastics in that it helps the gymnast to understand shapes, movement patterns, and complex skills, but also reduces the risk of injury due to a fall or error in performance. It is the position of Gymnastics Canada that such physical contact that is reasonably intended to coach, teach, or demonstrate a skill to an athlete, as well as safety actions such as spotting or catching an athlete, are acceptable and appropriate forms of touch in the sport of gymnastics. The following are guidelines for spotting and appropriate boundaries:

Spotting Guidelines:

- The ideal hand placement for spotting athletes is on the side of their hips and trunk.
- Avoid physical contact of sensitive areas of the body, i.e. genital areas, buttocks, or breasts.
- If accidental, unintended touch occurs as a result of error in the performance of the athlete or the coach's spotting, apologize immediately. If this occurs more than 2 times, STOP and take stock of the problem. Ask yourself what changes you can make to ensure that accidental, unintended touch is less likely to happen. It is good practice to report the unintended contact to the athlete's parent.
- Do not slap body parts, pull hair, squeeze tightly, or push down aggressively on athletes.
- Avoid placing yourself in awkward or compromising spotting positions (any position that may be thought of as unnecessary positioning by a reasonable observer).
- Wear light footwear and minimal jewellery.
- Long hair should be tied back.
- Keep both your hands free.

NOTE:

In most cases, **spotting for guidance** should be used only when needed to orientate or position the gymnast so they can replicate movements.

Likewise, **spotting for safety** should be used only when needed, with the goal of designing and using safe progressions as often as you can.

Assisted stretching

- At all times, assistance to an athlete in stretching must exclude inappropriate positioning with the athlete. Avoid standing or kneeling between an athletes legs. Do not lie on an athlete.
- Excessive force must not be used to assist stretching.
- When possible use partner exercises between gymnasts.
- Always provide explanations to parents regarding assisted stretching.