

GUIDANCE NOTE

SAFE TOUCH

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1. PURPOSE OF DOCUMENT

The purpose of this document is to ensure that all physical contact in fencing is appropriate, safe, and necessary, protecting fencers from harm while supporting effective coaching and performance. It applies to coaches, volunteers, medical staff, officials and referees, as well as fencers and parents involved in the sport. This creates the framework for the concept of Safe Touch. Safe Touch is designed to protect everyone in the sport of fencing.

2. INTRODUCTION

Fencing is a physical activity and, as such, physical contact with participants, including children and adults at risk, is inevitable. It is neither possible nor appropriate to simply say, "Do not touch." It is, however, important to recognise that Safe Touch should only take place where it is:

- Appropriate – relevant to the fencing or coaching activity
- Necessary – required for safety, improvement of technique or performance, or medical care
- Consensual – the athlete understands and agrees, where possible
- Respectful – maintains personal dignity and boundaries
- Open and observable – never secretive

It is also important to recognise that some people do not like to be touched, and that there may be cultural sensitivity around touch.

3. ACCEPTABLE PHYSICAL CONTACT

Below are listed some examples of what could constitute acceptable physical contact.

Coaching and Skill Development	• Demonstrating technique (e.g. guiding arm position) • Correcting posture or movement where verbal instruction is insufficient or has failed to be effective
Safety	• Preventing injury during training or in activities • Preventing a person from encroaching on a piste while fencing is in progress • Supporting an individual who has fallen or lost balance
First Aid and Medical Care NB This should be guided by an individual's qualification or training	• Treating injuries • Assisting with recovery when necessary
Celebration or Encouragement	• Handshakes • High-fives • Brief congratulatory gestures

4. UNACCEPTABLE PHYSICAL CONTACT

The following are not acceptable:

- Touching private areas (unless medically necessary)
- Touch that is or could be construed as sexual, aggressive, or intimidating
- Contact carried out in secret or away from others
- Unnecessary prolonged contact
- Physical contact used as punishment or discipline

5. GUIDELINES FOR SAFE TOUCH

All coaches, staff, and volunteers must keep a safe and appropriate distance from participants, remembering that different people have different tolerances around personal space. People should not engage in any inappropriate physical contact.

It is helpful to explain at the appropriate times or in documentation the principles relating to Safe Touch and to agree with any group on the parameters. This could include encouraging the group to say what they think is acceptable and relaying the club or organisation's approach to safe touch. This can include the principles that everyone should:

- Explain any physical contact before it occurs except in emergencies

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- Where touch has been required for safety or emergency situations, an explanation should be given immediately after the event as to why the touch was necessary and to check that the person being touch is OK
- Seek permission where appropriate
- Use verbal instruction and demonstration first whenever possible
- Ensure contact is brief and purposeful
- Touch is appropriate; firm, necessary, direct, precise, functional.
- Check learning has occurred.
- Avoid situations where they are alone with an athlete
- Be aware of age, cultural, and personal boundaries

It is really important to remember that

- Everyone has the right to feel safe and respected all of the time
- Feeling safe and being safe are two different things
- No one should be scared into feeling safe
- A person has the right to say no to physical contact
- Ask questions about coaching methods
- Report any uncomfortable or inappropriate behaviour

Always demonstrate respect towards fellow coaches, staff, participants, and anyone else in the fencing environment.

6. REPORTING CONCERNS

If any of the following incidents should occur, you must report them immediately to the Club Welfare Officer and make a written record of the event as soon as possible while it is still fresh in your mind. Where appropriate parents/carers should also be informed of the incident.

- If you accidentally hurt a person
- If a person seems distressed in any manner
- If a person appears to be sexually aroused by your actions
- If a person misunderstands or misinterprets something you have done

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