

MLA/NSPCC Principles in relation to physical contact with children

Museums, libraries and archive organisations provide a wide range of activities and services to children. Most of this activity does not require any physical contact to take place. There could, however, be occasions or specific activities that do involve some contact.

The MLA Safeguarding Guidance indicates that the issue of physical contact could be placed within the code of conduct when considering your policies. It talks about 'avoiding physical contact except in emergencies'; it does not say contact should never occur. The following information provides some broad principles for organisations to consider. This is not an exhaustive list and will not necessarily be relevant to all organisations, but it provides a basis to work from.

- Treat all children with dignity and respect and never touch a child in a way that would be considered indecent.
- Any physical contact that occurs with a child should be in response to their needs at the time, of limited duration and appropriate to their age, stage of development, gender, ethnicity and ability.
- Physical contact should normally take place in a safe and open environment, ie one easily observed by others, and should never be secretive, or for the gratification of the adult, or represent a misuse of authority.
- Always explain to a child the reason why contact is necessary and what form it will take.
- Always encourage children, where possible, to undertake self-care tasks independently.
- There may be occasions where a distressed young person needs comfort and reassurance, which may include physical comforting such as any caring parent would give. Physical contact may also be required to prevent an accident or injury. Making physical contact to mark a success, however, would be wholly inappropriate. Adults should use their discretion in such cases to ensure that what is normal and natural does not become unnecessary and unjustified contact, particularly with the same child over a period of time.
- Always be prepared to report and explain actions and accept that all physical contact should be open to scrutiny.
- Ensure you know who to speak to if you have a concern about any inappropriate physical contact with a child. Additional information on this subject is included within the 'Guidance for Safe Working Practices for Adults Working with Children and Young People' document which can be accessed at:
<http://webarchive.nationalarchives.gov.uk/20100202100434/dcsf.gov.uk/everychildmatters/resources-and-practice/ig00311/>

A personal code of conduct

- Respect all individuals, irrespective of age, developmental stage, ability, sex, sexual orientation, or ethnicity.
- Place the safety and well-being of children first; before any personal or organisational goals and before any loyalty to friends.
- Form only appropriate relationships with children, based on trust and respect.
- Be aware of the relative powerlessness of children, and especially disabled children, in relation to adults.
- Be committed to actively preventing the exploitation and abuse of children.
- Be aware of your organisation's child protection policy, and your responsibilities within it.

From the NSPCC Educare Programme