

Physical Contact in Dance Policy

Author/ Checked :	CFL /JM/LB
Date	May 2024
Approved by	BP
Issue Date	09/05/2024
Next Review Date	May 2026

1. Introduction

Teaching dance is a physical activity and appropriate physical contact between participants/company members and practitioners in class is essential to training. Practitioners can make physical contact with a participant to illustrate a concept or to adjust a participant's alignment (often this is especially relevant with the younger participants who have less ballet experience). Correcting posture often requires adjusting the rib-cage and the buttock area simultaneously and it is sometimes necessary to touch the inner thigh. In classes, practitioners may sometimes need to demonstrate with participants in ways that involve supporting and lifting. In choreographic teaching, practitioners demonstrate positions and movements to the participants by moving parts of the participants' bodies and by moving participants in relation to each other and this often involves a considerable amount of physical contact.

Physical contact is also an essential component of the appropriate provision of costuming/fitting, First Aid or Sports / Physiotherapy, for the means of assessment or treatment of injuries or illness. Where physical contact is necessary, the practitioner should be able to explain the reason.

2. Purpose

National Youth Ballet understands that such physical contact is a potentially complex area, and also fully recognises its responsibilities for safeguarding participants and practitioners and for protecting their welfare. The purpose of this policy is to set out expectations and principles regarding appropriate physical contact in dance.

3. Terminology

"Participant(s)" - used to denote all participants in NYB activity including children and vulnerable adults.

"Practitioners" - used to denote anyone employed by NYB in an artistic capacity

4. Physical Contact

The following principles and procedures are in place to fulfill National Youth Ballet's obligations:

- i. **Consent** - All practitioners will treat any physical contact with due sensitivity and care, and with due regard for the wishes of the participant. All practitioners will seek consent before correcting a participant physically. If consent is withheld the practitioner will respect the participant's wishes.
- ii. For the avoidance of doubt, it is always important to ask for consent before engaging in physical contact. For example; "Is it ok for me to correct you?" or "Can I help adjust your posture?" and never to approach a young person from behind. A young person may not want to be touched for all sorts of reasons, all of which are valid and should be respected. Requesting consent gives them the option to say 'no' to unwanted physical contact.
- iii. When physical contact may be made, it is also important to be clear about where you will be touching them. For example: 'Is it ok if I put my hand on your hips to adjust your pelvis?' In this way the practitioner is as clear as possible about what will happen and why.
- iv. Contact by the practitioner is made with particular awareness of the needs of each individual participant, to assist the participant in correcting placement.

- v. It may occasionally be necessary, in the instance of a safety emergency, to catch a participant if they are falling or at risk of injury. In this instance it is not practicable to seek consent.
- vi. Contact will not involve force or the use of any instrument.
- vii. Practitioners may need to facilitate contact between two participants, modeling good consent practice eg “Would it work for you if Dancer x places their hand on your thigh to guide you?”
- viii. Practitioners will be mindful of location and avoid situations where they are isolated with a participant; all classes should be held in studios and dance areas with windows and/or an open door.
- ix. Physical contact by NYB’s Sports Therapist / Physiotherapist will only be made if parental consent is given. NYB will contact the parent / carer for permission to practise, outlining findings and treatment plan and then request consent for treatment by email. NYB’s Sports Therapist / Physiotherapist will always administer treatment in the presence of a chaperone.
- x. As practitioners, adults and leaders in the rehearsal studio you have the ability and responsibility to create a safe space to allow young people to voice their concerns. Participants should be encouraged to discuss any worries with the Safeguarding and Support Team Manager or any member of the pastoral staff or an independent listener.
- xi. Both participants and practitioners should report any concerns to the Creative / Artistic Director, or the designated Safeguarding Lead.

5. Empowering Children and Adults at Risk

As influential adults and educators we are keenly aware of our duty of care to participants. We will therefore proactively seek out opportunities to:

- a. Encourage participants to exercise agency over their bodies
- b. Encourage participants to clearly articulate their boundaries
- c. Create an environment in which participants feel comfortable to deny instructions and requests that make them uncomfortable
- d. Hold a check-in procedure at the start of each session to inform participants about the content of the session and where touch / partnering will be encountered. Dancers will be given time to discuss this with their partners before the activity takes place and will be reminded of the need to seek consent.
- e. Hold a check-out session at the end of each day, facilitated by the lead practitioner, which will allow participants to discuss the events of the day before leaving the studio.

6. Adults Partnering with Children and Adults at Risk

Occasionally adults may partner with children or vulnerable adults. This carries with it an extra duty of care. There is a significant power imbalance in this relationship, making the young person particularly vulnerable. Young people may be inclined to dismiss their physical needs to create a good impression with a view to securing future roles and/ or impressing their adult dance partner. They may also be more sensitive to verbal feedback.

In order to mitigate any risks and ensure that the needs of the young person are met, in addition to the measures outlined in section 3, the following additional steps will be taken:

- a. a third party will be designated to be present in rehearsals as a chaperone / advocate;
- b. an initial meeting will take place between all parties, led by the advocate / chaperone to clearly set out expectations for the project and the inclusive and safe culture of the rehearsal studio. If the young person is under 14 their parent/carer must also attend. This is optional for over 14s;
- c. during rehearsals rest breaks will be enforced at scheduled and clearly communicated intervals to ensure that the young person is not dismissing their physical needs to meet the requirements of the adult partner / protect their reputation;
- d. a regular system of check-ins will be instigated between the young person and the chaperone / advocate (at least daily during active rehearsals) in which mental and physical health concerns can be discussed and actionable accommodations and changes can be implemented.

7. Partnering with People with Additional Sensory Needs

For some participants with additional sensory needs, physical touch is unwelcome. This may be consistent or may be intermittent, requiring the practitioner to check-in regularly with the participant. In circumstances where physical touch is unwanted, to ensure best practice, it is helpful to understand what form of touch is acceptable before running a session. NYB participants are asked to complete a registration form which asks about neurodivergence and any additional needs. This allows NYB practitioners to have a better understanding of how to support individual participants throughout their time with us. Registration forms are made available to session leaders for planning purposes.

Individuals with complex needs may also have an access rider for use whilst participating in NYB activity and follow up conversations may be scheduled to better understand specific needs.

In general it is helpful to consider how to make participants as comfortable as possible in order that they can fully participate in each session. This may include the use of a prop such as a scarf for indirect touch, or focussing on rhythm and beats to drive movement.

It is important, as with any teaching, that consent is sought, and that the person leading the session checks in regularly with participants, and is aware of anyone in distress.

Further resources on planning sessions can be found in [this article from Sense in conjunction with Studio Wayne Macgregor](#).

8. Partnering with people with Physical Disabilities

NYB is determined to reduce barriers and access to dance for participants. We are aware that there is no “one size fits all” approach to working with people with physical disabilities. When working with participants or contributors with physical disabilities we will follow the process outlined above, reviewing registration forms and conducting a needs based assessment with the person concerned (and their parents/ carers if appropriate). We will tailor the delivery of sessions and make accommodations to create an environment in which participants can participate fully with appropriate adjustments incorporated as needed. We will always be guided by the physical needs of the person in question and by adherence to considerations of health and safety.

9. Links to Other Policies and Reading

Safeguarding Policy

Adult Code of Conduct

[Traumatic Experiences in the Dance World](#)

[Safer Dance](#)

<https://www.sense.org.uk/information-and-advice/for-professionals/sense-arts-and-wellbeing-for-professionals/dance-activities-for-people-with-complex-disabilities/#tips>

NYB Values	
Safe	We champion healthy and sustainable practice.
Nurturing	We contribute to a mutually positive and nurturing experience.
Respectful	We are respectful of each other, and show this in our interactions with everyone; both online and in person.
Inclusive	We value diversity and proactively seek to create an inclusive environment for all stakeholders.
Communal	We are a community and we grow from our shared experience.
Creative	At our core we are creative and collaborate in our creative process.
Challenging	We challenge perceptions about what ballet is and conventions about who ballet is for.
Sustainable	We acknowledge that there is a climate emergency. We are action-oriented and committed to using our influence, resources and skills to be a positive force for change.
Exceptional	We work hard to create high quality educational and dance experiences.