

## PHYSICAL CONTACT POLICY

P-PC-2411/1

### PHILOSOPHY AND AIMS

The safety and wellbeing of the children and young people in our care at NYMT is paramount. Accordingly, and in line with our Safeguarding Policy, this includes:

- children's right to protection from harm or abuse;
- parents' right to feel safe when entrusting their children to NYMT;
- NYMT's commitment to providing an environment in which children and young people feel safe, secure, valued, respected and confident;
- all NYMT staff understanding and following our approach to safeguarding.

NYMT does not operate with a 'no touch' approach, which would be impractical and inappropriate in some of the work that we do. Nevertheless, care must always be taken to ensure that physical contact between staff and our Young Company Members is justified, appropriate and in line with the statements above.

### DEFINITIONS

**Young Company Member** refers to a person who is receiving training as a participant at an NYMT activity.

*Further definitions can be found in the main NYMT Safeguarding Policy document.*

### APPROPRIATE PHYSICAL CONTACT

There are occasions when it is appropriate for staff to have physical contact with Young Company Members, but such contact must be appropriate to their professional role and unambiguous, and it should be in the presence of other adults. In deciding whether or not physical contact would be appropriate, staff must consider the needs of the Young Company Member at the time, taking into account where a young person may be more vulnerable because of their personal characteristics like age, gender and cultural background.

Examples of where touching a Young Company Member might be appropriate:

- demonstrating exercises or physical techniques during a rehearsal;
- reassuring a child of younger age;
- comforting an upset or distressed Young Company Member;
- praising or congratulating a Young Company Member;
- reciprocating a hug initiated by a Young Company Member;
- giving first aid.

Staff should never engage in physical contact to the chest or to the legs above the knee. Contact to the mid-body should be particularly careful and kept to the minimum required. See also the Intimate Care section of the Safeguarding Policy.

Staff must seek the advice of senior colleagues if they are in any doubt about the appropriateness of physical touch. In line with their safeguarding training, staff must never act in a way that might make a reasonable person doubt their intentions.

## CONSENT

Consent should always be sought from a Young Company Member before making physical contact, unless it is not possible to do so (e.g. if a Young Company Member has fainted).

Young Company Members have the right to refuse permission for physical contact, and staff must adjust their work accordingly.

Young Company Members must be given the opportunity to withdraw permission at any time. As such, staff must always be clear about their intentions before engaging in physical contact.

When working in a group session, it may be practical to address the group as a whole about indicating their consent during a rehearsal. In this instance:

- Young Company Members should be invited to place their hands on their chest to indicate that they do not wish to be touched;
- A reminder about this consent procedure should be reissued at appropriate intervals.

A Young Company Member initiating physical contact (such as a hug) can be indication of consent. If deemed suitable within their professional role – for example, a member of pastoral staff comforting a distressed child – staff may offer a hug verbally before proceeding. Staff should never initiate hugs, as to do so risks being non-consensual.

## INCIDENTS THAT MUST BE REPORTED

Staff are expected to report anything that concerns them or that may have been misinterpreted, in line with their safeguarding training. The following are examples of incidents that should be immediately reported to a member of the safeguarding team:

- a staff member has accidentally hurt a Young Company Member;
- a Young Company Member appears to be aroused by physical contact with staff;
- a Young Company Member misunderstands or misinterprets an adult's actions.

Young Company Members are encouraged at their welcomes/inductions to discuss any worries they have with pastoral staff, but they are free to do so with any trusted adult.

## APPENDIX A: POLICY UPDATES & REVIEW

This version dated 1 November 2024.

Date of next review: November 2025.