**Physical Restraint Guidelines**

**Student and staff wellbeing come first**

Physical restraint affects the wellbeing of both the student and the staff member who applies it. It is associated with injury and increased emotional trauma to them both.

These guidelines focus on staff and student safety and wellbeing. They provide staff with generic techniques for preventing and de-escalating potentially dangerous situations. For more information schools can request the Understanding Behaviour – Responding Safely training.

Identifying when you may need to apply physical restraint

**Use physical restraint only where safety is at a serious and imminent risk.**

Physical restraint is a serious intervention. The emotional and physical impact on the student being restrained and the person doing the restraining can be significant. There are legal and reputational risks if a student is harmed.

The first aim should be to avoid needing to use physical restraint. Use preventative and de-escalation techniques to reduce the risk of injury.

**Use physical restraint only when:**

The teacher or authorised staff member reasonably believes that the safety of the student or of any other person is at serious and imminent risk.

The physical restraint response must be reasonable and proportionate in the circumstances:

* Use the minimum force necessary to respond to the serious and imminent risk to safety.
* Use physical restraint only for as long as is needed to ensure the safety of everyone involved.

**What is serious and imminent risk to safety?**

The physical restraint provisions are intended to deal with the upper end of the spectrum of situations where teachers and authorised staff members have physical contact with a student. It is clear that, in these situations, the restraint is in response to a serious and imminent risk to safety.

Teachers and authorised staff members will need to use their professional judgement to decide what constitutes “a serious and imminent risk to safety”. These situations are examples.

* A student is moving in with a weapon, or something that could be used as a weapon, and is clearly intent on using violence towards another person.
* A student is physically attacking another person, or is about to.
* A student is throwing furniture, computers, or breaking glass close to others who would be injured if hit.
* A student is putting themselves in danger, for example running onto a road or trying to harm themselves.

**These examples do not pose a serious and imminent risk to safety**

Avoid using physical restraint to manage behaviour in these situations:

* to respond to behaviour that is disrupting the classroom but not putting anyone in danger of being hurt
* for refusal to comply with an adult’s request
* to respond to verbal threats
* as coercion, discipline or punishment
* to stop a student who is damaging or removing property, unless there is a risk to safety.

**Acceptable Physical Contact**

Staff may need to physically support students. The following situations involving physical contact to support students happen in schools every day:

* Temporary physical contact, such as an open hand on the arm, back or shoulders to remove a student from a situation to a safer place.
* Supporting a student to move them to another location, or help them to get in a vehicle or use the stairs.
* The practice of harness restraint, when keeping a student and others safe in a moving vehicle, or when recommended by a physiotherapist or occupational therapist for safety or body positioning.
* Younger students, especially in their first year of school, sometimes need additional help. For example, you may “shepherd” a group of younger students from one place to another.
* Staff may hold the hand of a young student who is happy to have their hand held for a short time.
* Staff may pick a student up to comfort them.
* Assisting a student with toileting, including changing a nappy.

Use preventative and de-escalation techniques first

The first aim is to avoid needing to use physical restraint.

Use the following strategies to prevent or de-escalate potentially dangerous behaviour. These are general suggestions only.

**Preventative techniques**

Understand the student

* Get to know the student and identify potentially difficult times or situations that may be stressful or difficult for them.
* Identify the student’s personal signs of stress or unhappiness and intervene early.
* Monitor wider classroom/playground behaviour carefully for potential areas of conflict.

Respect the student

* Demonstrate a supportive approach: “I’m here to help.”
* Be flexible in your responses: adapt what you’re doing to the demands of the situation.
* Be reasonable: a reasonable action, request or expectation deserves a reasonable response
* Promote and accept compromise or negotiated solutions, while maintaining your authority.
* Take the student seriously and address issues quickly.

Preserve the student’s dignity

* Address private or sensitive issues in private.
* Avoid the use of inappropriate humour such as sarcasm or mocking.

**De-escalation techniques**

Safety first – create space and time

* Remove the audience – ask other students to take their work and move away.
* Give the student physical space.
* Name the emotion in a calm even voice: “You look really angry”, “I can see that you are very frustrated”…
* Wait.

Communicate calmly

* Talk quietly, even when the person is loud.
* Try to remain calm and respectful.
* Monitor your own body language and allow the student the opportunity to move out of the situation with dignity.
* Focus on communicating respect and your desire to help.
* Keep verbal interactions respectful.
* When appropriate, give the student clear choices and/or directions to help them feel more secure and regain control.

Think ahead in case the situation escalates

* If escalation occurs, move further away.
* Make sure you have an exit plan.
* Constantly reassess the situation.
* Send for help if necessary.

**What may escalate the behaviour**

* Threatening the student.
* Arguing or interrupting.
* Contradicting what the student says – even if they are wrong.
* Challenging the student.
* Trying to shame the student or showing your disrespect for the student.

Guidance if you have to use physical restraint

**What to do if prevention and de-escalation do not work**

* Physical restraint should only be applied by teachers and authorised staff.
* There may be situations when an unauthorised staff member intervenes and physically restrains a student, for example when there are no teachers or authorised staff nearby.
* The Education Act 1989 will not cover the intervention of an unauthorised staff member who physically restrains a student. There may be other justifications for intervening available in legislation or common law that apply.
* If teachers and authorised staff members do not have the skills or confidence to safely restrain a student, call for help.
* Call the police when a student cannot be managed safely and the imminent danger to students, staff or themselves remains, after all alternatives have been explored.
* All staff should be aware that physical restraint is a serious intervention to be used when no other, less severe, options are available.

**Do not use these restraints**

* Physical restraint that inhibits the student’s breathing, speaking or main method of communication, for example physical restraint that inhibits a student’s ability to use sign language.
* Prone (face-down) physical restraint
* Pressure points and pain holds
* Tackling, sitting, lying or kneeling on a student
* Pressure on the chest or neck
* Hyperextension (bending back) of joints
* Headlocks
* Using force to take/drag a student, who is resisting, to another location
* Restraint when moving a student from one place to another – trying to get them into a van or taxi, for example – when they are in an escalated state, as this may escalate them further.

**Monitor wellbeing throughout when applying physical restraint**

* The physical and psychological state of the student being restrained should be continuously monitored by the person performing the restraint and other people present.
* Apply physical restraint only for the minimum time necessary and stop as soon as the danger has passed.
* Monitor the physical and psychological wellbeing of both the student and the staff member who applied the restraint for the rest of the school day. Watch for shock, possible unnoticed injury and delayed effects.