

SAFE TOUCH

Circus is an inherently physical art form and as a result, has an element of danger when training. Physical touch is a tool which many teachers may use to mitigate these dangers and support your training.

Safe Touch and Unsafe Touch

Safe Touch is our phrase for touch which is used in a teaching capacity to support your learning and to ensure your safety in your physical training. This could include spotting in an acro class, lifting in a discipline class, or gentle guidance in a movement class. It is integral that the teacher ensures that Safe Touch is **consensual, supportive, and necessary**.

As opposed to this, **Unsafe Touch**, is touch which is unwanted and has an intention of hurting (physically or emotionally) the recipient. *An Unsafe Touch could be given by anyone to anyone (student/teacher/staff/visitor). **If you feel you have been touched or witnessed touching in a way that feels unsafe then please report this as soon as possible to the safeguarding officer, or, if you wish to remain anonymous, through the harassment report.***

Safe Touch in Practice

Safe Touch is a practicable policy which ensures that everyone is comfortable and safe with any physical contact that may occur in or out of the classroom while at NCCA. Here are some examples of where Safe Touch may be used in classes:

- A teacher or students spotting someone who is training a new trick.
- Teachers lifting a student as an example for the class.
- A teacher applying light pressure to a part of the back to encourage awareness and release.
- A teacher linking arms with a student as part of a drama game.
- Students making physical contact with each other in a contact improvisation.
- Students making physical contact with each other when working together on a lift or shared choreography.

Our tools for ensuring safe touch are all around **assessing the situation**:

1. Is touch necessary to achieve the action or exercise? Can this exercise be completed without touch?

2. Is the touch consensual? Has the person been asked if they are comfortable being touched? Are there any signs the person is not/no-longer comfortable with physical contact?
3. Is touch supporting the development or ensuring the safety of another person?

We also encourage everyone to use a Traffic Light system to clarify if or where they are comfortable being touched:

1. **Green: Okay for Safe Touch.** Highlight the areas of your body that are green for contact.
2. **Yellow: Okay for Safe Touch if necessary.** Highlight the areas of your body that are yellow for contact.
3. **Red: Not comfortable for Safe Touch at all.** Highlight the areas that are red for contact.

Advice:

Think honestly about where is green, yellow or red, don't brush over what is okay/not okay for you. Your traffic light might change day-to-day, class to class, or even within the class. If you feel you need to notify someone that your comfort has changed, do so.

And Remember: It is okay to say that you are all red today, there will be an alternative to making contact.

How we intend to continue to support Safe Touch:

To ensure that Safe Touch is practiced throughout NCCA, we will:

- Employ a recruitment policy for all teaching staff and new students to ensure that everyone is aware of the practice of Safe Touch and in agreement with its enactment.
- Monitor and support teachers and students frequently during the first 6 months of their employment/training to ensure that they are practicing Safe Touch as part of their practice in the building.
- Run workshops and training for teachers and students to make them aware of the Safe Touch policy in practice, or any changes that have been made to the policy. This may also include workshops with visiting specialists.
- We will make sure that the Safe Touch policy is easily accessible for all teachers, students and visitors to NCCA.
- This policy exists as part of a larger framework of policy which can be found on the Sexual Harassment Policies page on the NCCA website.

GUIDE: PROFESSIONAL BOUNDARIES FOR SAFE TOUCH

PHYSICAL TOUCH

Touch should be considered a possible teaching strategy, but not the only one. E.g. could you use blocks or mats to help someone onto a trapeze bar.

Physical contact should be a tool to enhance learning or promote safety and mitigate risks.

Be mindful where you safely touch someone and position yourself in a way which is relative and comfortable for the other person.

COMMUNICATION

When working in a physical environment, everyone must communicate with each other about Safe Touch. Talking about touch can help de-stigmatise consent and comfort, and ensure everyone develops a safe, accessible and inclusive practice.

Teachers should make it clear that touch will be a tool used within the class and reiterate this throughout the both the terms and individual classes.

Everyone should use a method to confirm consent, comfort and boundaries (such as the Traffic Light system). You should be aware of any changes to these boundaries throughout the session and sensitively offer others the chance to opt out of contact for the rest of the exercise/session.

AWARENESS

Awareness and sensitivity of others in physical work is integral for a safe and accessible practice. When working with others physically, please consider:

1. That touch means something different for everyone in the room.

Consider people's different physical experiences and the physical contexts that may exist outside of the class.

2. That people may use non-verbal methods to let you know that they are feeling uncomfortable, look for reactions or changes in behaviour when you are working with contact.

3. That power dynamics can make it difficult to express discomfort. Be aware of your position in the room and how others may view you in relation to the class.

DON'T

Under 18s: Do not be alone in a room with a young person- *If this occurs then contact another member of staff who will accompany you within the class or will move you to a more visible location.*

Non-intentional contact can happen due to accidents or mistakes. It is important that non-intentional contact is acknowledged with the recipient.

If a student becomes upset and seeks physical comfort from a member of staff this should be kept to an absolute minimum. We do not expect staff to disregard a student's feelings, however it is important to be aware how that physical content may be interpreted or conveyed to the participant.

If you make non-intentional contact, or you find yourself in any of the circumstances outlined above, you should complete a report and deliver it to a safeguarding officer as soon as possible. This record will be kept and used as part of the investigation if a parent or carer files a complaint with the organisation.