

## **Use of physical contact in work with people with learning difficulties – guidelines for safeguards**

- **Know why you do it**  
Be knowledgeable on the purposes of using physical contact by discussion, thought and by reading the pertinent psychological and developmental literature.
- **Have consent from the person**  
Obey the usual conventions concerning making physical contact with another person. If you rarely get consent to touch, then go back a few stages and work toward obtaining willingly given consent. At the very least, physical contact may be necessary to carry out basic care.
- **Be prepared to discuss and explain your practices**  
First and foremost by being knowledgeable, as above.
- **Document - have it acknowledged in the school curriculum document or workplace brochure**  
The culture and working practices of the school or other workplace are acknowledged in the curriculum document or workplace brochure and this will include explication of the use of physical contact and the purposes of it.
- **Document - have it acknowledged in any individual programme for the person**  
Be assertive. If you are certain that use of physical content is fulfilling the person's needs educationally or developmentally, then state this in the documentation drawn up to support work with that person.
- **Have good teamwork, both organisational and emotional**  
Teamworking practices should literally facilitate staff working together in teams so that staff or students are rarely alone. The teamworking ethos should also include good discussions among staff concerning the emotional aspects of the work, including crucially, orientations toward the issue of use of physical contact.
- **Use of physical contact should be discussed openly and regularly**  
There should be no sense of furtiveness or 'hidden curriculum'. This important aspect of teaching technique should tangibly be a matter of open discussion and study.
- **Have others present where possible**  
The most basic safeguard for staff and students is to have other staff present in the room when in situations where physical contact is likely to be used.