Appropriate Physical Contact and Safe Touch Policy

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The Franchisee is responsible for the implementation and oversight of this Policy.

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1. Introduction

1.1 There may be occasions when it may be entirely appropriate and proper for staff to have physical contact with students, particularly in a performing arts environment, but it is crucial that they only do so in ways appropriate to their professional role.

1.2 Physical instruction which involves safe touch towards certain areas of training is sometimes key to aid effective teaching and learning, i.e., awareness of correct muscle usage, correct posture, correct line and breathing techniques.

1.3 For example, physical contact between staff and students may be appropriate in the following types of circumstances:

- when a teacher needs to make physical contact in order to illustrate a concept or to adjust a student's alignment or posture, or improve awareness of correct muscle usage, correct line or breathing techniques;
- when a student needs encouragement or support to attempt a new challenge e.g., instruction or correction in a dance or circus skills' class;
- to demonstrate safe practice, for example in partner work or stage combat;
- when there is a need to take urgent action to avoid an incident or injury;
- in pas-de-deux classes, where teachers may demonstrate ways which will involve supporting and lifting with students;
- in choreographic teaching, where teachers may demonstrate positions and movements to the students by moving parts of the students' bodies and by moving dancers in relation to each other: this often involves a good deal of contact with students.

1.4 students may be required to contact each other, for example in partner work, ensemble work, or during contact improvisation, physical theatre, stage combat, or in acting scenes which require a certain level of intimacy.

2. Policy Aims

2.1 The aim of this policy is to ensure that all physical contact between adults and students at Italia Conti Associates promotes the students' safety and welfare.

2.2 Italia Conti Associates recognises that such physical contact is a potentially complex area, and fully recognises its responsibilities for safeguarding students and teachers and for protecting their welfare.

2.3 The principles underlying this policy are as follows.

- in accordance with Italia Conti Associate's *Safeguarding & Child Protection Policy*, the welfare of the student is paramount;

- all members of staff in the provision are responsible for safeguarding and promoting the welfare of each student attending;

- each staff member is responsible for their own actions and behaviour and should avoid any conduct which would lead any reasonable person to question their motivation and intentions;

- members of staff work, and should be seen to work, in an open and transparent way;

- the same professional standards are always applied regardless of culture, disability, gender, gender identity, language, racial origin, religious belief and/or sexual identity;

- staff continually monitor and review their practice and ensure they follow the guidance provided by the provision.

3. Procedures

3.1 For subjects that may include physical contact, staff should ensure that they include an initial briefing that sets out expectations of professional working practice in vocational training.

3.2 students have a right to let staff know if something makes them feel uncomfortable.

3.3 Staff should ensure that students are clearly briefed on safe and appropriate touch as relevant to the subject/topic being studied, e.g., safe practice in lifting or partner work.

3.4 Staff should not have unnecessary physical contact with students and should be alert to the fact that minor forms of friendly physical contact can be misconstrued by students or onlookers.

3.5 Staff should be aware that even well-intentioned physical contact may be misconstrued by the student, an observer or by anyone to whom this action is described.

3.6 Staff must be sensitive to a student's cultural background and any special educational needs. All staff will treat any physical contact with due sensitivity and care and with due regard for the wishes of the student.

3.7 When physical contact is made with students it should be in response to their learning needs at that time, of limited duration and appropriate to their age, stage of development, gender, ethnicity, and background. It must never threaten or be sexually inappropriate.

3.8 Where feasible, staff should seek the student's permission before initiating contact.

3.9 Staff should listen, observe and take note of the student's reaction or feelings and as far as is possible, use a level of contact which is acceptable to the student for the minimum time necessary.

3.10 It is not always possible to be specific about the appropriateness of each physical contact, since an action that is appropriate with one student in one set of circumstances may be inappropriate in another, or with a different student. Staff should therefore use their professional judgement at all times.

3.11 Staff should never touch a student in a way which may be considered indecent. Always be prepared to explain actions and accept that all physical contact be open to scrutiny.

3.12 Staff must not engage in rough play, tickling or fun fights with students.

3.13 Extra caution should be exercised where a student is known to have suffered previous abuse or neglect. Such experiences may sometimes make a student exceptionally needy and demanding of physical contact, and staff should respond sensitively by supporting the student and helping them to understand the importance of personal boundaries.

3.14 Staff may be required to initiate physical contact with students to support them in order for them to perform a task safely; to demonstrate the use of a particular piece of equipment or movement (s)or to assist them with an exercise. Contact under these circumstances should be done with the student's agreement, for the minimum time necessary and in an open environment.

3.15 Staff should remain sensitive to any discomfort expressed verbally or non-verbally by the student.

3.16 Physical contact must never be secretive, for the gratification of the adult or represent a misuse of authority.

4. Good Practice in Safe Touch

4.1 Always be prepared to explain how or why you are making physical contact for example, postural adjustment in technical singing or in a dance class. This applies to both staff to student and peer-to-peer contact.

4.2 Use common sense and awareness, for example, ask permission where appropriate e.g., where a touch may be uncomfortable or unexpected.

4.3 Use a firm and specific touch, e.g., flat of the hand, so that touch is always unambiguous and cannot be misconstrued.

4.4 Set out clear boundaries / guidelines at the start of topic study.

4.5 In exercises requiring contact between students, for example, stage combat, duet work or partner work, aim to use a staged process to build trust and ensure safety. Set out and explain guidelines and boundaries clearly and encourage open evaluation of the process.

4.6 When blocking fight scenes, acting / physical theatre scenes or scenes involving intimacy where contact between students may be involved, encourage students to choreograph or plan and walk through the movements, so all students involved are clear and secure on the details of the sequence and contact.

4.7 Ensure safe working practice and rehearsal is followed in stage combat/slapstick exploration/partner work and any lifts or falls.

4.8 Ensure current safe practice in relation to Covid guidelines is followed at all times.

5. One-to-one situations

5.1 When working individually with students, staff should be aware of the potential vulnerability of both students and staff in such situations.

5.2 Staff should manage these situations and take reasonable and sensible precautions to ensure the safety and security of the student and staff alike.

5.3 Where possible, individual work with students should not be undertaken in isolated areas or rooms where there is no external viewing panel. Where it is necessary to close doors for reasons of confidentiality a colleague should be made aware of this and asked to remain vigilant.

5.4 Where possible, a gap or barrier should be maintained between teacher and student at all times. Any physical contact should be the minimum required for care, instruction, or restraint.

6. Students with disabilities

6.1 Staff should be aware of students with physical disabilities and any reasonable adjustments that need to be in place for their particular subject. It is the responsibility of the Franchisee/Principal to communicate such information to the relevant staff members.

6.2 Staff should understand where it is appropriate to touch in relation to the student's disability. If unclear about specific movement/choreography, staff should hold discrete conversations with the student prior to a lesson to discuss considerations, limitations, and alternatives in order to work in an anticipatory way. Some touching and adjusting of movement may be considered safe for the majority, but in the case of a physically disabled student, could cause harm. (If deemed necessary, a specific risk assessment might also be undertaken with the student).

6.3 Staff should be aware of any temporary disabilities and injuries, by asking at the start of each class for these to be disclosed. Staff should be aware of limitations, and alternatives in order to work in an anticipatory way. Some touching and adjusting of movement may be considered safe for the majority, but in the case of a temporary disability or injury, could cause harm.

7. Guidelines for the adjustment of clothing and costumes in fitting, rehearsal, performance and for side stage quick changes

7.1 Where possible, there should be two people present: one to clear clothing, the other to assist performer(s) with the change.

7.2 Provide as little assistance as possible, i.e. only as necessary.

7.3 The dresser should not pull up or change undergarments/ tights/ lingerie: this must be left to the performer.

7.4 Agree and rehearse the process before the show with the performer.

8. Fitting microphones side stage

8.1 Agree/rehearse the process before the show with the performer.

8.2 There should be a third-party present wherever possible.

8.3 Use as little skin contact as possible except to tape.

8.4 Where wires need to be threaded under clothing, agree the process before the show with the performer.

9. Reporting

9.1 students have a right to let staff know if something makes them feel uncomfortable and should be encouraged to discuss any worries with any member of staff.

9.2 If a member of staff believes that an action could be misinterpreted, the incident and circumstances should be reported to their line manager, recorded and, if appropriate, a copy placed on the student's file.

10. Linked policies

Health & Safety Policy
Safeguarding and Child Protection Policy
Staff Code of Conduct
Intimate and Personal Care Policy

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