

# Using physical restraint in schools

Schools are required to notify, monitor and report on the use of physical restraint.

### Unsafe situations and use of physical restraint in schools

Schools are usually a safe and happy place. But there are times when things happen and someone needs to step in, to keep everyone safe.

If a student needs to be physically restrained to keep everyone safe, there are rules in place about when it is okay to do so.

Physically restraining a student is a last resort action in schools. Teachers know it is far better to prevent dangerous situations happening and to calm things down. Sometimes, that's not always possible.

### What is physical restraint?

Physical restraint is when a teacher or authorised staff member uses physical force to stop, restrict or subdue a student from moving their body against their will.

This is different from physical contact that happens every day in schools.

Examples of acceptable physical contact include:

- 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.
- Younger students, especially in their first year of school, sometimes need additional help. For example, teachers 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.

### When can physical restraint be used?

A teacher or authorised staff member must not use physical restraint unless it is necessary to prevent imminent harm to a student or another person. They must reasonably believe that there is no other option available in the circumstances to prevent the harm, and the physical restraint must be reasonable and proportionate in the circumstances.

Situations where it may be appropriate to use physical restraint include:

- breaking up a fight
- stopping a student from moving in with a weapon
- stopping a student who is throwing furniture close to others who could be injured
- preventing a student from running onto a road.

Students with the most challenging behaviours should have a safety plan that outlines situations and restraint techniques to keep everyone safe. Where the Ministry is part of the team supporting the student, Ministry staff can provide advice on safe holds.

What happens after an incident involving physical restraint?

Physical restraint is a serious intervention and schools must notify, monitor and report on the use of physical restraint. This includes informing parents' or caregivers, and the employer (board of trustees or manager of a private school).

Talking to parents on the day

After a student is physically restrained, staff need to inform the parents or caregivers on the day it occurs, so they can monitor the student's wellbeing at home.

Next steps

Schools should offer the parents or caregivers a separate time, preferably within two days of the incident to talk through the incident and find ways together, to improve safety.

At this meeting, schools should:

- give parents or caregivers the opportunity to discuss what happened
- work with them to explore changes needed, to prevent restraint
- if appropriate, involve the student in this discussion
- write notes that outline next steps or actions.

Further information

[Guidelines for Registered Schools in New Zealand on the Use of Physical Restraint\(external link\)](#)

[Education \(Physical Restraint\) Rules 2017\(external link\)](#)

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