



Safe Touch Policy

'In a world that often feels disconnected,
The human touch reminds us of our shared humanity.' - Unknown

Contents.

1. Introduction
2. Aims
3. The Research
4. Appropriate and Inappropriate Touch
5. Types of Physical Touch and Contact
6. Safe Touch Guidelines
7. Power to Search Pupils without Consent
8. Complaints Procedures

1. Introduction

This policy on safe touch and physical contact has been developed with informed knowledge of neurobiological research and studies based on and around attachment, child development and the positive impact of touch. At Kingsholm C of E Primary School and Nursery we strive for all children to feel safe and happy. When coming to school children need to experience positive relationships with all staff and children they come into contact with. These positive relationship experiences are fundamental to our positive ethos.

The importance of touch and physical contact reaches many levels. Besides having physical needs for food, cleanliness and shelter, we also have touch and physical contact needs. The first sense we develop as babies is touch and the first languages a baby understand after birth is crying and **touch**. In fact, our sense of touch starts to develop while we are still in the womb. This proves how essential touch is for our survival. Touch is a vital component to successful social, emotional, cognitive and physical development.

2. Aims

At Kingsholm C of E Primary School and Nursery we believe that all our children have the right to independence, choice and inclusion and we seek to provide opportunities for personal growth and emotional health and well-being. However, rights also involve responsibilities, such as not harming other people's rights. Children unable to control their actions or unable to appreciate danger have a right to be protected; as do other students using the school and all staff have a duty of care to exercise. This policy applies to all staff and children working in our school.

This policy relates to the Team Teach Workbook, our Safeguarding and Child Protection Policy and Positive Behaviour for Learning Policy.

3. The Research

Children learn who they are and how the world is by forming relationships with people and things around them. The quality of a children's relationships with significant adults is vital to their healthy development and emotional health and wellbeing. Healthy pro-social brain development requires access to safe touch as one of the means of calming, soothing and containing distress for a frightened, sad or angry child. It is essential for all children to learn the difference between safe and unsafe touch and to experiences having their strongest emotions contained, validated, accepted and soothed by a significant adult.

If children are behaving in unacceptable, threatening, dangerous, aggressive or out of control ways, they have not yet learned how their strongest, emotional reactions can be contained, channelled and communicated safely. In recognition of this and in supervised conditions, trained staff will consider using safe touch as one of the means available to them for example to calm a distressed child, contain an angry child, encourage or affirm an anxious child or a child with low-self-esteem.

Safe touch used to calm, soothe and regulate a child's emotions is a needed developmental experience. The brain does not develop self-soothing neuronal pathways unless and until this safe emotional regulation has been experienced.

Other means of calming, soothing and containing children's strong emotions include:

- Slowing down
- Lowering voices
- Breathing more deeply

- Matching a child's emotional display and then regulating it down alongside them
- Talking slowly, firmly and quietly to establish control
- Providing clear predictable and consistent boundaries e.g. this is not safe.

The developmentally appropriate use of safe touch is defined by situation in where it's absence would actually be inhumane, unkind and potentially psychologically or neurobiologically damaging. Not providing that support where a child is displaying grief, stress and/or rage reactions can lead to a state of hyper-arousal, in which toxic levels of stress chemical are released in the body and brain. The severely damaging long-term effects of this state have been intensively researched worldwide and are well documented.

4. Appropriate and Inappropriate Touch

All staff members must understand the difference between appropriate and inappropriate touch. All staff need to demonstrate a clear understanding of the difference. Connection and holding in mind can be achieved without touching. Staff are all trained through Team Teach to physically support a child where needed. Through team teach staff are trained to use pre-emptive and preventative methods to support a child to regulate and manage their emotions and their bodies safely.

These methods may include distraction, WIN, change of adult, use of a safe space.

Gentle safe holding is appropriate if a child is;

- *Hurting themselves and/or others* (or is likely to hurt themselves and/or others) or
- *Damaging property, and/or*
- *Incensed and out of control*, so that all verbal attempts to engage have failed

Such necessary interventions are fully in line with guidelines set out in Government Document, 'New Guidance on the Use of Reasonable Force in School.' (DfEE 1998) and The Education Act 1996.

Our staff team members are trained in the safest and gentlest means of holding a child which is entirely designed to enable the child to feel safe and soothed, and to bring him or her down from uncontrollable states of hyper arousal. Without such an intervention the child can be left at risk of actual physical harm or psychological damage.

5. Types of Physical Touch and Contact

Casual/Informal/Incidental Touch

Staff use touch with children as part of normal relationships, for example, comforting a child, giving assurance and congratulating. This might include putting an arm out to encourage a child not to exit a room, taking a child by the hand, putting an arm on the back or putting an arm around the shoulders. The benefit of this action is often proactive and can prevent a situation escalating.

General Reparative Touch

This is used by staff working with children who are having difficulties with their emotions. Healthy emotional development requires safe touch as a means of calming, soothing and containing distress for a frightened, angry or sad child. Touch used to regulate child's emotions, triggers the release of the calming chemical oxytocin in the body. Reparative touch may include sitting on an adult's lap, with face to face always being avoided and in sight of colleagues. This will be age and stage appropriate. Other examples may include, squeezing an arm, rubbing the back or hand/foot massage.

Contact Play

Contact play is where staff may adopt a role similar to that of a parent when playing a game with a child. Such games may include tag or 'chase', catching the student and together following the rules of the game by taking turns and building trust.

Positive Handling

Reasonable and proportionate positive handling will only be used to stop students:

- Causing injury to themselves
- Causing injury to other children
- Damaging property
- Having a negative impact upon learning

Staff are trained to use the following examples of holds to guide and support a child where necessary. Contact during this time is kept to a minimum. All staff ensure that after such an event, time is taken to reflect, repair and reconnect. (What happened? Who was affected? Why was this necessary?)

Help Hug – one arm around the shoulders with the nearest hand on the nearest shoulder or covering just above the elbows.

Guiding elbows – arms or cupped hands placed just above the elbows to prevent hazardous movements.

Staff also use the following Team Teach strategies from the 'Team Teach Toolbox' to de-escalate a distressed child:

- Distraction – using a known favourite topic or game or environment
- Removing others and an audience
- Using a calm and gentle tone
- Getting down at the child's level to reduce anxiety
- Changing adults to remove barriers
- Offering two options to enable the child to take control
- Having safe and quiet spaces around school for children to use
- Keeping instruction simple and clear
- Offer examples of positive choices

6. Safe Touch Guidelines

Parents/Carers are informed of the school 'Safe Touch' policy. Any contact with a child is shared with parents/carers and examples of contact modelled for the parent/carer.

Teachers/Staff are trained using Team Teach (Tony Ryall Training) and/or Thrive approach by dissemination in staff training and meetings.

Teachers/Learning Partners are trained in all aspects of safe touch.

Adult rule: No adults should use touch when alone with a child. Doors will always be open.

7. Power to Search Pupils without Consent

Under Section 550ZB(5) of the Education Act 1996; the Headteacher and those members of staff authorised by the Headteacher can conduct a search for the following "prohibited items".

- knives and weapons
- alcohol
- illegal drugs
- stolen items
- tobacco and cigarette papers
- fireworks
- pornographic images
- any article that has been or is likely to be used to commit an offence, cause personal injury or damage to property.

8. Complaints Procedures

It is essential that children and adults are able to complain and have their complaints heard. We have a school complaints policy in place which identifies how to raise a formal complaint. It also references and provides a complaints form (Appendix A) to complete and submit. The policy is there to support all children, parents and staff when concerns are raised. Open and clear communication with children, parents and families is key, especially when using positive handling to support children. This allows opportunities when communicating incidents, for individuals involved to raise complaints and have these addressed appropriately.

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Policy reference material, guidance or link policies	Positive Behaviour for Learning Policy Safeguarding Policy Safer Working Practice Guidance Use of reasonable force. Advice for headteachers, staff and governing bodies. DFE July 2013 Education Act 1996 (Section 550A) Education and Inspections Act 2006 (Section 93)
Reviewed by	SLT
Ratified by	Steph Matthews, Headteacher and Nina Hargrave, Chair of Governors
Ratification date	
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