

Safe Touch Policy

Aims To ensure that all staff carry out safe, confident and dignified practice when using appropriate, necessary and/or planned touch.

Why use touch? Used in context and with empathy, touch supports the development of our natural interactions with the children and young people we care for. It can also be key to developing fundamental social, behavioural and attention skills. Whilst offering physical support to those pupils who need it.

The guidelines that follow describe the school's procedures on the use of appropriate physical touch. Touch is important and may be used routinely for any of the following reasons:-

Communication – touch is beneficial as part of the process of establishing the fundamentals of communication (Nind and Hewett, 1994) for people at early communication levels. Touch is necessary to reinforce other communication (e.g. hand on shoulder when speaking) or to function as the main form of communication in itself. Touch enables staff and pupils to respond non-verbally or to respond to another person's own use of physical contact for communication and to make social connections. This is particularly likely to occur during intensive interaction or day to day greetings (hand shakes, high fives, fist bumps etc.) Touch cues, hand over hand signing, physical prompts and Intensive Interaction are aided and developed by the use of supportive touch.

Educational Tasks- Touch can also be used to direct children in educational tasks and developing skills. Physical prompting and support, gestural and physical prompts during learning activities such as hand-over-hand support and hand-under-hand support.

Play activities after class sessions or when going out on school trips naturally include touch. People of any age who are at early levels of development are likely to be quite tactile and physical.

Mobility- Physical support may be used as guidance and/or to help with mobility or as part of an activity where a pupil needs support when moving. Some pupils may need moving and handling to protect students from harming themselves or others, including restrictive physical intervention. This must be carried out in line with the relevant policy guidelines .

Emotional reasons – touch is an effective way to communicate affection and warmth. It gives reassurance and can communicate security and comfort. Touch enables the person to develop understanding of these positive emotions and the ability to communicate them. Touch can offer reassurance and support, comforting distressed or upset pupils, communicating warmth, comfort and reassurance and to develop positive emotions. Cautionary touch should be used with pupils who are sensitive to touch, touch defensive or may have a history of receiving negative touch.

Medical care – to provide medical care such as First Aid (See First Aid policy).

Keeping Staff and Pupils Safe

Hand holding

Staff should use their professional judgement when holding hands with students. Offering a link of arms is preferential to hand holding. Students often need support with walking and balance, or may need support for safety and to avoid running off.

Staff need to be aware of the developmental age of the students they are supporting, and be clear the physical contact used is appropriate for the individual student. Developmental levels can often be more relevant to our students than their chronological age.

Types of touch

Staff need to be aware of the types of touch used. Especially pupils on the Autistic Spectrum or with multi-sensory impairment and / or sensory integration difficulties may become confused and distressed by certain touch. Always have parents of such children in class.

What does it look like to others?

Other people may be watching who may misinterpret physical intervention procedures or the use of touch.

Staff should ensure that they understand the reasons that they are using touch and how to use it effectively.

Hugs:

Hugs can be given only as a quick hug by any gender staff to any gender student when they are below ten years of age. The hug can be longer and the said child can be made to sit on the lap of the staff only after permission from the parent is obtained. After 10 years of age no hugs can be given to students unless parental permission is obtained. Unlike a kiss in a hug two people come into full contact with each other. So we do not encourage hugs. No student shall be allowed to sit on the lap of the staff after 10 years of age as again two people come into full contact with each other.

Kiss

Kiss: A staff member can sometimes provide a quick kiss to a student as a token of appreciation for doing well in class or when they need comforting. The kiss for a toddler can be only on the forehead or on the hand or a flying kiss and no other body part. Similarly for students who are ten years and above the kiss should be only on the hand or a flying kiss and not touch any other body part.

A hand kiss is generally considered as a very respectful form of show of affection by the student to the teacher and vice versa and around the world and hence the hand kiss is ok

according to our policies. Again the hand kiss should not be a regular affair and should be used only sparingly as per the judgement of the teacher/staff.

In case of adults no form of kiss is permitted.

Highly sensitive students: For highly sensitive students who would not like any form of physical touch/kiss the parent needs to let the school know in writing at the time of enrollment about the same. For such students once notified by the parents the school staff shall administer the no touch policy and ensure that the child's comfort level is not compromised.

Inappropriate Touch

It is not appropriate to touch students in the following areas : Genitals Chest / breast thighs, legs, Bottom or the back.

Except for: First aid Intimate/ Personal care Medical needs

In these circumstances staff should ensure that there is another member of staff present who the pupil is comfortable and familiar with. For pupils receiving touch of an intimate nature consent should have been gained from the pupil involved.

It is not acceptable to kiss students in any way other than described above. If a student initiates a kiss between themselves and a member of staff, staff need to withdraw from the situation. Our responsibility is to ensure our pupils are fully prepared so they are safe within the school and wider community.

If you are in doubt about any issues concerning appropriate touch, or you observe any practice that causes concern, you should discuss this with a member of the Senior leadership Team. All staff have a responsibility to ensure safe and appropriate practice at all times.