



Safe Touch Policy

Avanti House Primary School

Introduction

These guidelines outline the principles for physical touch between staff members and pupils at Avanti House Primary School. All staff, visitors and volunteers at school are expected to follow these guidelines.

Research has recognised that physical touch is incredibly important for a child's development. Touch is essential in order to provide sensitive, good quality care and support natural interactions and is part of the development, emotional wellbeing, care and education of pupils. Touch is the earliest sensory system to become functional and is the foundation for all other sensory systems. Positive touch is beneficial for both psychological and physiologically development.

Psychologically, touch can be calming and relaxing and is vital for emotional wellbeing. Physiologically, touch facilitates the growth of the body's cells and the development of the brain and nervous system.

However, in the current social climate there is a tendency to associate touch with intimacy and sexuality. Safeguarding children from inappropriate physical interactions is crucial but it is also essential to recognise that the use of positive, appropriate touch is incredibly important for a child's wellbeing, sensory regulation, and emotional security.

Research

It is essential for all children to learn the difference between safe and unsafe touch and to experience 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, under special, agreed and supervised conditions, specially trained staff will consider using safe touch as one of the means available to them, for example to calm a distressed child, to contain an angry or wild child and/or encourage or affirm an anxious child or to support 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 neuronal pathways to initiate calming and self-soothing unless and until this safe emotional regulation has been experienced within a positive relationship with a significant adult. Where children have had insufficient experience of safe touch and calming regulation, this may be a priority to help their brains to develop access to thinking, judging, evaluating, and choosing mechanisms. These are sometimes known as 'higher executive skills' and they are an intrinsic part of cognitive regulation.

Safe touch is one of the keyways of regulating children's emotions, but it is a strategy that fully trained staff will use only under supervision and in line with a whole school Policy on Touch.



Ways of regulating children's emotions

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

- Slowing one's pace
- Lowering the voice
- Breathing more deeply
- Initially matching the pitch and volume of the child's emotional display (shout, cry etc) and then regulate it down
- Talking slowly, firmly, and quietly in an unhurried and unflustered way
- Providing clear predictable and consistently held boundaries

Refraining from physically, safely holding a child in the face of their intense grief, stress and/or rage reactions can lead to a state of hyper-arousal, in which toxic levels of stress chemicals 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.

Guidelines for implementing Safe Touch

It is not illegal to touch a pupil. There are occasions when physical contact, other than reasonable force, with a pupil is proper and necessary.

Examples of where touching a pupil might be proper or necessary:

- Holding the hand of the child at the front/back of the line when going to assembly or when walking together around the school.
- When comforting a distressed pupil.
- When a pupil is being congratulated or praised.
- To demonstrate how to use a musical instrument.
- To demonstrate exercises or techniques during PE lessons or sports coaching
- To give first aid.

We are highly aware of the current atmosphere where due to fears of abuse, touch as a natural and important form of human connection has been almost vetoed in some school contexts. Our policy rests on the belief that every member of staff needs to appreciate the difference between appropriate and inappropriate touch. Hence all staff members need to demonstrate a clear understanding of the difference. They need to show themselves to be highly aware of both the damaging and unnecessary uses of touch in an educational context. Touch is not to be used as an ill-thought out or impulsive act of futile reassurance/gratification or as a block to referral for psychological assessment.

Positive Handling cannot always be planned for, and a situation may occur where it is necessary. Where it may be planned for, a risk assessment needs to be carried out and updated.



Some examples of situations where reasonable force might be used are:

- Child is hurting himself/herself or others, (or is likely to hurt himself/herself and/or others) or
- damaging property
- is incensed and out of control, so that all verbal attempts to engage him/her have failed.

Trained staff team members are trained in the safest and gentlest means of holding a child that 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.

Whilst limits and boundaries in such circumstances can be a vital corrective emotional experience, without such an intervention (holding) the child can be left at risk of actual physical or psychological damage.

Such necessary interventions are fully in line with guidelines set out in the Government Document, 'New Guidance on the Use of Reasonable Force in School.' (DfES 1998) and 'Use of Reasonable Force' (2013)

Positive Handling should only be used as a last resort.

Positive handling

To ensure touch is only used appropriately the following guidelines are to be followed:

- Parents/carers should be informed of the school policy on Touch.
- Where necessary a Risk Assessment should be made and consulted and signed by the parents of any child who the school thinks positive handling/ Safe touch may be used
- Teachers/support staff should be trained in the Safe Touch Policy
- Staff members should agree the use of safe touch in discussion with their manager.
- Child should be consulted, appropriate to their understanding, and involved in the development of a plan, based on a comprehensive risk assessment.
- Strategies should be rehearsed and practised (as is possible) with the child in preparation.
- TWO- THREE Adult rule: No adult should use safe/positive holding when alone with a child. Both adults should have the closest / best relationship with the child.

Where touch is used, contact should be brief and gentle, on clothed or publicly visible parts of the body: hands, arms, shoulders, head, hair, shoes.

- This should also be read in conjunction with the 'Physical Intervention and Reasonable Force' Policy

Policies:

This policy should not be viewed in isolation and is closely related to the following:

- Child Protection and Safeguarding



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- Physical Intervention and Reasonable Force
- Behaviour for Learning
- Staff Code of Conduct
- SEND