



Touch Policy

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Introduction

Touch is a deep, fundamental form of communication for all human beings and can be particularly effective for ensuring the transmission of messages about self-worth and respect, particularly – but not only – when speech communication is not available. Inappropriate touch, or the effects of the experience of inappropriate touch, is partly combated by experience of appropriate touch.

Physical contact between staff and pupils is a complex and controversial area; the common myth still exists that staff must not ever touch pupils. This is recognised in the DfE's guidance 'Use of reasonable force in schools' (2013). Physical contact is sometimes purely considered in the context of staff using 'reasonable force' to control or restrain a pupil in a dangerous circumstance. We recognise that at Ivel Valley, touch means a lot more than this: we need touch to provide access, safety, dignity, choice, communication and comfort to many of our pupils, whilst still adhering to statutory guidance regarding safeguarding. We also recognise that some touch can be painful, overwhelming or distressing to some pupils, especially those who have experienced trauma, or those who have tactile defensiveness.

The purpose of this policy

Every member of staff needs to know the difference between appropriate and inappropriate touch. This policy aims to support staff to understand this, and to feel able to use touch to meet the needs of pupils, whilst reinforcing the importance of using touch in a considered, unambiguous manner that is entirely about the best interests of the child, as per the Children Act 1989 & 2004.

Consent

Our responsibility is to ensure that our pupils are as safe as possible within the school and wider community. As far as is possible, we must give maximum regard to the pupil's right to give consent to physical contact. It is important that children & young people learn that, in the majority of occasions, they are in control of their bodies and they are the ones to determine how they are touched, and who they are touched by. We must actively teach pupils to understand what consent means, and how they can give it. For some pupils, this might be a verbal agreement; others might need time and opportunity to initiate Consent must be continually requested, for example we must not assume that giving consent once for intimate care covers every other occasion.

Types of appropriate touch

Care

Touch can be necessary to support pupils to have their basic care needs met throughout the school day. This might be to access food and drink – either orally or through a tube feed, to have medication administered, to give First Aid, or to have personal or intimate care routines delivered. Staff should always encourage co-operative work and consider pupils' dignity. Further information can be found in the intimate care policy.

Casual

Staff use touch with pupils as part of a normal relationship, for example giving high 5s, patting on the back, a guiding hand on the shoulder. This could be for comfort, reassurance or congratulations. It is important that staff don't overuse casual touch, and that we consider carefully if an action is appropriate for an individual pupil, for example: offering a linked arm instead of holding a hand; sitting next to a pupil instead of sitting on a lap; offering a side-on hug instead of a forward-facing hug. These will vary depending on age and developmental need, and should be considered on an individual basis.

Communication

Touch is beneficial as part of the process of establishing the fundamentals of communication for people at early communication levels. Touch enables both staff and pupils to respond non-verbally, or to respond to another person's own use of physical contact, supporting communication and interaction. Touch might also be needed to support a pupil to understand an activity, for example exercises and techniques in PE, or in the swimming pool. Touch cues, PECS, hand over hand signing, physical prompts, TACPAC, Dance Massage and Intensive Interaction are aided and developed by the use of supportive touch.

Comfort

Touch can be used to calm, soothe and reassure a pupil who is experiencing distress. Touch enables the person to develop understanding of these positive emotions and the ability to communicate them. A friendly touch also increases release of the hormone oxytocin, which promotes feelings of trust and bonding. Used carefully and thoughtfully, comforting touch can purposefully encourage some pupils who do not want or like it to learn the enjoyment and benefit of physical contact.

Interactive play

Play activities naturally include touch. Contact play can be used to build up positive, trusting relationships with staff, and enable pupils to have fun and feel cared for. This should only take place when the pupil has developed a trusting relationship with the staff member, and when they feel completely comfortable and at ease with this type of contact. This might include tickle games, being rocked, 'rough and tumble' or piggy backs. These will vary depending on age and developmental need, and should be considered on an individual basis.

Mobility

Physical support may be used as guidance to aid mobility, or as part of an activity where a pupil needs support when moving. Touch will also be important to support pupils with profound and multiple learning disabilities, for example when putting on slings, during hoisting and when positioning in chairs. Some staff will need to access moving & handling training to enable them to do these tasks safely. As appropriate, staff should follow guidance from physiotherapists, MOVE practitioners and the moving & handling lead, and they must refer to pupils' individual plans.

Positive handling

Sometimes, some of our pupils experience levels of stress, anxiety or frustration that cause their behaviour to become unsafe for themselves, or others. In these cases, positive handling might be used to keep everyone safe. In recognition of the sensitive and complex nature of these experiences and decisions, further information about this is detailed in our positive handling policy.

Sensory input

Some pupils will require touch to support their sensory needs. This might be formal, such as following a recommended programme from a specialist sensory OT, or informal, for example if a pupil requests a 'squash' on their hands or shoulders. It is important to consider the needs of the pupil in these instances, and be led by them.

Specific, agreed interventions

Some identified interventions require touch to be implemented. These interventions are overseen by our middle leader with responsibility for pupils with Complex Learning Difficulties and Disabilities (CLDD), and she provides training for staff as appropriate. These interventions might require access to skin, for example removing a jumper or changing into PE kit, and there might be use of supporting products, such as oils. It is good practice for teachers to make families aware if their children are accessing these interventions. Asking permission and gaining consent is an important part of these interventions. These include, but are not limited to:

- *Dance Massage*: this focuses on translating music via movement and dance. It combines the soothing, sensory experience of massage with the rhythm and energy of music. Dance Massage allows people who would not normally be able to access dance, a unique, tactile dance experience, as well as offering a wealth of opportunities to develop sensory integration.
- *Story Massage*: this combines the benefits of positive touch with the fun and creativity of words – whether as story, rhyme or song. Ten simple massage strokes form the basis of the programme. These strokes have a name, such as The Circle or The Sprinkle, and an easy to recognise symbol making it fully accessible for all ages and abilities.
- *TACPAC*: this is a sensory communication resource using touch and music. TACPAC draws together touch and music to create a structured half hour of sensory communication between two people.
- It stands for Tactile Approach to Communication (Pack).

Therapies

Pupils require touch from staff to access a number of therapies. This includes, but isn't limited to hydrotherapy, physiotherapy and occupational therapy. Staff must follow the programmes as set by the therapists, and contact them if further guidance is needed.

Types of inappropriate touch

Actions

It is never acceptable to kiss pupils. If a pupil communicates through kissing staff, staff must withdraw and appropriate alternative interaction modelled. Staff could use phrases such as “save kisses for [parent/carer name]”.

Areas

Outside of necessary actions during first aid, personal care or intimate care, it is not appropriate to touch pupils on their bottoms, genitals or breasts. Pupils may sometimes touch intimate areas of a member of staff's body when there is no sexual intent or understanding. It is legitimate and advisable for the member of staff to withdraw from, or cease to touch the pupil, but not advisable to display a reaction at that moment which may be reinforcing, and therefore counterproductive.

Arousal

With all pupils, members of staff must operate maximum sensitivity to physical contact being misunderstood or misconstrued and triggering sexual arousal. Pupils can sometimes become physically aroused during personal care. In this situation staff should finish personal care procedure and should give the pupil a few minutes of privacy.

Individual context

Some pupils will find some types of touch distressing or painful. This could be due to a number of reasons, such as hypersensitivity, or a history of sexual or physical abuse. Staff must be aware of individual need, and only use touch that could cause distress if it is absolutely necessary to keep a pupil safe.

Intentions

It is never acceptable to touch a pupil with the intention of causing pain or discomfort.

Roles and Responsibilities

All staff have a responsibility to adhere to this policy, regardless of their role or whereabouts in the school / college they work.

Legal Framework & Statutory Guidance

Linked national guidance:

- DfE guidance Use of Reasonable Force, July 2013
- Keeping Children Safe in Education (current version)

Linked policies:

- Code of conduct
- Manual Handling policy
- Positive Handling policy
- Safeguarding & Child Protection policy

Equalities and Inclusion

If there is any concern about applying this policy to pupils based on their individual needs, or any relevant protected characteristics, this must be raised with a member of the Senior Leadership Team. This policy is designed to recognise the unique needs of our pupils. The policy has been reviewed with the middle leader for CLDD to ensure that the needs of this group of pupils have been considered.

Safeguarding Implications

If staff are in doubt about any issues concerning appropriate touch, or observe any practice that causes concern, they must discuss this with a member of the Senior Leadership Team. Staff are also encouraged to be open and honest if they are unsure if their personal practice is appropriate, or if something happens accidentally. An open and honest culture is vital. All staff have a responsibility to ensure safe and appropriate practice at all times, adhering to Keeping Children Safe in Education (current version) and the Ivel Valley safeguarding & child protection policy.