

OUR MISSION STATEMENT:

“PASSIONATE ABOUT CELEBRATING LEARNING, ENJOYMENT AND ACHIEVEMENT FOR ALL”



Safe Touch and Physical Intervention Policy

ADOPTED BY SLT: Summer 2020

Updated Summer 2022

SIGNED (Head Teacher)

REVIEW DATE: Summer 2024

Tiverton Safe Touch and Physical Intervention Policy

Introduction

Children need to learn who they are and how they fit into the world. The quality of the child's relationships with significant adults is key to their healthy development and emotional health and wellbeing.

Context

Our policy on Safe Touch has been developed in the context of the local authorities' Child Protection Procedures and Policies and Government guidance. It takes into account the extensive neurobiological research and other empirical studies relating to attachment theory and child development that identify safe touch as a positive contribution to brain development, emotional regulation, mental health and the development of pro-social skills. This policy also includes specific guidance relating to the use of force and physical intervention where it is used in emergency and planned situations.

This policy should be read in conjunction with:

Tiverton School Behaviour Policy and Team Teach Guidance

'Use of reasonable force Advice for headteachers, staff and governing bodies July 2013' (DFE), 'Behaviour and discipline in schools, Advice for headteachers and school staff February 2014' (DFE), Child Protection and Safeguarding policy, Health and Safety policy. 'Governing bodies of maintained schools have a duty under section 175 of the Education Act 2002 requiring them to make arrangements to ensure that their 4 functions are carried out with a view to safeguarding and promoting the welfare of pupils.'

Why have a policy on safe touch?

Tiverton School has adopted an informed, evidence based decision to allow safe touch in special cases as a developmentally appropriate intervention that will aid healthy growth and learning.

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 until this safe emotional regulation has been experienced. Where children have had insufficient experience of safe touch and calming regulation this may be a priority to help the brain to develop access to thinking, judging and evaluating mechanisms. Safe touch is one of the key ways of regulating children's emotions but it is a strategy that staff will use only under supervision and in line with this whole school policy on safe touch.

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 and then regulating it down talking slowly, firmly and quietly in an unhurried and unflustered way

What is Safe Touch?

The developmentally appropriate and therapeutic use of safe touch is defined by situations in which abstinence would actually be inhumane, unkind and potentially psychologically or neuro- biologically damaging.

Examples include the empirically backed beneficial use of touch in the comforting of a child who is in an acute state of distress and/or out of control. Not to reach out to the child in such circumstances could be re-traumatising and damaging, confirming or inviting anti-social behaviour patterns. Abstinence in the face of 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.

In addition, gentle safe holding in line with the school policy on Positive Handling (Team Teach) is appropriate if a child:

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

Such necessary interventions are fully in line with guidelines set out in the Government Document 'Use of reasonable force – advice for headteachers, staff and governing bodies'.

Trained Team Teach staff members have been thoroughly trained in the safest and gentlest means of holding a child (Team Teach) which is designed to enable the child to feel safe and soothed whilst bringing them down from uncontrolled states of hyper arousal. **Such interventions are deemed to be Reasonable, proportionate and necessary whilst always being in the best interests of the pupil.** Without this intervention, the child can be left at risk of actual physical or psychological harm.

Why is touch an important part of our work?

Research shows clearly that 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 experience having their strongest emotions contained, validated, accepted and soothed by a significant adult.

If children are behaving in inappropriate, threatening, dangerous, aggressive or dysregulated ways they have not yet learned how their strongest emotional reactions can be contained, channelled and communicated safely.

In recognition of this, under agreed and supervised conditions, staff will consider using safe touch as one of the means available to them for:

- Calming a distressed child
- Contain a dysregulated child
- Affirm or encourage an anxious child or a child with low self-esteem.

Appropriate and Inappropriate Touch

Our policy rests on the belief that each staff member must appreciate the difference between appropriate and inappropriate touch and will need to demonstrate a clear understanding of the

difference, acknowledging 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 or as a means to ensure compliance.

All staff should ensure the following guidelines are adhered to:

- Parents/Carers should be informed of the school policy around touch. Discussion with parents and pupils about how comfortable their child is with safe touch should be held at the induction meeting. For some pupils, safe touch will not be comfortable for them and this should be communicated to staff.
- Staff members should agree the use of safe touch in discussion with the leadership team and its use regularly reviewed.
- Staff should follow the safeguarding policy at all times (always keep the door open when on your own with a child).
- Use brief, gentle contact on open or clothed parts of the body: hands, arms, shoulders, head, hair.

Unsafe Touch

At no point and under no circumstances should staff members use touch to satisfy their own need for physical contact or reassurance. Staff need to show awareness of touch that is invasive or which could be confusing, traumatising or experienced as eroticising in any way what so ever.

Staff must always be particularly sensitive to pupils who are demonstrating that they are not comfortable with touch even if it appears to be appropriate to the member of staff. It is vital for a member of staff to think about what they represent to a particular child. A child's history may also influence who represents a 'safe' adult to them. Additionally, some children may be used to experiencing different levels or types of touch as part of their cultural upbringing.

Should any intimate touch be used it would be deemed as a serious breach and will warrant the highest level of disciplinary action.

What about other physical contact with pupils? (2013, Crown op cit)

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.

Some 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
- High five or hand shake greeting
- 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
- Manual handling
- Physio
- Body awareness/dance massage

Tiverton School is committed to safeguarding and promoting the welfare of children and young people and expects all staff and volunteers to share this commitment.