

Baginton Fields School

Safe Touch and Safe Holding Policy



"Dedicated to delivering inspirational learning experiences"

Written summer 2021

Next review summer 2024

Named persons with responsibility:

Alison Francis- Headteacher
Franck Lavie- Designated Safeguarding Lead
Helen Bishton- Behaviour
Mia Webster- Thrive Practitioner
Sharon Davies- Team Teach Trainer

To whom does this policy apply?

It applies to all staff and students working within Baginton Fields School.

Named members of staff need to have received Team Teach training to know how and when to hold students in safe ways within governmental guidelines. As a Thrive Licensed Practitioner, these trained delegates are then trained by Thrive staff to combine their practice with the Thrive Approach™ so they can identify and use safe touch as a developmental intervention.

Why have a policy on touch?

In order to protect students and school staff from allegations under Child Protection procedures, many schools, education authorities and academies have adopted 'No Touch' policies. However, such policies do not address the emotional health and social wellbeing needs of our students.

This school (Baginton Fields School) is adopting an informed, evidence-based decision to allow safe touch in special cases as a developmentally appropriate intervention that will aid healthy emotional growth and learning.

Research

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 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 student, to contain an angry or wild student and/or encourage or affirm an anxious student or to support a student 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 key ways 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 regulating it down
- Talking slowly firmly and quietly in an unhurried unflustered way
- Providing clear predictable consistently held boundaries

The developmentally appropriate (and reparative) 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 neuro-biologically damaging as well as confirming or inviting anti-social behaviour patterns.

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.

Moreover, gentle safe holding is appropriate if a child:

- is hurting themselves or others,
- (or is likely to hurt themselves and/or others) or
- is damaging property, and/or
- is incensed and out of control, so that all communication attempts to engage them 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.' (DfEE 1998) and 'Use of Reasonable Force' (2013)

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

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

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

- Providing a guide at times of transition or change of lesson activity;
- When comforting a distressed student;
- To provide reassurance;
- Greetings such as a handshake;
- When a student 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;
- To protect a student from danger;
- To give personal care as per care plan;
- Support a student when changing for swimming etc;
- For moving and handling students with physical disability, for physio or OT programme;
- Intensive interaction;
- Rebound therapy;
- Hand/ foot massage for short periods in a planned manner;
- Deep pressure applied according to sensory profile/ Behaviour Support Plan;
- And at times when Physical Intervention is necessary.

Appropriate and inappropriate touch

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.

Equally, when a child is in deep distress, the Thrive Licensed Practitioner is trained to know when and how sufficient connection and psychological holding have been or can be provided/established without touching.

Guidelines for the use of Safe Touch

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.
- Parents/carers should be informed if their child or young person is to be part of the Individual Thrive programme
- Parents/carers wherever possible should be involved in the Thrive Assessments and Action Plans and be regularly updated as to their child's progress through the program
- Teachers/support staff should be trained in the Thrive approach
- Teachers/support staff should be trained in all aspects of safe touch
- Staff members should agree the use of safe touch in discussion with their manager.
- Students 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 student in preparation.
- An Individual Behaviour Support Plan or Safety Plan should be completed and its use recorded and monitored. This will supplement the Thrive Action Plan which will also include the use of safe touch as a strategy.
- TWO Adult rule: No adult should use safe 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.

Unsafe touch

- At no point and under no circumstances should staff members use touch to satisfy their own need for physical contact or reassurance.
- No unsafe touch: All staff are trained to be fully cognisant of touch that is invasive or which could be confusing, traumatising or experienced as eroticising in any way whatsoever.
- Serious Breach: Should any such touch be used it would be deemed as the most serious breach of the Code of Conduct warranting the highest level of disciplinary action.

Safeguarding members of staff (extract taken from Safeguarding and Child Protection policy)

Staff should always be clear about the reasons for physical contact with a student and be able to explain this if questioned. There could be times when physical contact is misconstrued by others.

Where possible student consent should be sought. In the case of non-verbal students, staff need to inform them of their actions and why they are necessary, staff should then ensure they

take care to notice and respond to any signs that might indicate that physical contact or touch might not be welcomed. Staff should also make sure that they observe closely any behavioural changes that indicate the need to stop or reduce contact.

Staff should not favour any individual child.

The area between the student's waist and mid-thigh or near the chest should not be touched in normal circumstances.

Where a student tries to become more physically closer than appropriate, it is important that they do not feel rejected, but are gently guided to a more appropriate behaviour by a positive suggestion, i.e., if a student goes to hug a member of staff, they should reposition the student to their side and this should be for a short time period only.

Never kiss a student, and do not encourage students to kiss an adult other than their parents. Students should not sit on the laps of any member of staff.

As far as possible all physical contact with a student should be in view of other adults. As far as possible staff should avoid being alone with a student, if this is necessary then staff should ensure that a door is open and that they are in view of any passing student or member of staff.

At times of personal care staff should ensure that the door is open but the curtain drawn to protect privacy.

Great care must be taken to ensure that all physical contact is specifically and only for the purpose of the operation being carried out.

Staff should remember that they are role models for the students and should model appropriate behaviour through their own actions.

If staff have any concerns regarding appropriate touch or observe any practice from others that raises concern, they should discuss this immediately with the DSL or Headteacher.

Supporting Policies:

Behaviour policy

Care and Control policy

Safeguarding and Child Protection policy