



TOUCH POLICY

At our school, we have a touch policy. This means that as a member of staff you are able to physically guide, touch or prompt children in appropriate way at the appropriate times. It is extremely important that you have read and understood this policy to appreciate the reasons why we may choose to hold/touch children and the appropriate ways in which we do so.

Why Do We Use Touch?

We believe that every child attending school should experience positive and nurturing touch. This belief shapes our whole school approach to promoting the physical, social, spiritual, mental and emotional wellbeing of all pupils and staff.

We acknowledge the growing culture that believes it is safer to refrain from any touch due to anxieties that allegations of abuse may be made and that indeed instances of abuse do occur in the world. Staff are also aware of, and highly skilled in, the use of other methods of comfort, de-escalation, and the control of undesirable behaviour. However, we believe that in order to provide a good quality emotional environment touch is important to children.

Children also need to be educated in what constitutes appropriate touch, so that they can recognize the difference between appropriate and inappropriate touch. This helps each child to respond appropriately to others and to seek help in threatening situations.

We may choose to hold children for a variety of reasons, but generally we would normally do so for either comfort or reward, or especially in times of distress where not to do so would be deemed unkind.

We may also need to physically touch, guide or prompt students if they require personal care, assistance with writing, eating, dressing etc. If pupils need guiding then this should be done by a gentle hand under the elbow.

On occasions we may need to hold pupils in order to keep them safe. See also 'Positive Handling' Policy.

How Do We Use Touch

Appropriate touch:

By 'Appropriate Touch' we mean that touch should not be invasive, humiliating, sexual or causing physical or emotional discomfort.

Appropriate places to touch are; shoulder, arms, elbows, back and hands. Very occasionally in the Early Years settings staff might allow children to sit on their lap (upper thighs) with a sideways seating position but this is not to be encouraged.

If a pupil is not happy about the 'touch' they should be given the opportunity to decline the physical contact.

Hugging

At this school, we encourage staff that are using touch for comfort or reward to use a 'school hug'. This is a sideways on hug, with the adult putting their hands on the children's shoulders. This discourages 'front on' hugging, and the adult's hands on the shoulder limits the ability of the child to turn themselves into you. This can be done either standing or sitting.

Hand-Holding

The school accepts that there will be times when holding hands with children is appropriate especially with those in the early years and particular pupils with educational needs.

We recognise that children sometimes enjoy being able to hold hands with adults around them. This is perfectly acceptable when the hand holding is compliant particularly when children are seeking reassurance during separation from their main carer or if they are upset. Other situations may include; holding a child's hand when crossing a road.

Prolonged handholding should be discouraged.

However, if the handholding is being used by an adult as a method of control to move children, this can become a restraint and the 'Positive handling Policy' guidance should be followed.

In summary, it is generally deemed appropriate to touch others on the upper arm which would appear to be regarded as a neutral zone in most cultures.

Peer massage

We sometimes use peer massage as a means to support children's well-being. It can help:

- To improve concentration
- To improve co-operation
- To increase a stronger sense of self and higher self-esteem/confidence
- To reduce aggressive behaviour
- To encourage a calmer classroom environment
- To encourage empathy and respect for their peers
- To enable the children to recognize difference between good and bad touch
- To encourage a more relaxed and focused feeling in the school

What is peer massage?

Relaxation is a skill that can be learnt. There are a variety of different approaches that can be used, the most important thing is finding what works for different children/adults. By learning to recognise our own feelings and states of tension, relaxation can begin to be used to help control them at will.

Massage in Schools is a programme of positive touch and clothed peer massage. The children learn a simple massage sequence which is given by the children to each other, working in pairs. They wear their normal school clothes and give massage to each other on the back, shoulders, head and arms.

Children have the right to choose whether or not to take part in a session. It takes 10-15 minutes. (A child not wanting a massage is asked to sit and watch, do an air massage or massage a teddy or cushion if appropriate) The child should always be able to see the other children during the massage.

NOTES

Please note that although we have a touch policy and believe that contingent touch can be a positive experience for the children that we care for, this does not mean that you have to touch children, and it should be realised that some children will not want to be touched. Please respect this.

Staff have a 'Duty of Care' towards pupils in their care. Therefore if a pupil is likely to be a risk from harm if you do not physically intervene in an emergency situation, you must take action. The action you take will be dependent on the dynamic risk assessment that you make at that moment in time.

Parents/carers will be made aware of this policy when their child is admitted to this school.