

Winford C of E Primary School

'Safe Touch' Policy



Together we Flourish

*Cooperation-happiness-forgiveness-hope-wisdom-peace-respect-
determination-curiosity-honesty-trust-patience*

Policy Written by	Nik Gardner
Ratified by governors on	September 2024
Due for renewal on	September 2026

Introduction

The term Physical contact is used to describe the use of touch for many purposes in numerous different contexts. This is a controversial and complex area. There have been instances where schools have had a no touch policy and totally forbade staff from touching children. This is actually against all statutory guidance and is not tenable.

The Children Act 1989 makes it clear that the paramount consideration in any decision should be in the best interest of the child concerned. Paramount in this context means that it should be the first thing people think about and it takes precedence over other considerations. We have a policy on safe touch in order to protect pupils and school staff from allegations. Winford School is adopting an informed, decision to allow safe touch in special cases as a developmentally appropriate intervention that will aid healthy emotional growth and learning.

Physical contact should always be about meeting the needs of the child. Actions that can be ambiguous are open to misinterpretation. Staff should always think before making any physical contact. They should be clear about why their actions are in the best interest of the child concerned. They should remember that some children like physical contact and some do not.

If a restraint is ever required, it is preferred to consult with staff members that have received Team Teach training if at all possible.

This policy applies to all staff at Winford School and to all activities, on or off-site and at all times.

Rationale and research

Children learn who they are and how the world is, by forming relationships with people and things around them. The quality of a child's relationship with significant adults is vital to their healthy development and emotional health and wellbeing. This policy rests on the belief that every member of staff needs to know the difference between appropriate and inappropriate touch.

Many of the pupils who require emotional support from school may have been subject to trauma or distress or may not have had a positive start in life. It is with this in mind that staff seek to respond to children's developmental needs by using appropriate safe touch.

Our policy takes into account the extensive neurobiological research and studies relating to attachment theory and child development that identify safe touch as a positive contribution to brain development, mental health and the development of social skills. We have adopted an informed, evidence based decision to allow safe touch as an appropriate action that will aid healthy growth, emotional health and wellbeing.

Touch is recognised as being a physical way of soothing, calming and containing distress. Berne identified touch as a human 'hunger' necessary for survival and well-being. Many research studies have indicated the necessity of human contact and touch in the healthy development of pupils. It is a factor in pupils who experience neglect and 'fail to thrive'.

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 as a developmental experience. The brain does not develop self-soothing neuronal pathways unless and until this safe emotional regulation has been experienced within a positive relationship with a significant adult. Where pupils 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.

It is essential for all pupils 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.

When do we use safe touch?

If pupils are behaving in unacceptable, threatening, dangerous, aggressive or out of control ways, 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 dysregulated child and/or encourage or affirm an anxious child or to support a child with low self-esteem.

Other means of calming, soothing and containing pupils' 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 way
- Providing clear predictable consistently held boundaries

The developmentally appropriate 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 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 neurobiologically damaging as well as confirming or inviting anti-social behaviour patterns.

Moreover, gentle safe holding is appropriate if a child:

- is hurting himself/herself or others (or is likely to hurt)
- is damaging school property
- is severely disrupting the learning of others (where it is not possible to move others out of the way)

Different types of touch

There are four different types of touch and physical contact that may be used, these are:

1. Casual / informal / incidental touch

Staff use touch with pupils as part of a normal relationship, for example comforting a child, giving reassurance and congratulating. This might include putting an arm out to bar an exit from a room, taking a child by the hand, patting on the back or putting an arm around the shoulders. The benefit of this action is often proactive and can prevent a situation from escalating.

2. General reparative touch

This is used by staff working with children who are having difficulties with their emotions. Healthy emotional development requires safe touch as a means of calming, soothing and containing distress for a frightened, angry or sad child. Touch used to regulate a child's emotions triggers the release of the calming chemical oxytocin in the body. Reparative touch may include stroking a back or an arm, rocking gently, cuddling, tickling or sitting on an adult's lap (lap cushion may be used), hand or foot massage.

3. Contact/interactive Play

Contact play is used by staff adopting a role similar to a parent in a healthy child-parent relationship. This will only take place when the child has developed a trusting relationship with the adult and when they feel completely comfortable and at ease with this type of contact. Contact play may include an adult chasing and catching the child or an adult and child playing a game of building towers with their hands.

This sort of play releases the following chemicals in the brain:

- Opioids - to calm and soothe and give pleasure;
- Dopamine - to focus, be alert and concentrate;
- BDNF (Brain Derived Neurotrophic Factor) - a brain 'fertiliser' that encourages growth. Interactive play may include: throwing cushions to each other or using soft foam bats to 'fence' each other.

4. Positive handling (calming a dysregulating child) -

The restraining techniques used should be familiar to the staff involved, and they should be appropriately trained and be able to use them safely. A child who is in a state of dysregulation and has no mechanism for self-calming or regulating their strong emotional reactions may be physically contained by staff.

We would recommend that Staff employ the safest and gentlest means of holding a child, which is entirely designed to enable the child to feel safe and soothed and bring him or her down from an uncontrollable state of hyper arousal. Maintaining boundaries in such cases can be a vital corrective emotional experience, without which the child can be left at risk of actual physical or psychological damage.

The brain does not develop self-soothing neuronal pathways unless this safe emotional regulation has been experienced. Physical containment of a dysregulating child can be the only way to provide the reassurance necessary to restore calm. 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 in the Education Act Section 550A.

During any incident of restraint, staff must seek as far as possible to:

- Lower the child's level of anxiety during the restraint by continually offering verbal reassurance and avoiding generating fear of injury in the child;
- Cause minimum level of restriction of movement of limbs consistent with the danger of injury (so, for example, will not restrict the movement of the child's legs when they are on the ground unless in an enclosed space where flailing legs are likely to be injured);
- Ensure at least one other member of staff is present wherever possible.

Steps to Take Before Positive Handling

Prevention strategies and calming measures will be employed and the following action should be taken before a restraint is used.

- Applying the schools behaviour policy

- Conversation, distraction, coaxing skills, gentle persuasion or redirection to other activities (e.g. touching the child's arm and leading him / her away from danger, gently stroking the child's shoulder);
- Put distance between the child and others - move others to a safer place;
- Calmly remove anything that could be used as a weapon, including hot drinks, objects, furniture;
- Use seclusion only if necessary for a short period while waiting for help, preferably where a member of staff can observe the child;
- Keep talking calmly to the child, explain what is happening and why, how it can stop, and what will happen next;

Although these techniques to calm a dysregulated child are seen as best practice, individual children may require techniques to calm down. Reference to a child's Individual Behaviour Care Plan is required for more information.

Guidance

This is in line with The **1996 Education Act (Section 550A)** that stipulates that reasonable physical intervention may be used to prevent a pupil from significant harm to self or others, damage to property, or committing a criminal offence. Any staff member undertaking safe touch or a restraint of any kind should never do this without at least one witness. The 'help' protocol will be followed and all necessary staff will receive appropriate and timely training in line with team teach guidance.

Government guidance also specifies other examples 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 physical education (PE) lessons or sports coaching
- To give first aid

It is important that the age and stage of development of every child informs how adults are with that child. Any member of staff who is concerned about appropriate touch should discuss this with their line manager.

Recording and Reporting

Where an adult has held a child using a Team Teach restrictive physical intervention, this will be recorded on CPOMS.

Any child who has significant SEMH needs and physical restraint may be necessary, will have a positive handling plan completed with teaching staff and shared with parents/carers. Any plan will be reviewed at least annually and discontinued as necessary.

The school will ensure that “significant incidents” (where a member of staff has used a physical intervention on a pupil) are recorded on CPOMS and reported to parents and all agencies involved with the child as appropriate.

Parents/ carers will be informed by a member of the senior leadership team of any significant incident when a restraint has been used, ideally by telephone and as soon as possible after the incident.

Complaints

All school users and stakeholders have a right to complain about actions taken by school staff including use of force. If a specific allegation is made against a member of staff, then the school will follow the related policy and procedures

Other complaints will be dealt with via the school’s complaints procedure

Links to other policies

This policy should be used in conjunction with the following policies:

- Child protection and Safeguarding Policy
- Behaviour Policy
- Whistle Blowing Policy
- Complaints Policy

