

Sefton Park Infant & Junior Schools

Safe Touch and Positive Handling Policy

This policy should be read in conjunction with other school policies: ·

Positive Behaviour Policy

· Safeguarding (Child Protection)

· Intimate care Guidelines

· Policy and Procedures for Supporting Children with Medical Conditions ·

SEND Policy

Introduction

At Sefton Park Schools we believe that children have the right to independence, choice and inclusion, and we seek to provide opportunities for personal growth and emotional health and wellbeing. Children who are unable to control their actions or unable to appreciate danger have a right to be protected; as do those around them and staff have a duty of care, for all, to exercise.

Rationale

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.

Many of the pupils who require extensive emotional support from our school may have been subject to trauma or distress or may find the world confusing due to a disability. It is with this in mind that staff seek to respond to children's developmental needs by using appropriate safe touch.

Our school 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.

Our policy rests on the belief that every member of staff needs to know the difference between appropriate and inappropriate touch. Hence, staff need to demonstrate a clear understanding of the difference. Equally, when a child is in

deep distress, staff need to know when and how sufficient connection and psychological holding can be provided *without* touching.

All staff need to be clearly aware of procedures within this policy. The policy should be seen in the wider context of the 'Positive Behaviour Policy' which aims to promote positive values and good behaviour choices.

Why have a policy on touch?

In order to protect children and school staff from allegations under Child Protection procedures many schools, education authorities and academies have adopted 'No Touch' policies.

Sefton Park Schools 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 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, 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 wild child and/or encourage or affirm an anxious child or to support a child with low self-esteem.

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. 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 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; and
- To give first aid.

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 squeezing an arm. When using reparative touch regularly, we will do this in agreement with parents.

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 Neurotropic Factor) – a brain 'fertiliser' that encourages growth.

4. Positive handling (calming a dysregulated child)

Trained staff will restrain a child when behaviour is :

- Unacceptably threatening, dangerous, aggressive or out of control; · In order to avoid harm to self or others or damage to property;

- To avoid an offence being committed and / or a breakdown of good order and discipline.

The holding 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 will be physically contained by staff. This kind of containment will usually involve two members of staff, one sat either side, holding the child in a 'Team Teach' (Appendix A) manner. It may also be necessary for another member of staff to control a child's kicking legs. Staff will employ the safest and gentlest means of holding a child, which is entirely designed to enable the child to feel safe and soothed, 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 'Use of Reasonable Force' (DfE 2013)

During any incident of physical holding intervention, 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 the 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.

Staff should **always** avoid touching or holding a pupil in a way that might be considered indecent or harmful.

In **exceptional** circumstances, when there is an immediate risk of injury, (e.g. to prevent a pupil running on to a busy road, hitting someone or throwing

something) staff may need to take any necessary action that is consistent with the concept of 'reasonable force'.

Any action which could exacerbate the situation should be avoided. The age and level of understanding of the pupil is very relevant in these circumstances. Physical intervention to enforce compliance with staff instruction is likely to be increasingly inappropriate with older pupils. It should never be used as a substitute for good behaviour management.

Steps to take before Positive Handling

Prevention strategies and calming measures which will be employed and the following action should be taken, as much as possible, before a restraint is used:

- 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).
- encouraging the pupil to help him/herself feel more secure by wrapping a blanket tightly around him/herself or holding on tightly to a large cushion or stuffed toy.
- 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.
- to prevent a child continuing to pose harm in a dangerous situation, advise others to leave but remain with the child.
- use seclusion only if necessary for a short period while waiting for help, preferably where a staff member 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.
- use first aid procedures in the event of injury or physical distress when safe to do so.
- adults in charge should take a calm, measured approach to a situation, and never give the impression that they have lost their temper, or are acting out of anger, frustration, or to punish a pupil. All trained staff should apply their 'Team Teach' restraint training knowledge.

Staff should always avoid touching or holding a pupil in a way that might be considered indecent. In exceptional circumstances, when there is an immediate

risk of injury, (e.g. to prevent a pupil running on to a busy road, hitting someone or throwing something) staff may need to take any necessary action that is consistent with the concept of 'reasonable force'.

Any action which could exacerbate the situation should be avoided. The age and level of understanding of the pupil is very relevant in these circumstances. Physical intervention to enforce compliance with staff instruction is likely to be increasingly inappropriate with older pupils. It should never be used as a substitute for good behaviour management.

No adult should use safe holding when alone with a child.

Planning for Challenging Behaviour

Obviously some situations may need immediate action but if the school is aware that a pupil is likely to behave in a way that may require holding or restraint, it should plan how to respond if the situation arises. This will be done using the school Positive Handling Plan (PHP) and such planning needs to address:

- a Risk Assessment of the pupil's behaviour
- positive strategies for the pupil i.e. preventative strategies and skills to calm, defuse, divert or de-escalate the behaviour using a Behaviour Escalation Summary Chart (BESC)
- involving parents so that they are fully aware of how the school may respond
- briefing staff – ensure that everyone knows what action should be taken and that everyone responds consistently
- ensuring that additional support can be summoned if appropriate · the need to take specific advice about the safest way to hold pupils with specific health needs

Who can use positive handling?

Key members of staff have been Team Teach trained; these staff are listed in Appendix B. This training supports staff in using pre-emptive and responsive positive handling strategies and techniques. The school office holds an up to date list of these and copies of their certificates. As far as is possible the staff using positive handling will be those which are Team Teach trained however,

there may be occasions when this is not possible. In an emergency, for example, if a child was in immediate risk of injury or on the point of inflicting injury on someone else, any member of staff would be entitled to intervene. All staff have

a duty of care and may need to be involved in a positive handling scenario. In these circumstances a trained member of staff will replace them as soon as is possible.

Recording Incidents and Sharing Information

Immediately following the incident where positive handling is used, the staff member should tell a member of the Senior Leadership Team. All staff involved in any positive handling will be allowed time to seek medical attention if necessary, to recover and to be debriefed by senior colleagues.

An ABC form and the Bound and Numbered Book should be completed as soon as possible afterwards. A note of the number in the Bound and Numbered Book should be made on the ABC sheet to enable cross-referencing. Staff will identify what actions would be appropriate for future use and prevention, including environmental / policy / procedural change.

The Bound and Numbered book is kept in the locked filing cabinet in the Inclusion Leader's office.

Parents should be informed of the incident, and given the opportunity to discuss it. The Inclusion Leader/Designated Safeguarding Lead will need to consider whether parents should be told immediately, or at the end of the school day, and whether they should be informed orally or in writing.

All staff involved in any positive handling will be allowed time to seek medical attention if necessary, to recover and to be debriefed by colleagues nominated by the Principal. Written records will be completed within 24 hours, if practical.

The Inclusion Leader will monitor and sign the Bound and Numbered book daily.

If a Positive Handling Plan is in place this should be reviewed and updated if necessary following a Positive Handling incident. If there is no plan in place then it is essential that a meeting be arranged as soon as possible to create a plan, this should involve parents as well as relevant staff.

The school's Bound and Numbered Book will be reviewed every half term by the Safeguarding Team. The information will be used to review Positive Handling Plans for individual children, staff training needs and relevant school policies.

Further information can be found at www.team-teach.co.uk