

Shirehampton Primary School

Touch Policy



Touch Policy

1. Introduction – Statement of Intent

Our policy on touch has been developed with due consideration of neuro-biological research and studies based on and around the positive impact of touch (Reference - Margaret Sutherland Book - "The Science of Parenting" - ISBN 1-4053-1486-9). This Policy also takes into account the non-statutory advice issued by the DfE in July 2011, namely 'Use of Reasonable Force - Advice for Head teachers, Staff and Governing Bodies'.

The Governing Body aim to ensure that all staff and authorised volunteers feel confident and young people feel secure with all forms of appropriate safe touch. It is not illegal to touch a pupil, but touch should not be invasive. There are occasions when physical contact, other than reasonable force, with a young person in school is proper and necessary.

The importance of touch should not be underestimated as it can:

- demonstrate affection
- show acceptance
- sooth and help adults attune to the child
- emphasise the spoken word
- provide reassurance
- offer an alternative to spoken communication.

Throughout this Policy document, the word 'staff' is used to include those employed at Shirehampton Primary School and authorised regular volunteers i.e. those who have been provided with additional training and guidance in dealing with the emotional aspects of young people such as Thrive. Pupils, students and children are described as 'young people' throughout this document.

2. General

We define the appropriate use of touch as in situations in which abstinence would actually be inhumane, unkind and potentially psychologically or neurobiologically damaging. Examples include the natural and beneficial use of touch in the comforting of a young person who is in an acute state of distress. Not to reach out to the young person in such circumstances could be re-traumatising and neurobiologically damaging. Failing to physically soothe a young person when in the face of intense grief and/or upset 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 have been well researched world-wide and are well documented.) In such states of distress, touch can often be the only means of maintaining a connection with the young person when he or she can no longer hear or make use of words or soothing tone/eye contact and therefore is in danger of dissociating, with all the detrimental effects that this can bring.

Moreover, gentle safe holding is appropriate if a young person is hurting either him or herself, others, or is damaging property and is so incensed and out of control that all verbal attempts to engage him or her have failed. Such necessary interventions are fully in line with guidelines set out in the government documents "Guidance on the Use of Restrictive Physical Interventions for Staff Working with Children and Adults who display Extreme Behaviour in Association with Learning Disability and/or Autistic Spectrum Disorders (2002)" and "Guidance on the Use of Restrictive Physical Interventions for Pupils with Severe Behavioural Difficulties" (2003). The staff at Shirehampton Primary School are trained in the safest and gentlest means of holding a young person, which is entirely designed to enable him/her to feel safe and soothed and to bring him/her down from uncontrollable states of hyper-arousal. Whilst limits and boundaries in such circumstances can be a vital corrective experience, moreover, without such an intervention, the young person can be left at risk of actual physical or psychological damage.

The staff at Shirehampton Primary School initiate and respond warmly to appropriate touch from all young people. Each morning the students are both greeted into the school and then again into their individual classrooms. Interactions in the corridor or at the above times may include a physical interaction. This creates the nurturing, warm, caring environment that is so enabling for the young people attending Shirehampton Primary School.

The staff at Shirehampton Primary School are highly aware of the current atmosphere where, due to fears of abuse, touch as a natural and vital form of human connection has been almost vetoed in some schools. Our policy adheres to the belief that every individual needs to appreciate the difference between appropriate and inappropriate touch. Staff are highly aware of both damaging and unnecessary uses of touch e.g. touch as an avoidance of the young person's feelings and emotional pain, as an avoidance of real contact, as a block to painful memories, as an ill thought out or impulsive act of futile reassurance/gratification, as a block to important therapeutic work and conflict resolution. Equally, when a young person is in deep distress, staff are aware when sufficient connection and psychological holding have been established without touching.

3. Appropriate Touch

By 'Appropriate Touch' we mean touch that is not invasive, humiliating or could possibly be considered as eroticising / flirtatious. We agree that 'appropriate' places to touch include 'shoulders, arms, back'. Staff will invite the young person to sit closely beside them and the frequent use of the 'Team Teach' hug is offered and given.

Naturally, staff are also fully aware of touch that is invasive or which could be confusing, traumatising, or experienced as eroticising in anyway whatsoever. 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.

Our Safeguarding Policy outlines the necessity to ensure all young people are safe in their bodies and their feelings and how the staff at Shirehampton Primary School work together to ensure this is the case.

Where staff are acting in the best interests of the young person, they will be supported by the school.

4. Guidance

Shirehampton Primary School staff should always consider and abide by the following points when carrying out their duties:

- Touch should not be in response to or be intended to arouse sexual expectations or feelings (Department of Health Circular LAC (1993))
- Play-fighting is not a substitute for appropriate affection towards young people, it gives confusing messages to them about personal and professional boundaries
- Where a young person requires intimate personal care, staff should ensure that student is comfortable with the staff member attending to their needs. Other staff should always be around to monitor events and the young person's privacy and dignity should always be preserved.
- Privacy issues are always to be considered. A safe environment which respects privacy and shows regard for personal boundaries will be encouraged. Thought must be given to how staff present themselves, (e.g. how they dress), and how they show professional respect when relating to each other and to young people.
- Where a member of staff feels that it would be inappropriate to respond to a young person seeking physical comfort, outward rejection should always be avoided in favour of diversion or some other such tactic and the reason, where appropriate, for avoiding physical contact should be given to the young person.
- Unwelcome touch, where a young person indicates that touch from an adult is not welcome, perhaps by moving away or flinching to avoid, the staff member should consider apologising to demonstrate a respect for personal boundaries.
- Where a child presents a danger to themselves or to others it will, at times, be necessary for staff to use means of physical intervention as described in the School Positive Handling Policy. At such times, staff should always take care to explain what they are doing and that the actions taken are for safety reasons. As the situation de-escalates, touch can be appropriately used to move from a situation of control to one of care, using the Team Teach methods such as the friendly hold.
- Clarity should always be our aim. A young person should never be left in any doubt about the member of staff's intention behind any physical contact, even if it is felt that the child may not have the cognitive understanding or reasoning. Clumsy or unconsidered use of touch may be experienced by a child as being confusing, uncomfortable or distressing. A decisive, firm and planned form of open touch within an appropriate context and a safe relationship is less likely to lead to unease and confusion.

All staff have a responsibility to ensure that all practice at Shirehampton Primary School is safe and appropriate for both themselves and the child and is in line with

Health and safety guidelines. We should all expect to be observed by others and be prepared to discuss any concerns we have in a professional manner. Any member of staff who is concerned about another member of staff's practice should discuss their concerns with the Head Teacher.

5. Complimentary Policies

This Policy must be read in conjunction with the following School Policies:

- Safeguarding Policy
- Behaviour and Discipline Policy
- Anti- Bullying Policy
- Equalities Scheme
- Positive Handling Policy

This Policy was first implemented by the Governing Body in July 2008.

Date: April 2013

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