

Reviewed: April 2018

Touch Policy

INTRODUCTION

At Northumberland Pupil Referral Unit we are aware of the importance of touch to promote children's learning and emotional wellbeing. From the moment we are born we use our sense of touch to find out about the world around us. Touch plays a significant role in our early understanding of our surroundings but touch also enables us to feel secure and cared for. Research shows that 80% of our communication is non-verbal.

It is essential that this policy is viewed in the context that all staff are familiar with the school's Child Protection Policy and procedures. If staff are concerned about a child's actions or comments this should be recorded and discussed with the school's Designated Person for Child Protection (Designated Safeguarding Lead).

Enabling Children to Feel Valued as Individuals through Touch

Non-verbal communication is a very important part of our relationships. As adults we know that if we are greeted with a handshake as we enter a room we are more likely to feel relaxed. We only have to consider the language of touch to be able to understand how important physical contact is to our emotional wellbeing. We might say 'Your comments touched me deeply' or 'Well done, give yourself a pat on the back.'

Research has shown that touch has a very positive effect on emotional and physical wellbeing. At the PRU we believe that it is important to be open and honest about the ways in which touch can be used to enhance children's educational experience.

Adults in the school will:

- respect individuals' personal and intimate space
- have an understanding that not all people feel comfortable about physical contact and that they have the right to have their feelings respected
- acknowledge children's learning both verbally and through touch, where appropriate e.g. hand on the shoulder, handshake, pat on the back, high five or light brief touch on the hand
- welcome parents and visitors to the classroom both verbally and if appropriate with a handshake or light touch
- model appropriate behaviour, through greeting people with a handshake and acknowledging achievements of other adults through hand on the shoulder, handshake, pat on the back
- reward appropriate behaviour e.g. asking children to pat themselves on the back or shake hands
- approach distressed children from the side by offering to sit with them or by offering to hold their hand or putting an arm around them. Occasionally a child requires a higher level of physical contact e.g. a hug.

- ensure that positive touch takes place appropriately, always in public and sometimes with verbal explanation e.g. 'You look upset, do you need a cuddle?'
- follow the school's related policies e.g. Physical Intervention, Behaviour, Child Protection

Pupils within the school will be taught to:

- respect individual's personal and intimate space
- comfort distressed children with their agreement by offering to sit with them and by offering to hold their hand or put their arm around them
- use a setting specific acknowledgement of achievement e.g. give themselves a pat on the back
- discuss their feelings and ask for support from others if they need it
- understand the importance of appropriate touch for their wellbeing
- respond appropriately when others ask them not to touch them and seek appropriate adult help if necessary
- feel confident about asking others not to touch them
- discuss and develop their understanding of positive and appropriate touch when working with other children

How do we use Touch

Hugging:

At the PRU 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:

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. However, if hand-holding is being used by an adult as a method of control to move children, this can become a restraint. Therefore, we encourage the use of the 'school hand hold'. This can be done by the adult holding their arm out and the child is encouraged to wrap their arm around the adult's lower arm. The adult's other hand can then be placed over the child's for a little security if it is required.

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.

Lap Sitting:

At the PRU we actively discourage lap-sitting. Children should be taught to seek comfort/attention through other means, for example the 'school hand-hold or hug'. If a child attempts to sit on your lap, explain to them that this is not what we do here and ask them to sit next to you if it is appropriate.

At times, children may in crisis or distress hold you in a way which is not described above (e.g. 'front on' or hug/lap sitting). If this should happen please ensure that you have informed a senior member of staff to protect yourself. You may be asked to make a note of this, this will be in order to record and monitor the amount of times the child is doing this to staff to see whether this is a 'controlling' behaviour, or whether the child is displaying distressed behaviour regularly.

Please note that although we have a Touch Policy and believe that contingent touch can be a positive experience for the children 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 the children in their care. Therefore if a child 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.

Recording

All positive touch will be recorded on CPOMS under the Physical Intervention, Positive touch category.

_____ **Chair**

_____ **Date**