

Appropriate Touch Policy & Guidance

Yew Tree Primary School



Date of Policy:	January 2025
Responsibility:	SENDCO/SLT
Review Date:	January 2028
Consultation:	This policy was developed with staff & governors following best practice advice. This policy should be read in conjunction with our Positive Handling Policy.

ETHOS STATEMENT

It is the aim of the Governing Body of Yew Tree Primary School to develop policies and procedures which support the school's vision of:

“Learning Without Limits”

INTRODUCTION

Yew Tree Primary School recognises that there are occasions where members of staff may require physical contact with pupils in their care. It is also acknowledged that members of staff can be put into situations where physical restraint of a pupil may be necessary to prevent deliberate self-harm or harm to others and/or the environment.

The 'Guidelines to Safer Working Practice for Adults who work with Children and Young People' (AMA 2007) state that all children and young people have the right to be treated with respect and dignity, including in those circumstances where they display difficult or challenging behaviour.

This policy is intended to set out guidelines for appropriate touch and to support members of staff working with children in making sensible judgements about physical contact needed with children. It outlines ways to prevent misinterpretation of any physical contact with children as well as making it clear situations that should be avoided if possible.

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. There is a common myth that school staff are not allowed to ever touch a child.

The Children Act 1989 and 2004 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. There are many circumstances where touch is a necessity.

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.

RATIONALE

Children have the right to independence and choices, and we seek to provide opportunities for personal growth and emotional health and wellbeing. However, rights also involve responsibilities, such as not harming other people's rights.

Children unable to control their actions or unable to appreciate danger have a right to be protected; and staff have a duty of care to exercise. 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 children 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.

Attachment theory and child development identifies 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 'Behaviour Policy', 'Positive Handling' and the 'Safeguarding and Child Protection Policy'. Staff always need to be mindful of appropriate behaviour.

Any physical interventions identified in the 'Positive Handling Policy' are logged in a bound book in line with Team Teach Practice. Personal Support Plans are written for children where physical interventions may be used more frequently along with intimate care plans as and when needed. These are shared with and signed for by parents.

GUIDELINES

Different types of touch

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 taking a child by the hand (if age appropriate), 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. Reparative touch may include stroking a back, squeezing an arm, rocking gently, cuddling or massage. Due to the complex needs of some of our children reparative touch may be used with children. However, any type of touch which places the child or staff member at risk, e.g. massage, should be considered carefully and agreed as part of a personal support plan.

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 rough and tumble, being supported to explore in messy play, being held or rocked in physical play or being helped to access playground equipment. Consideration should be given to the touch required for children and this should be documented within a personal support plan.

4. Positive handling (calming a dysregulating child)

Staff may use force as is reasonable in all the circumstances in order to prevent a pupil from doing, or continuing to do, a type of behaviour that may result in them harming themselves or another. This needs to be read in conjunction with the Behaviour and Positive Handling Policy. It may also be a way of providing support for the child in order for them to regulate their emotions or their sensory needs. This will be in line with their Sensory Diets which are monitored by Occupational Therapists and shared with parents.

5. Using Touch to Communicate and Teach

Due to the complex nature of some children's needs it is often appropriate and very important to use touch to communicate with them e.g. Through on body signing or to alert a child that they are about to be asked to be moved or to guide children in completing a task as part of a learning program or to find out about something by exploring materials and objects.

6. In Self-care activities

Some children may need their personal care needs met by staff and these children will be assisted to take part in self-care activities such as feeding, washing or dressing. Children will also have their intimate care needs met when having their nappy or pad change, (further details can be found in our Intimate Care Policy).

GENERAL EXPECTATIONS

It is accepted that younger children, in particular, are very tactile and often seek physical contact with adults. Where this is the case then the following expectations should be met:

- Physical contact as a form of punishment is absolutely unacceptable. This includes contact such as rough handling, shoving, shaking, hair pulling, slapping, spanking, hitting etc.
- Children should never be tickled as it can be over stimulating and is considered to be a deceptive device that may lead to more inappropriate touching, e.g. fondling.
- Children should never be allowed to stand in between an adult's legs. Instead, they should be gently guided to the adult's side where they can be spoken to at eye-to-eye level.

- Children sitting on laps should be avoided. However, when this is necessary it should be for a short period of time and in the presence of another adult where at all possible.
- Kissing and other similar forms of affection are unacceptable.
- Children should not be taken to an isolated area where they cannot be viewed by others (unless there is an agreed Care Plan) where a member of staff has responsibility for applying or administering medication).

If a member of staff feels that an act of physical contact between themselves and a child may be misinterpreted then they should speak to the Head Teacher or Deputy Head Teacher immediately.