Evergreen
Primary Academy

Safe Touch Procedure
September 2026
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The developmentally necessary experience of safe touch

Children learn who they are and how the world is in relationship. The quality of the child's relationships with significant adults is key to their healthy development and 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 children. It is a factor in children who experience neglect and 'fail to thrive'.

Context

Our policy on Safe Touch (sometimes termed 'Safe Holding') has been developed in the context of the local authorities' Child Protection Procedures and Policies and Government guidance and takes into account the extensive neurobiological research and other empirical studies relating to attachment theory and child development that identify safe touch as a positive contribution to brain development, emotional regulation, mental health and the development of pro-social skills.

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. Evergreen Primary Academy 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, 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 a dysregulated or unsafe child and/or encourage or affirm an anxious child or to support a child with low self-esteem. Safe touch used to calm, soothe and regulate a child's emotions is a needed 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 children 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. Safe touch is one of the key ways of regulating children's emotions, but it is a strategy that fully trained staff will use only under supervision.

Ways of regulating children's emotions

Other means of calming, soothing and containing children's strong emotions include:

- Slowing one's pace
- Giving appropriate space
- 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 unflustered way
- Providing clear predictable consistently held boundaries

The developmentally appropriate (and therapeutic) use of safe touch is defined by situations in which abstinence would actually be inhumane, unkind and potentially psychologically or neurobiologically damaging. Examples include the empirically backed beneficial use of touch in the comforting of a child who is 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 neuro-biologically damaging as well as confirming or inviting anti-social behaviour patterns. Refraining from physically, safely holding a child in the face of their intense grief, stress and/or rage reactions 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 state have been intensively researched worldwide and are well documented.

Evergreen recognises the importance of ensuring good order to provide a safe environment for staff and pupils. To achieve this, it is recognised that, in extreme circumstances, it may be necessary for school staff to intervene physically to manage certain harmful behaviours by pupils. This is when a child is:

- is hurting himself/herself or others, (or is likely to hurt himself/herself and/or others) or
- is damaging property, and/or
- is incensed and out of control, so that all verbal attempts to engage him/her have failed.

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' (2013) op cit.

Staff members are trained, with Team Teach, in the safest and gentlest means of holding a child that is entirely designed to enable the child to feel safe and soothed, and to bring him or her down from uncontrollable states of hyper-arousal. Whilst limits and boundaries in such circumstances can be a vital corrective emotional experience, without such an intervention (holding) the child can be left at risk of actual physical or psychological damage. The age and level of understanding of the pupil and the severity of the incident

are important factors to consider. Staff must always bear in mind their legal duty to make reasonable adjustments for disabled children and children with SEN.

While any member of school staff may intervene physically in an emergency, and all teachers are legally enabled to use reasonable force under section 93 of the Education and Inspections Act 2006, only those staff who have been specifically authorised by the Principal will normally take part in restrictive physical interventions that have been included in Positive Handling Plans. An up-to-date list of authorised staff will be kept in the school and will be reported annually to the Academy Council. In cases where it can reasonably be foreseen that a pupil is likely to require positive handling, a Positive Handling Plan will be drawn up by the school with the agreement of parents/carers and in consultation with relevant agencies and the child and will be reviewed regularly.

What about other physical contact with pupils?

It is not illegal to touch a pupil. There are occasions when physical contact, other than reasonable force, with a pupil is proper and necessary.
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.

Appropriate and inappropriate touch

We are highly aware of the current atmosphere where due to fears of abuse, touch as a natural and important form of human connection has been almost vetoed in some school contexts. Our policy rests on the belief that every member of staff needs to appreciate the difference between appropriate and inappropriate touch. Hence all staff members need to demonstrate a clear understanding of the difference. They need to show themselves to be highly aware of both the damaging and unnecessary uses of touch in an educational context. Touch is not to be used as an ill-thought out or impulsive act of futile reassurance/gratification or as a block to referral for psychological assessment. Equally, when a child is in deep distress, the staff are trained to know when and how sufficient connection and psychological holding have been or can be provided/established without touching.

Guidelines for the use of Safe Touch

To ensure touch is only used appropriately the following guidelines are to be followed:

- Parents/carers will be informed of the school policy on Touch

- Parents/carers wherever possible should be involved in the Thrive Assessments and Action Plans and be regularly updated as to their child's progress through the program
- Teachers/support staff will be trained in all aspects of safe touch
- All instances where safe touch is used will be shared and discussed with parents and carers at the earliest opportunity by a member of the school Senior Leadership Team.

No adult should use safe holding when alone with a child. Where touch is used, it will be brief, gentle contact on open clothed parts of the body: hands, arms, shoulders, head, hair, shoes.

At no point and under no circumstances should staff members use touch to satisfy their own need for physical contact or reassurance. All staff are trained to be fully cognisant of touch that is invasive or which could be confusing, traumatising or experienced as eroticising in any way whatsoever.

Records & Procedures

All incidents involving positive handling intervention will be recorded in a Bound and Numbered book. All serious incidents will be reported to PCS in order to provide appropriate follow up and support for pupils and staff.
Parents will be informed as soon as practical about all serious incidents.

The school's Positive Handling Book will be reviewed every half term by the Principal and the Academy Councillor with responsibility for Child Protection issues. The information will be used to review Positive Handling Plans for individual children, staff training needs and relevant school policies.

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.

Pupils will be given medical attention if necessary and will be given time to become calm before discussing an incident. The pupil will be given the opportunity to explain things from his/her point of view and steps will be taken to re-establish the relationship between the pupil and the staff involved in the incident.

Staff who act in accordance with this policy will be positively supported by the CLF and Evergreen, but staff will be expected to use their professional judgement when handling children, and everyone involved must be aware that their actions may be subject to scrutiny and possible legal action.

While staff will use the minimum force for the shortest time during a positive handling intervention, it is recognised that minor injuries, such as bruises and scratches, may occur. Such minor injuries will not, by themselves, be regarded as evidence of misconduct.

All complaints relating to restrictive physical intervention will be recorded by the school and details will be shared with the CLF and other agencies. The Principal will clarify the details of all complaints in accordance with the School's Complaints Policy, and will ensure they are dealt with appropriately.

Serious Breach

Should any such touch be used it would be deemed as the most serious breach of the Code of Ethics warranting the highest level of disciplinary action.