

Dream Big, Work Hard, Be Kind



Positive Touch Policy

Date Approved
17th June 2024

Date of Next Review
Summer Term 2026

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Introduction

We are highly aware of the current climate in which touch/physical comfort as a natural and important form of human connection. At Redbridge Primary School, we take it very seriously to safeguard children and young people. We work with very vulnerable and challenging pupils who are experiencing difficulties which may leave them feeling distressed, angry, or disorientated. In these circumstances it is natural for children to seek comfort from the adults they trust. If these adults feel they must never reach out to comfort a child at such a time, it would be deeply concerning, particularly considering situations where the withholding of touch with a very distressed or dysregulated child can be damaging to a child's recovery and future development. Many neuroscientific and psychological studies have shown that a lack of soothing touch in childhood, particularly during times of distress, can result in physical ill health and problems with anxiety, aggression or depression in later life.

Positive Touch

Positive touch the appropriate therapeutic use of touch is defined by situations in which abstinence (i.e. not to touch the child) would be inhumane, unkind and potentially psychologically or neurobiologically damaging. There is strong evidence that the use of touch in the comforting of a child who is in an acute state of distress is greatly beneficial. Not to reach out to the child in such circumstances, could also be re-traumatising. The damaging long-term effects of this have been extensively researched worldwide and are well documented. In many states of distress, touch can often be the only means of maintaining a connection with the child when he or she can no longer hear or make therapeutic use of the adult's words.

Positive Touch as a Preventative Measure

Therapeutic touch can also be appropriate as a way of preventing a behaviour or state of heightened anxiety occurring before it occurs, for example, to calm a pupil or to guide them away from a stressful situation. Where pupils may have sensory processing disorders/needs this can lead to heightened anxiety and/or sensory seeking behaviours. The use of therapeutic touch in these circumstances is acceptable. This may include squeezing and hugging providing it is done in an appropriate manner (for example a side hug rather than a full frontal hug)

Some pupils may seek therapeutic touch in response to positive behaviour. For example, hugging (from the side) tickling or physical play within an appropriate setting. It may also be beneficial to use therapeutic touch to support the building of positive working relationships, especially when we consider that many of our pupils are unable to communicate and form bonds through a verbal medium.

Guidelines Around Appropriate Touch

For the most part positive touch should only involve the extremities or the back. For example, a hand on the arm or shoulder. Supportive hugs where appropriate need to be 'side on' so that genitals are not touching. Positive touch should never involve private areas of the body and should never be done in a way which makes the pupil feel uncomfortable or violated. This constitutes a serious safeguarding breach as described below.

Safeguarding

The use of Touch in the context of Safeguarding Children at Redbridge Primary School is to ensure staff are aware of touch, which is posing as therapeutic, but which is being used to satisfy the practitioner's need for contact rather than that of the children. Naturally, staff are also fully aware of touch that is invasive, or which could be confusing, traumatising, or experienced as stimulating in any way whatsoever. Should any such touch be used, it would be deemed as the most serious breach of our Safeguarding Policy. Therapeutic touch is for the benefit of the pupil not the staff member.

Staff Training

All staff at Redbridge Primary School have received specialist, advanced training from members of the senior leadership team on working with children and young people. This training is updated regularly. Staff are trained to use touch only when it is necessary in the scenarios mentioned above and only when non-physical means of are not enough. The training forms part of staff induction and will take place before staff have direct contact with pupils. In the training staff will be provided information regarding:

- Appropriate positive touch
- When to use positive touch
- When not to use positive touch
- How to follow a support/sensory/behaviour/learning plan with regards to positive touch
- What to do if they are unsure in any way about what is appropriate

Reporting Concerns

Any concerns about staff conduct regarding our Positive Touch policy should be reported immediately to a member of the school safeguarding team and/or Local Authority Designated Officer (LADO). Concerns involving the head teacher should be reported to the Chair of Governors. Whistleblowing guidance is also available for all staff should they require further advice.

Summary of Key Points

Respect Personal Boundaries

It is best practice to ask for, and receive explicit permission before initiating any physical contact with a student.

Professional Context

Ensure any necessary touch, such as a pat on the back, or a high-five is appropriate, non-intrusive, and clearly linked to professional duties or the student's well-being.

Public Interaction

Perform any touch, such as comforting a distressed student, in the presence of other staff members of in visible areas whenever possible.

Avoid Sensitive Areas

Never touch students in areas that are considered private or sensitive including chest, buttocks, and upper thighs.

Cultural Sensitivity

Be aware of and respect cultural differences regarding personal space and touch.

Report Concerns

Immediately report any observed or suspected inappropriate touch or boundary violations to the appropriate authorities.

Training and Awareness

Regularly participate in training sessions about appropriate physical interactions with students to stay informed about best practices and school policies.

Clear Communication

Clearly communicate your actions and intentions to the student before any necessary touch to ensure they understand and consent.

Document Incidents

Keep a record of any incidents where touch was necessary, especially if it involved physical restraint or intervention, and report them according to school policy.

Redbridge
Primary School

