



## **St Ann's School Appropriate Touch Policy**

### **Introduction – Statement of Intent**

**St Ann's is proud to be a Unicef Gold Rights Respecting School. The United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child guides all aspects of our daily practice. Article 3 (best interests of the child) Article 6 (survival and development) and Article 34 (sexual exploitation) are actively promoted through adherence to this Policy and Policy into Practice document.**

St Ann's Appropriate Touch Policy 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").

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
- emphasise the spoken word
- provide reassurance
- offer an alternative to spoken communication.

### **General**

We define the appropriate use of touch as in situations in which abstinence would actually be inhumane, unkind and potentially psychologically or neuro biologically 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 neuro biologically 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.

The staff at St Ann's 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.

### **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 are the young person's shoulders, arms and back. Staff will invite the young person to sit closely beside them and when appropriate a sideways hug (not frontal) can be offered and given.**

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 invasive touch be used it would be deemed as the most serious breach of the Code of Ethics 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 St Ann's 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.

All staff have a responsibility to ensure that all practice at St Ann's School is safe and appropriate. 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 Headteacher or another senior member of staff as appropriate.

## **Policy into Practice**

The purpose of the remainder of this document is to provide practical safeguards and guidelines for the use of physical contact. This policy will be a coherent document which describes the purpose, nature and aims of communication through interaction at St Ann's.

### **Context**

We have many students who display emotional, physiological, cognitive and communicative behaviours associated with very early levels of development.

For people who are at an early stage of development touch is likely to be the most fundamental, tangible, foundational form of communication; to some extent establishing a foundation for all further communication development.

Many students have sensory impairments relating to sight or hearing. This emphasises the necessity to use available channels of communication in order to ensure that students have rich social experiences.

Physical contact is a deep, fundamental form of communication for all human beings, and can be particularly effective for ensuring the transmission of profound messages about self worth and respect, particularly (but not only) when speech communication is not available.

Students that have difficulties with appropriate touch, for example those students who are heavy handed or physically challenging, need experiences of positive touch in order to adapt their behaviour. Appropriate touch cannot be experienced, understood and reciprocated when touch is withdrawn.

Some people do not like to be touched (e.g. some people with autism); as a result we can see that they lack knowledge of a huge area of human experience and thus we should sensitively address and ameliorate the problem if possible.

Touch is normal interaction for the affirmation of relationships and giving of emotional and physiological support (even when cultural attitudes to touch vary enormously).

Appropriate touching may make the recognition of negative inappropriate touch more likely, and thus may be a proactive measure against inappropriate touch and/or the effects of the experience of inappropriate touch.

### **Statement of Intent**

- To reinforce communication, for example, by placing a hand on the student's shoulder whilst speaking.
- To give physical support and guidance.
- To give reassurance: communicate security and comfort.

- As a last resort and to maintain safety to physically intervene and manage behaviours (read in conjunction with St Ann's Positive Behaviour Policy and Positive Handling Policy).
- To play and interact
- To role model positive use of touch.
- To respond non-verbally.
- To direct or physically prompt.
- To give personal care. Also refer to St Ann's Intimate Care Policy.
- To give physical cues for participation or understanding.
- Medication/treatment – to offer support after seizure/injury.
- To aid protection in hazardous situations.
- To give therapy, for example: massage physiotherapy.
- As the main form of communication.
- To respond to students use of physical contact for communication and making social connections.
- To reward and affirm.
- To give the opportunity of choice to lead the communication.
- To communicate warmth and a sense of mutuality, and enable the student to learn understanding of these things and the ability to communicate them.
- To offer the opportunity to students who do not want or like touch to see the enjoyment and benefit of physical contact.
- To give graphic experience of the tempo of life and physical activity enjoyed by another person, for example: a member of staff communicates calm and stillness through physical contact.

## **Aims**

### **Know why you do it.**

Be knowledgeable on the purposes of physical contact by discussion, thought and by reading the pertinent psychological and developmental literature (see Resources section)

### **Have consent from the person**

Obey the usual conventions concerning making physical contact with another person.

Be particularly sensitive about the physical contact necessary to carry out personal care.

### **Be prepared to discuss and explain your practices**

First and foremost by being knowledgeable, as above.

**Ensure use of physical contact is acknowledged in any published individual programme for the person**

If any particular physical contact is fulfilling the person's needs, educationally or developmentally, then state this in the documentation drawn up to support work with that person.

Lack of written information regarding this will leave staff at risk of having actions misinterpreted. This documentation should be subject to regular review.

### **Good teamwork: both organisational and emotional**

Team working practices should literally facilitate working together in teams so that staff or students are rarely alone. The teamwork ethos should also include good discussions among staff concerning the emotional aspects of the work; including, crucially, orientations towards the issue of use of physical contact.

### **Have others present**

The most basic safeguards for staff and students is to have other staff present in the room, to work with the door open and to advise colleagues when in situations where physical contact is likely to be used.

### **Practice**

What this means in practice is that physical contact can be routine in staff technique; however, all staff must observe these potential hazards:

- Staff must operate maximum sensitivity to physical contact being misunderstood or misconstrued and triggering sexual arousal.
- Giving maximum regard to the student's right to give consent to physical contact. Read in conjunction with St Ann's Positive Behaviour Policy and Positive Handling Policy
- Members of staff must also be aware of misinterpreting student's sexual behaviour towards them being as purely socially communicative and friendly and vice versa.
- Students may sometimes touch intimate areas of a member of staff's body when there is no sexual intent or understanding. It is legitimate and advisable for the member of staff to withdraw from or cease to touch, but not advisable to make a huge issue of the incident at that moment as this may be reinforcing.

### **Possible reasons for withholding non-routine physical contact**

- Causes short term sexual arousal.
- There is a history of physical or sexual abuse.
- Distress is caused as a result.
- The member of staff, at that moment, feels that the circumstances may leave them vulnerable to allegations of improper conduct.

- If a judgement to withhold physical contact from a student is made it is important to recognise that the situation needs to be addressed. It may, therefore, be the case that the circumstances, for the student, that have caused the difficulty with touch may need to be ameliorated with a careful, sensitive programme of measures drawn up by the Multi- disciplinary Team.
- The pupil's use of touch is presently too extreme for the comfort of the member of staff.

## **Resources**

Field T., (2001) Touch. Cambridge. MA:MIT.

Montague, A., (1986) Touching: The Human significance of the skin. New York, Harper & Rowe..  
 Montague, A., (1995) Development of Theory of Touch. In T.M. Field, ed. Touch in Early Development. Lawrence Erlbaum Associates.

Nind, M + Hewett, D., (2001) The Practical Guide to Intensive Interaction. Kidderminster: British Institute of Learning Disabilities.

Nind, M + Hewett, D., (1998) Interaction as Curriculum. British Journal and Special Education, 15(2), pp.55-57.

Hewett, D., (2007) 'Do touch: physical contact and people who have severe, profound and multiple learning difficulties' Support for Learning, 22(3), pp.116-12

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