

# Powick Church of England Primary School

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## Safe Touch Policy

Reviewed: January 2024

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# **Powick CE Primary School**

## ***'Embracing Learning Together'***

At Powick CE Primary School we are a caring Christian community where everyone is welcome and, following the example set by Jesus, we thread kindness and compassion through everything we do. Through working together, we desire for everyone in our community to flourish by developing their God given talents.



## **SAFE TOUCH POLICY**

### **Context**

#### **The developmentally necessary experience of safe touch**

Children learn who they are (and how the world is) through their significant relationships. The quality of the child's relationships with significant adults is key to their healthy development and emotional health and wellbeing. Touch is recognized 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'.

Our policy on Safe Touch (sometimes termed 'Safe Holding') has been developed in the context of the local authority's Child Protection Procedures and Policies and Government guidance. (See Appendix 1)

It 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.

#### **To whom does it apply?**

It applies to all staff and children working within our school.

Named members of staff need to have received 'Positive Handling' training and know how and when to hold children in safe ways within governmental guidelines. Please refer to the school Risk Reduction Policy.

#### **Why have a policy on touch?**

Powick CE Primary School 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. This policy ensures that all staff, parents and pupils understand the framework within which safe touch will take place.

#### **Research**

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, trained staff will consider using safe touch as one of the means available to them, for example to calm a distressed child, to contain an angry or wild child and/or encourage or affirm an anxious child or to support a child with low self-esteem.

Safe touch is one of the keyways 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
- 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.

### **Gentle, safe holding is appropriate if a child:**

- 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.

Trained staff team members know 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.

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' (DfE 1998) and 'Use of Reasonable Force' (2013).

### **What about other physical contact with pupils? (2013, Crown op cit)**

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
- To give first aid.

### **Appropriate and inappropriate touch**

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.

### **Guidelines for the use of Safe Touch**

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

- Parents/carers should be informed of the school policy on safe touch
- Staff members should agree the use of planned safe touch in discussion with the parents/carers/SENDCo/DSL as appropriate to the individual child's needs
- A child should be consulted, appropriate to their understanding, and involved in the development of a plan, based the outcomes of discussions between the adults responsible for their care and alongside a detailed regulation plan and risk assessment.
- Adults working with the child should take opportunities to rehearse and practise (as is reasonably possible) with the child in preparation.
- If the child has a regulation plan, then safe touch strategies will be included as a calming measure.

- TWO Adult rule: No adult should use safe holding when alone with a child.

Where touch is used, contact should be brief and gentle, on clothed or publically visible parts of the body: hands, arms, shoulders, head, hair, shoes.

### **Unsafe touch**

- At no point and under no circumstances should staff members use touch to satisfy their own need for physical contact or reassurance.
- No unsafe touch: 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.
- 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.

## **Appendix 1 USE OF REASONABLE FORCE**

### **ADVICE FOR HEAD TEACHERS, STAFF AND GOVERNING BODIES**

#### **When can reasonable force be used?**

- Reasonable force can be used to prevent pupils from hurting themselves or others, from damaging property, or from causing disorder.
- In a school, force is used for two main purposes – to control pupils or to restrain them.
  - The decision on whether or not to physically intervene is down to the professional judgement of the staff member concerned and should always depend on the individual circumstances.
- The following list is not exhaustive but provides some examples of situations where reasonable force can and cannot be used.

#### **Schools can use reasonable force to:**

- Remove disruptive children from the classroom where they have refused to follow an instruction to do so
- Prevent a pupil behaving in a way that disrupts a school event or a school trip or visit
- Prevent a pupil leaving the classroom where allowing the pupil to leave would risk their safety or lead to behaviour that disrupts the behaviour of others

- Prevent a pupil from attacking a member of staff or another pupil, or to stop a fight in the playground
- Restrain a pupil at risk of harming themselves through physical outbursts.

**Schools cannot:**

- Use force as a punishment – it is always unlawful to use force as a punishment.

*Source: Extract from Department of Education, Use of reasonable force Advice for head teachers, staff and governing bodies - July 2013 Section 93, Education and Inspections Act 2006*