**East Stour Primary**

**Appropriate Touch Policy**



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**Appropriate Touch Policy**

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These guidelines outline the principles for physical touch between staff members and pupils at East Stour Primary School. All staff, visitors and volunteers at school are expected to follow these guidelines.

Research has recognised that physical touch is incredibly important for a child’s development. Touch is essential in order to provide sensitive, good quality care and support natural interactions and is part of the development, emotional wellbeing, care and education of pupils. Touch is the earliest sensory system to become functional and is the foundation for all other sensory systems. Positive touch is beneficial for both psychological and physiological development.

Psychologically, touch can be calming and relaxing and is vital for emotional wellbeing. Physiologically, touch facilitates the growth of the body’s cells and the development of the brain and nervous system.

However, in the current social climate there is a tendency to associate touch with intimacy and sexuality. Safeguarding children from inappropriate physical interactions is crucial but it is also essential to recognise that the use of positive, appropriate touch is incredibly important for a child’s wellbeing, sensory regulation and emotional security.

# 1. Purposes of touch

Staff at East Stour Primary School routinely engage in the physical touch with pupils for the following reasons:

* To aid and develop communication – touch cues, physical prompts, intensive interaction and to make social interactions
* To offer physical support and guidance- help with mobility, moving and handling, guiding pupils into rooms
* To offer reassurance and support - comforting distressed or upset pupils, communicating warmth, comfort and reassurance and to develop positive emotions
* Physical prompting and support- gestural and physical prompts during learning activities such as hand over hand or hand under hand support
* To support pupils with personal care routines
* Protection- from other students or from themselves (for example self-harming or absconding), including restraint and physical intervention
* To carry out therapy programmes- physiotherapy, occupational therapy, swimming, following programmes and advice
* Responding to pupils’ physical contact
* Giving rewards such as high fives, fist pumps or a pat on the back

# 2. General Principles and Guidelines

Staff need to have a clear idea of why they are using physical touch with pupils. Staff should not be touching pupils for the sake of it or because it is easier or saves time. Discuss the use of touch with colleagues if you are unsure.

Where appropriate, have consent from the pupil who is involved in the use of appropriate touch. Always explain to the pupil what you are doing and why.

Be prepared to openly discuss and explain why you are using physical touch with pupils. Always make sure you have consent from the children.

Staff should be sensitive to signals (non-verbal and verbal) that indicate that a child dislikes touch. For example, a child may pull away or make negative facial expressions.

Be aware that some pupils may provoke a physical intervention situation in order to gain physical contact.

Have a sensitive awareness that students with physical need, need support to touch and interact in ways that happen naturally with their peers.

Staffs also need to consider the influences of race, gender, age, sexual identity and disability:

* Gender difference may make someone feel uncomfortable
* A child’s personal history may distort the understanding of a ‘safe’ adult
* Pupils from ethnic minority backgrounds may be used to different types of appropriate touch
* Pupils with multisensory impairments may be startled by touch
* Pupils with sensory integration difficulties may interpret touch differently to others
* It is important for staff to familiarise themselves with the needs of different pupils and to ask advice if they are unsure from one of the DSL’s in school.

# 3. Specific Guidelines and Principles

Parents/carers should be informed of the school policy on appropriate touch.

**The use of touch to comfort pupils**

It would not be appropriate or beneficial to suggest that staff do not comfort pupils who are upset or distressed.

Staff need to be aware of a pupil’s individual needs and circumstances and should use their professional judgement when comforting pupils.

No staff member should use appropriate touch when alone with a child.

**Students who touch staff inappropriately**

Occasionally students may engage in physical contact that staff find inappropriate. Staff should withdraw from these situations as soon as possible and these should be added onto CPOMS and discussed with their phase team leader. Staff should not give negative feedback to the students as this may reinforce the behaviour. If this is a regular occurrence, the methods for managing this behaviour should be highlighted on a student’s behaviour plan. If staff feel it is not appropriate to respond to physical contact from a child, staff should avoid open rejection and should try to divert and redirect the child instead.

**Hand Holding**

Staff should use their professional judgement when holding hands with students. In Early Years and lower KS1 our students often need support with walking and balance or may need support to prevent them from running.

**Lap Sitting**

In Early Years there are times when a child may ask to sit on a staff member's lap. Our aim is to help our children to become as independent as possible during these early years. A child will first be encouraged to sit alongside the staff member, on their own chair, while they calm down and regulate. If a child climbs onto a staff member's lap, and the staff member feels this is appropriate for the child’s needs. The child should be positioned closer to the knees rather than fully against the body. Position a child to sit side or facing forwards on the lap. The child can lean into the adult sideways or backwards but not chest to chest, this needs to be initiated by the child and observing for ongoing consent.

**Hugs**

A hug should always be instigated by the child.

How to provide a hug, allow the child to lead, only provide hugs that are asked for and consented to. Ensuring you observe for ongoing consent, avoid being overbearing as adults we are bigger than the children. Provide the least amount of physical contact required to meet the child's needs.

Try to keep the hug as side to side as is possible, in this situation, putting the adult's arm on the child’s shoulder. This discourages front on hugs which is an inappropriate touch for children in a school setting.

Staff need to be aware of the developmental age of the student they are supporting, and be clear the physical contact used is appropriate for the individual student. Stages of developmental can often be more relevant to our students than their chronological age.

In using touch during personal care routines staff should ensure that pupils are comfortable and familiar with the staff member delivering intimate care. Always explain to the child the process that is happening.

Staff should be aware of the types of appropriate touch used. Pupils with ASD, multisensory impairment and/or sensory integration difficulties may become confused and distressed with certain types of touch. It is important to verbalise reassurance as well.

If you are in any doubt about any issues concerning appropriate touch, or you observe any practice that causes concern, you should discuss this with a DSL.

All children are entitled to receive an education in an environment where they feel safe, secure and respected.

The school will dedicate itself to ensuring that no pupils feel threatened or disrespected, in terms of physical contact between themselves or a member of staff.

All members of staff at our school have a duty of care towards pupils, and must be aware of the boundaries involving physical contact. All members of staff are responsible for ensuring that no pupil feels threatened or unsafe at our school as a result of inappropriate touch.

All staff members are aware that they can whistleblow if they see an inappropriate action of another staff member, volunteer or visitor. All staff members have access to the school's online safeguarding systems CPOMS and CPOMS Staffsafe.

**All staff have a responsibility to ensure safe and appropriate practice at all times.**