



Safe Touch Policy

Introduction

At Uplands Manor Primary School, we aim to provide the children with a nurturing and supportive environment. In order to achieve this, it is sometimes necessary for staff to have physical contact with children. The term physical contact is used to describe the use of touch for many purposes in numerous different contexts. Staff must be clear about the reason they are making physical contact with the child and ensure that it is purposeful in meeting the needs of the child concerned. It is also important to remember that not all children like physical contact and knowledge of the child is essential.

The Children Act 1989 and 2004 makes it clear that the paramount consideration in any decision should be in the best interest of the child concerned. Paramount in this context means that it should be the first thing people think about and it takes precedence over other considerations.

Aims

Our aim is to enable children to have any sensory, personal development, social and emotional wellbeing needs to be met, whilst acknowledging the need to protect children and empower them with choices around physical contact. We are committed to ensuring that all staff responsible for the care of students will undertake their duties in a professional manner to ensure safety and dignity of the children is protected.

Rationale

Children learn who they are and how the world is, by forming relationships with people and things around them. The quality of a child's relationship with significant adults is vital to their healthy development and emotional health and wellbeing. Many children who require emotional support from school may have been subject to trauma or distress or may not have had a positive start in life. It is with this in mind that staff seek to respond to children's developmental needs by using appropriate safe touch. Attachment theory and child development identifies safe touch as a positive contribution to brain development, mental health and the development of social skills.

This policy rests on the belief that every member of staff needs to know the difference between appropriate and inappropriate touch. Hence, staff need to demonstrate a clear understanding of the difference. Equally, when a child is in deep distress, staff need to know when and how sufficient connection and psychological holding can be provided without touching.

All staff need to be clearly aware of procedures within this policy. The policy should be seen in the wider context of the Behaviour Policy and the Safeguarding and Child Protection Policy. Staff always need to be mindful of appropriate behaviour.

Different types of appropriate touch

1. Casual / informal / incidental touch

Staff use touch with pupils as part of a normal relationship, for example comforting a child, giving reassurance and congratulating. This might include taking a child by the hand (if age appropriate), patting on the back, high fiving or putting an arm around the shoulders. The benefit of this action is often proactive and can prevent a situation from escalating.

2. Reparative touch

This is used by staff working with children who are having difficulties with their emotions. Healthy emotional development requires safe touch as a means of calming, soothing and containing distress for a frightened, angry or sad child. Touch used to regulate a child's emotions triggers the release of the calming chemical oxytocin in the body. Reparative touch may include stroking a back, squeezing an arm, rocking gently, cuddling or sitting on an adults' lap.

3. Contact/interactive Play

Contact play is used by staff adopting a role similar to a parent in a healthy child-parent relationship. This will only take place when the child has developed a trusting relationship with the adult and when they feel completely comfortable and at ease with this type of contact. Contact play may include tickle games, being supported to explore in messy play, being held or rocked in physical play or being helped to access playground equipment.

4. Positive handling (calming a dysregulating child)

Staff may use force as is reasonable in all the circumstances in order to prevent a pupil from doing, or continuing to do, a type of behaviour that may result in them harming themselves or another. This needs to be read in conjunction with the behaviour and physical intervention policy. It may also be a way of providing support for the child in order for them to regulate their emotions or their sensory needs.

5. Using touch to communicate and teach

At Uplands Manor, we have a number of children who have complex communication needs and it is often appropriate and very important to use touch to communicate with them, e.g. through intensive interaction, to guide children in completing a task as part of a learning program or to find out about something by exploring materials and objects.

6. In self-care activities

Some children at Uplands Manor need their personal care needs met by staff and children will be assisted to take part in self-care activities such as feeding, washing or dressing. Children will also have their intimate care needs met when having their nappy changed (Intimate Care Policy).

In the Early Years, the Focus Provision and other SEND children may need daily intimate care. Staff who provide this personal care have a high awareness of child protection and we are committed to ensuring that all staff undertake their duties in a professional manner at all times. Staff recognise that there is a need to treat all children with respect when personal care is given and that no child should be attended in a way that causes distress or pain. In these circumstances staff should ensure that there is another member of staff present with whom the child is comfortable and familiar. Where possible, for children receiving touch of an intimate nature consent should have been gained from the child involved.

Staff Responsibility

Our responsibility is to ensure our children are fully prepared so they are safe within the school and wider community. If anyone is in doubt about any issues concerning appropriate touch, or observe any practice that causes concern, it should be discussed with a member of the Senior Leadership Team.

All staff have a responsibility to ensure safe and appropriate practice at all times. We are committed to equal opportunities and the objective of this policy is that no person should suffer or experience less favourable treatment, discrimination or lack of opportunities under any circumstances.

Linked Policies

- Behaviour Policy
- Intimate Care policy
- Safeguarding Policy