



Touch – our school policy

Kingsweston School

Kingsweston School policy on Touch

Rationale:

Touch is essential in order to provide sensitive and good quality care for the children and young people we support. Used in context and with empathy, touch supports the development of our natural interactions with the children and young people we support, teach and care for.

Staff often have concerns and fears about the use of touch for various reasons. This policy sets out to clarify the reasons and conditions for touch and should be read in conjunction relevant guidance and legislation and our safeguarding and whistleblowing policies.

Purposes:

Touch is important and may be used routinely for any of the following reasons:

For communication:

- To reinforce other communications (e.g. placing a hand on someone's shoulder when speaking to them) or to function as the main form of communication in itself.
- To respond non-verbally or to respond to another person's own use of physical contact for communication and to make social connections. This is particularly likely to occur during Intensive Interaction or day to day greetings (handshakes etc.).
- To support the initiation of directed communication, e.g. assisted signing, emerging use of PECS.

For educational reasons as part of the process of establishing the 'Fundamentals of Communication' for people at early communication levels. To sensitively direct children in educational tasks and essential skills.

As support or guidance, for example during transitions between activities and during swimming or P.E. sessions.

To play. Play activities naturally include touch. People of any age who are at early levels of development are likely to be quite tactile and physical.

For therapy – (e.g. massage, sensory stimulation, physiotherapy, rebound therapy etc.) either by the therapist or by another member of staff carrying out a therapy programme or following therapy advice.

For emotional reasons – to communicate affection and warmth.

- To give reassurance, to communicate security and comfort.
- To enable the person to develop understanding of these positive emotions and the ability to communicate them.

For the purposes of care. Touch is necessary in order to carry out personal care for some of the people we support.

To give medical and nursing care.

To give physical support to people who have physical difficulties and in order to **guide** people between places, rooms or activities.

To protect children and young people from danger by physically intervening and managing challenging behaviours, including the use of restraint, (following the recognised Team Teach guidelines and policies of the school).

Guidelines:

Staff need to be clear and open about why they are using touch and be able to explain their practices. There must be clarity and transparency in issues of touch. The use of touch should be discussed openly and regularly between staff.

Wherever possible and necessary (given the atypical physical contact that might be needed to support a young person), a description and rationale for physical contact and the details of how this contact is made should be documented on the tracking sheet following discussion with parents and other relevant people.

We recognise that for some pupils their life story and/or sensory processing complicates the way in which they will interpret touch and we will be sensitive to this.

People of any age can want and need physical support/touch. Staff are often concerned about the issue of age-appropriateness. However, the developmental age, emotional and communication needs of the individual are the priority when considering of the touch needs of the young person.

While gender and cultural factors have relevance in issues of touch, the emotional and communication needs of the individual are due equal consideration within a context of secure and effective safeguarding processes.

It should always be considered by staff that for touch to provide positive experiences it should be consensual. As far as possible, the young person involved should consent to any touch given and staff should be sensitive to any verbal and non-verbal communication they give that might indicate that they don't want to be touched.

Staff should be sensitive to any changes in the young person's behaviour (e.g. over-excitement or negative reactions) that might indicate the need to reduce or withdraw touch, particularly during play or Intensive Interaction. Significant changes in behaviour should be recorded.

The people we support should be given opportunities to touch each other while interacting and playing as would happen naturally for any child or young person. Attention should always be given to ensure that both parties are safe and happy with this.

Staff must be aware of potential hazards in respect of sexual issues:

- Staff must be sensitive to the danger of touch being misunderstood and triggering sexual arousal and so must be alert to all feedback signals from the person they are working with.
- The young people we support may occasionally inadvertently touch intimate parts of a member of staff's body when there is no sexual understanding or intent. The member of staff should withdraw without giving significant negative feedback in this situation and the incident should be recorded.

It is **never** appropriate for staff to touch a young person's intimate body areas except as part of intimate or medical care (see relevant policies).

If staff are in any doubt about issues concerning appropriate touch, or observe any practice that causes them any concern, they should follow the schools safeguarding processes.

Staff should be aware that there have been many instances of abuse perpetrated in both schools and residential care establishments. The best method of prevention is transparency, openness and teamwork, and staff should always try to monitor and assist each other in carrying out their work.

Conclusion:

Touch is necessary and desirable as part of the development, emotional wellbeing, care, education and quality of life of the people we support and care for.

This policy outlines when this may be needed, and it provides staff with the necessary direction and security for this to occur positively and productively, while still protecting the people in our care.

Use of physical contact in school – guidelines for safeguards

- **Know why you do it**

Be knowledgeable on the purposes of using physical contact by discussion, thought and by reading the pertinent psychological and developmental literature.

- **Have consent from the person**

Obey the usual conventions concerning making physical contact with another person. If you rarely get consent to touch, then go back a few stages and work toward obtaining willingly given consent. At the very least, physical contact may be necessary to carry out basic care.

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

First and foremost by being knowledgeable, as above.

- **Document - have it acknowledged in individual paperwork as necessary**

Be assertive. If you are certain that use of physical content is fulfilling the person's needs educationally or developmentally, then state this in the documentation drawn up to support work with that person.

- **Have good teamwork, both organisational and emotional**

The team working ethos should include discussions among staff concerning the emotional aspects of the work, including crucially, orientations toward the issue of use of physical contact.

- **Discuss openly and regularly**

There should be no sense of furtiveness or 'hidden curriculum'. This important aspect of teaching technique should tangibly be a matter of open discussion and study.

- **Be aware that this policy applies to Kingsweston pupils only**

This policy applies to staff working with all young people on roll at Kingsweston School. Given that some of our staff support our pupils in co-located settings, it is important to understand that the policy/practices of the host organisation determine how physical contact (if any) can be routinely made with their pupils.