



Gulval
School

Safe Touch Policy

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Signed:

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Contents

- 1. Mission Statement 3
- 2. Implementing the Policy..... 3
- 3. Context..... 3
- 4. To whom does it apply? 3
- 5. Why have a policy on touch?..... 3
- 6. Appropriate and inappropriate touch..... 5
- 7. Safe touch Guidelines 5
- 8. Monitor and Review of this Safe Touch Policy..... 6

1. Mission Statement

Gulval School (the Academy) is a fully inclusive academy in Cornwall. It is part of TPAT, a multi-academy trust set up to raise the standards of education throughout Cornwall. The Academy's aim is to provide the best education for our children; one that recognises their individual needs and supports them to achieve the very best from their education; praising and challenging; building confidence, self-worth and life skills and equipping them for their secondary education and life beyond the academy.

2. Implementing the Policy

The use of 'safe touch' by designated adults needs to be supervised, monitored and reviewed on a regular basis, as indeed does the policy, to ensure that it continues to meet the needs of children, parents / carers and staff.

The developmentally necessary experience or safe touch

Introduction: Children learn who they are and how the world is in relationship. The quality of the child's relationships with significant adults is key to their healthy development and emotional health and wellbeing.

3. Context

Our policy on Touch has been developed in the context of the LA Child Protection Procedures and Policies. It considers 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.

4. To whom does it apply?

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

Identified staff in our school are trained in the identification and use of safe touch as a developmental intervention. All the staff team receive regular case supervision by the SENDCO and Headteacher.

5. Why have a policy on touch?

In order to protect children and school staff from allegations under Child Protection procedures some

schools and LA's have adopted 'No Touch' policies. However, this school is adopting an informed, evidence-based decision to allow safe touch in special cases as a developmentally appropriate intervention that will aid healthy growth and learning.

Research

Research (see Appendix 2) 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***, specially trained staff will consider using safe touch as one of the means available to them for example to calm a distressed child, contain an angry or wild child and or encourage or affirm an anxious child or a child with low self-esteem.

Safe touch used to calm, soothe and regulate a child's emotions is a needed developmental experience. The brain does not develop self —soothing neuronal pathways unless and until this safe emotional regulation has been experienced. Where children have had insufficient experience of safe *touch* and calming regulation this may be a priority to help the brain to develop access to thinking, judging and evaluating mechanisms.

Safe touch is one of the key ways of regulating children's emotions, but it is a strategy that ***staff will use only under supervision and in line with a whole school Policy on Touch***. 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

The developmentally appropriate (and therapeutic) use of safe touch is defined by situations in which abstinence would actually be inhumane, unkind and potentially psychologically or neurobiologically damaging. Examples include the empirically backed beneficial use of touch in the comforting of a child who is in an acute state of distress and / or out of control. Not to reach out to the child in such circumstances could be re-traumatising and neurobiologically damaging, confirming or inviting anti-social behaviour patterns. Abstinence in the face of intense grief, stress and/or rage reactions 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 state have been intensively researched worldwide and are well documented.

Moreover, 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
- **damaging property**, and/or
- **Incensed and out of control**, so that all verbal attempts to engage him/her have failed.

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.' (DfEE 1998).

The staff team members are trained in the safest and gentlest means of holding a child which 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.

6. Appropriate and inappropriate touch

We are highly aware of the current atmosphere where due to fears of abuse, touch as a natural and important form of human connection has been almost vetoed in some school contexts. Our policy rests on the belief that every member of staff needs to appreciate the difference between appropriate and inappropriate touch. Hence all staff have to demonstrate a clear understanding of the difference. They have 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.

Equally, when a child is in deep distress, the THRIVE team member is trained to know when and how sufficient connection and psychological holding have been or can be provided/established **without** touching.

7. Safe touch Guidelines

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

Parents/carers should be informed of the school policy on Touch. **Parents/carers** should provide signed consent for their child to be part of the Thrive program

Parents/carers wherever possible should be involved in the Thrive Assessments and Action Plans and be regularly updated as to their child's progress through the program

Teachers/support staff should be trained in the Thrive approach by dissemination in staff meetings

Teachers/support staff should be trained in all aspects of safe touch

Staff members should agree the use of safe touch in discussion with their case

supervisor and a part of school induction.

Adult rule: No adult should use touch when alone with a child. Doors will always be open.

Use brief, gentle contact on open clothed 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.

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.

8. Monitor and Review of this Safe Touch Policy

The review of this policy is the responsibility of and is monitored by the Headteacher. This includes;

- An annual review of the safe touch policy
- Liaison with staff to gather their views and inform them of any changes

Parents and pupils will also be encouraged to give their views where appropriate

This policy is monitored on a day-to-day basis by the Headteacher. The Headteacher reports to TPAT Trust and the local governing body about its effectiveness.

This policy will be reviewed formally every two years and more often if there are changes to relevant legislation. The governing body monitors that these reviews take place.