



St Botolph's C of E Primary School Safe Touch Policy 2024

For the purpose of this policy, "safe touch" is defined as physical contact that, if otherwise avoided, would be inhumane, unkind and potentially emotionally or physically damaging for the pupil. Safe touch should never be invasive, humiliating or flirtatious.

The term physical contact is used to describe the use of touch for many purposes in numerous different contexts. This is a controversial and complex area. There have been instances where schools have had a 'no touch' policy and totally forbade staff from touching children. This is actually against all statutory guidance and is not tenable. There is a common myth that school staff are not allowed to ever touch a child.

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. There are many circumstances where touch is a necessity. Physical contact should always be about meeting the needs of the child. Actions that can be ambiguous are open to misinterpretation. Staff should always think before making any physical contact. They should be clear about why their actions are in the best interest of the child concerned. They should remember that some children like physical contact and some do not.

Behaviour is always a form of communication. Understanding that children are communicating through their behaviour gives adults the opportunity to respond differently. When children feel valued, respected and have their needs met, there is no longer a reason to use challenging behaviour to communicate. Punishing a child for a behaviour may stop the behaviour for the moment, but it does not give the child support or provide alternate ways to act in difficult situations. When adults help children find positive ways to communicate their needs to others, children learn important social and problem-solving skills that will help them throughout their life.

Children engage in challenging behaviour for a reason. The purpose may be to get someone's attention, stopping an activity they don't like, or satisfying sensory or emotional needs. Some children may not be able to verbally describe the problem or know what is expected of their behaviour in a situation. Some children find emotional self-regulation difficult, this may be due to a special educational need, previous or ongoing maltreatment or abuse, or a lack of appropriate responses being modelled to them.

Adults and children are communicating something through their behaviour during every moment in every day, even if they are not aware of it. A child's challenging behaviour is a sign that s/he is upset and that something is not right. Behaviour is dependent on both the situation the child is in and the relationships they inhabit.

Since children often use their behaviour to tell us what they need, adults can help the child by figuring out the meaning behind the child's behaviour. All children, but especially those who display challenging behaviour, need the consistency of a reliable and caring adult who will provide support and guidance, especially during difficult times.

Children have the right to independence and choices, and we seek to provide opportunities for personal growth and emotional health and wellbeing. However, rights also involve responsibilities, such as not harming other people's rights.

Children unable to control their actions or unable to appreciate danger have a right to be protected; and staff have a duty of care to exercise this.

Different types of 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 or putting an arm around the shoulders. The benefit of this action is often proactive and can prevent a situation from escalating.

2. General reparative touch

This is used by staff working with children who are having difficulties with their emotions. Healthy emotional development often 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, sitting on an adults' lap or hand massage.

3. Positive handling

Staff may use force as is reasonable and proportionate in all the circumstances in order to keep a child or other children safe by preventing 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 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. 3 staff at St Botolph's are Team Teach trained and understand when to use the strategies involved to support pupils' behaviour.