

# Thurgoland C.E. Primary School

## Safe Touch Policy



**Positive Handling: strategies used by trained/ named members of staff to ensure a pupils safety i.e. when becoming dysregulated.**

### **Thurgoland CE Primary Safe Touch Policy**

Children learn who they are (and how the world is) within their significant relationships. The quality of the child's relationships with significant adults is key to their healthy development and emotional health and wellbeing. Touch is recognized as being a physical way of soothing, calming and containing distress. Many research studies have indicated the necessity of human contact and touch in the healthy development of children. It is a factor in children who experience neglect and 'fail to thrive'.

Our policy on Safe Touch (sometimes termed 'Safe Holding') has been developed in the context of the local authorities' child protection procedures and policies and government guidance, and contains within it Thrive Approach™ recommendations. It identifies safe touch as a positive contribution to brain development, emotional regulation, mental health and the development of pro-social skills.

#### **To whom does it apply?**

It applies to all staff and children working within the school.

There will be occasions where physical contact between staff and children occurs as a normal part of school activities.

#### **Where physical contact occurs using positive handling techniques this will be by a named member of staff.**

Named members of staff need to have received 'Positive Handling' (or equivalent) training to know how and when to hold children in safe ways within governmental guidelines to ensure their safety and the safety of other pupils and staff. These trained staff members are then trained by Thrive staff to combine their practice with the Thrive Approach™ so they can identify and use safe touch as a developmental intervention.

#### **Why have a policy on touch?**

In order to protect children and school staff from allegations under Child Protection procedures many schools, education authorities and academies have adopted 'No Touch' policies. However such policies do not address the emotional health and social wellbeing needs of children.

Thurgoland School is adopting an informed, evidence-based decision to allow safe touch in special cases as a developmentally appropriate intervention that will aid healthy emotional growth and learning.

## **Research**

Research 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, to contain an angry or wild child and/or encourage or affirm an anxious child or to support 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 neuronal pathways to initiate calming and self-soothing unless and until this safe emotional regulation has been experienced within a positive relationship with a significant adult.

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

## **Ways of regulating children's emotions**

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 and then regulating it down
- Talking slowly firmly and quietly in an unhurried unflustered way
- Providing clear predictable consistently held boundaries

The appropriate use of safe touch is defined by situations in which abstinence would actually be inhumane, unkind and potentially psychologically or neuro-biologically damaging. Refraining from physically, safely holding a child in the face of their 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,
- is **likely** to hurt himself/herself and/or others

- is damaging property
- is incensed and out of control, so that all verbal attempts to engage him/her have failed.

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

### **What about other physical contact with pupils?**

It is not illegal to touch a pupil. There are occasions when physical contact, that sits outside the Safe Touch policy, with a pupil is proper and necessary.

Examples of where touching a pupil might be proper or necessary:

- Holding the hand of the child at the front/back of the line when going to assembly or when walking together around the school;
- When comforting a distressed pupil;
- When a pupil is being congratulated or praised;
- To demonstrate how to use a musical instrument;
- To demonstrate exercises or techniques during PE lessons or sports coaching; and
- To give first aid.

### **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 members need to demonstrate a clear understanding of the difference. They need to show themselves to be highly aware of both the damaging and unnecessary uses of touch in an educational context.

### **Guidelines for the use of Safe Touch**

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

- Parents/carers should be informed of the school policy on Touch.
- 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 manager.
- Child should be consulted, appropriate to their understanding, and involved in the development of a plan, based on a comprehensive risk assessment.
- Strategies should be rehearsed and practised (as is possible) with the child in preparation.
- A Resilience Plan should be completed and its use recorded and monitored. This will supplement the Thrive Action Plan which will also include the use of safe touch as a strategy.
- A Resilience Plan will be completed and agreed by staff, parents and the child
- TWO Adult rule: No adult should use safe holding when alone with a child. Both adults should have the closest / best relationship with the child.
- Where touch is used, contact should be brief and gentle, on clothed or publicly visible 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.
- Serious Breach: 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.

### **When can reasonable force be used?**

- Reasonable force can be used to prevent pupils from hurting themselves or others, from damaging property, or from causing disorder.
- In a school, force is used for two main purposes – to control pupils or to restrain them.
- The decision on whether or not to physically intervene is down to the professional judgement of the staff member concerned and should always depend on the individual circumstances.
- The following list is not exhaustive but provides some examples of situations where reasonable force can and cannot be used.
- A Resilience Plan (appendix A) should be completed along with parents and the child for those who may need this strategy.

### **Schools can use reasonable force to:**

- Remove disruptive children from the classroom where they have refused to follow an instruction to do so;
- Prevent a pupil behaving in a way that disrupts a school event or a school trip or visit;
- Prevent a pupil leaving the classroom where allowing the pupil to leave would risk their safety or lead to behaviour that disrupts the behaviour of others;
- Prevent a pupil from attacking a member of staff or another pupil, or to stop a fight in the playground; and
- Restrain a pupil at risk of harming themselves through physical outbursts.

### **Schools cannot:**

- Use force as a punishment – it is always unlawful to use force as a punishment.

### **When reasonable force has been used**

Parents will be informed by telephone or face to face should reasonable force be used to calm a child and ensure their and others' safety. The incident will be recorded on the CPOMS. This will include the events leading up to the incident and details about the strategies deployed by staff. A copy of this document will be given to parents. Following an incident the Resilience Plan will be reviewed by staff.