



Wheatcroft Community Primary School

Safe Touch Policy

SENCo: Mariana Glass

Senior Leadership Team

PGCert: Special Education Needs Coordination

Adopted by governors: 17.5.2022

Agreed by staff: 27.4.2022

Reviewed 19.1.23 (Personnel changes)

Next Review date: January 2026

Aims

Wheatcroft Community Primary School believes that children have the right to independence, choice and inclusion. We seek to provide opportunities for personal growth and emotional mental health and wellbeing. These rights also involve responsibilities, such as not harming others. 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 these rights

Rationale – why have a safe touch policy?

In order to protect children and school staff from allegations under Child Protection procedures, many schools have adopted 'No Touch' policies. However, such policies do not address the emotional mental health and social wellbeing needs of children. Wheatcroft Community Primary 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. This is part of the Thrive Approach. 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, staff who have been trained will consider using safe touch as one of the means available to them, for example to calm and comfort a distressed child or to contain an aggressive act. Safe touch when 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. Where children have had insufficient experience of safe touch and calming regulation, this may be a priority to help their brains to develop access to thinking, judging, evaluating and choosing mechanisms. These are sometimes known as 'higher executive skills' and they are an intrinsic part of cognitive regulation. 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 this policy.

Our policy rests on the belief that every member of staff needs to know the difference between appropriate and inappropriate touch.

Different types of touch

1. Casual/informal/incidental touch

It has been agreed that staff at Wheatcroft CP School will 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, patting on the back or putting an arm around the shoulders (adult standing to the side of the pupil). For children in the Early Years and KS1, it may also include having the child sitting on the knee to be comforted. This will only be done if the child has initiated the need for contact in this way. The benefit of this action is often proactive and can prevent a situation from escalating. For children in KS2 (Years 3,4,5,and 6) it has been agreed that having the child sitting on the knee is not age appropriate.

2. General 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 frightened, angry or sad children. Reparative touch may include stroking a back, squeezing an arm/shoulders, rocking gently, cuddling (adult standing/sitting to the side of the pupil), hand or foot massage.

3. Contact/Interactive Play

Contact play is used by staff adopting a similar role 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 may include sensory pressure e.g. pushing or pulling activities; tickling, being held or rocked, being helped to access playground equipment and being supported to explore in messy play.

4. Positive handling (calming a dysregulated child)

At Wheatcroft CP School, 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 harming themselves or another. It may also be a way of providing support for the child in order for them to regulate their emotions or their sensory needs (sensory circuits)

5. Using touch to communicate and teach

At times, touch may be used to communicate with a child. This may happen through body signing or to alert a child that they are about to be asked to move. Touch may also be used by staff to guide children in completing a learning task (e.g. finding out about something by exploring materials and objects, following occupational therapy targets).

6. In Self-care activities

Some children at Wheatcroft CP School need to have their personal care or medical needs met by staff. These needs will be stated in intimate care plans or medical care plans and staff responsible for attending to the care needs will be identified and training given.

All staff need to be aware of the types of touch used and when and where these are appropriate. They must also be aware that some children will find any physical contact uncomfortable (e.g. pupils with ASD or sensory processing difficulties) and to find other ways of supporting these pupils.

To protect themselves, staff should not lone work when providing touch as part of a therapy program or when supporting a pupil's sensory needs e.g. through Thrive plans and interventions. Staff must not lone work when providing intimate care where the pupil will be undressing and/or requiring support behind a closed door.

All staff should ensure that they understand the reasons that they are using touch and how to use it effectively. Staff members must feel that they can question the reasons they have been asked to provide physical care and ask for clarification when unsure.

Inappropriate Touch

It is not appropriate to touch students in the following areas:

- Genitals
- Chest/breast
- Bottom

The **only** exception to this would be in the case of:

- First aid needs
- Intimate care needs (plan in place)
- Medical needs
-

In these circumstances staff should ensure that there is another member of staff present who the pupil is comfortable and familiar with. Consent must be gained from the pupil/parent

If staff have any doubts or concerns about the use of appropriate safe touch this should be discussed with a member of the Senior Leadership Team and the Designated Safeguarding Lead.

All staff have a responsibility to ensure safe and appropriate practice at all times, in line with this policy and the Safeguarding/Child Protection Policy.

This policy should be read in line with the following policies:

- Safeguarding Policy/Child Protection Policy
- Whole School Behaviour Policy
- SEN Policy
- Medicines Policy
- First Aid Risk Assessment
- Intimate Care Policy
- Lone working Policy

This policy was written March 2022