



St Margaret's Academy
Safe Touch and Positive Handling Policy

Aims

At St Margaret's Academy we believe that children have the right to independence, choice and inclusion, 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 as do other children at the school, and staff have a duty of care to exercise.

Rationale

Children learn who they are and how the world is, by forming relationships with people and things around them. The quality of a child's relationship with significant adults is vital to their healthy development and emotional health and wellbeing.

Many of the pupils who require emotional support from school may have been subject to trauma or distress or may not have had a positive start in life. It is with this in mind that staff seek to respond to children's developmental needs by using appropriate safe touch.

At St Margaret's Academy our policy takes into account the extensive neurobiological research and studies relating to attachment theory and child development that identify safe touch as a positive contribution to brain development, mental health and the development of social skills. The school has adopted an informed, evidence based decision to allow safe touch as a developmentally appropriate intervention that will aid healthy growth and learning.

Our policy rests on the belief that every member of staff needs to know the difference between appropriate and inappropriate touch. Hence, staff need to demonstrate a clear understanding of the difference. Equally, when a child is in deep distress, staff need to know when and how sufficient connection and psychological holding can be provided without touching.

All staff need to be clearly aware of procedures within this policy. The policy should be seen in the wider context of the 'Behaviour Policy' which aims to promote positive values and good behaviour choices.

Different types of touch

There are four different types of touch and physical contact that may be used, these are:

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 putting an arm out to bar an exit from a room, taking a child by the hand, 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 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, tickling or sitting on an adults' lap, hand or foot massage.

3. Contact/interactive Play

Contact play is used by staff adopting a role similar 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 play may include an adult chasing and catching the child or an adult and child playing a game of building towers with their hands.

This sort of play releases the following chemicals in the brain:

- Opioids - to calm and soothe and give pleasure;
- Dopamine - to focus, be alert and concentrate;
- BDNF (Brain Derived Neurotrophic Factor) - a brain 'fertiliser' that encourages growth.

4. Positive handling (calming a dysregulating child)

Staff may use force as is reasonable in all the circumstances in order to prevent a pupil from doing, or continuing to do, any of the following:

- Committing a criminal offence
- Injuring themselves or others
- Causing damage to property
- Engaging in behaviour prejudicial to maintaining good order and discipline. (This could be to prevent a pupil behaving in a way that seriously disrupts a lesson or to ensure a pupil leaves a classroom where the pupil persistently refuses to follow an instruction to do so. (As defined in the DfCSF, 'The use of force to control or restrain pupils. Guidance for Schools' 2010).

The relevant considerations which must be taken into account:

- The degree of force must be proportionate to the circumstances and incident, and seriousness of the event (or the consequences it is intended to prevent).
- It should always be the minimum needed to achieve the desired result, (it might also depend on the age, understanding and sex of the pupil).
- Use of force is only reasonable if particular circumstances warrant it, otherwise it is unlawful; it therefore follows that it should not be used for situations that can be resolved without it, or for trivial misdemeanours.
- Restraint must not be used to make a child comply with instructions unless it complies with the key points above.

A child who is in a state of dysregulation and has no mechanism for self-calming or regulating their strong emotional reactions may be physically contained by staff. This kind of containment will usually involve a member of staff sitting behind the child and enveloping the child in their arms whilst providing a safe, calm and soothing presence. It may also be necessary for another member of staff to control a child's kicking legs.

Staff will employ the safest and gentlest means of holding a child, which is entirely designed to enable the child to feel safe and soothed, bring him or her down from an uncontrollable state of hyper arousal. Maintaining boundaries in such cases can be a vital corrective emotional experience, without which the child can be left at risk of actual physical or psychological damage.

The brain does not develop self-soothing neuronal pathways unless this safe emotional regulation has been experienced. Physical containment of a dysregulating child can be the only way to provide the reassurance necessary to restore calm. 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) and in the Education Act Section 550A.

During any incident of restraint, staff must seek as far as possible to:

- Lower the child's level of anxiety during the restraint by continually offering verbal reassurance and avoiding generating fear of injury in the child;

- Cause the minimum level of restriction of movement of limbs consistent with the danger of injury (so, for example, will not restrict the movement of the child's legs when they are on the ground unless in an enclosed space where flailing legs are likely to be injured);
- Ensure at least one other member of staff is present.

Steps to take before positive handling

If the school is aware that a pupil is likely to behave in a way that might require physical restraint, it should plan how to respond. Consideration should be given to:

- Manage the pupil. Use strategies to de-escalate the event
- Involve parents so that they are fully aware of how the school may have to react
- Brief staff - ensure that everyone knows what action should be taken
- Ensure that additional support can be summoned if appropriate
- The need to take specific advice about the safest way to hold pupils with specific health needs (particularly those pupils with SEND)

Prevention strategies and calming measures will be employed and the following action should be taken before a restraint is used.

- Conversation, distraction, coaxing skills, gentle persuasion or redirection to other activities (e.g. touching the child's arm and leading him/her away from danger, gently stroking the child's shoulder);
- Encourage the pupil to help him/herself feel more secure by wrapping a blanket tightly around him/herself or holding on tightly to a large cushion or stuffed toy.
- Put distance between the child and others - move others to a safer place;
- Calmly remove anything that could be used as a weapon, including hot drinks, objects, furniture;
- To prevent a child continuing to pose harm in a dangerous situation, advise others to leave but remain with the child;
- Use seclusion only if necessary for a short period while waiting for help, preferably where a staff member can observe the child;
- Keep talking calmly to the child, explain what is happening and why, how it can stop, and what will happen next;
- Use first aid procedures in the event of injury or physical distress when safe to do so

Adults in charge should take a calm, measured approach to a situation, and never give the impression that they have lost their temper, or are acting out of anger, frustration, or to punish a pupil.

Physical intervention can take many forms:

- Physically interposing between pupils or blocking a pupil's path
- Touching, holding, pulling or leading a pupil by the arm
- Shepherding a pupil away by placing a hand in the centre of the back.
- (In extreme circumstances) using a more restrictive holds - as per Team Teach restraint training

Staff should always avoid touching or holding a pupil in a way that might be considered indecent. In exceptional circumstances, when there is an immediate risk of injury, (eg to prevent a pupil running on to a busy road, hitting someone or throwing something) staff may need to take any necessary action that is consistent with the concept of 'reasonable force'.

In other circumstances, staff should not act in a way that might reasonably be expected to cause injury, for example by:

- Holding a pupil around the neck or in a way that might restrict breathing
- Slapping, punching, kicking, tripping or forcing limbs against a joint
- Holding or pulling a pupil by the hair
- Holding a pupil face down on the ground

Where the risk is not so urgent, the staff member should:

- Consider carefully whether - and if so when - physical intervention is right
- Always attempt to deal with the situation through strategies other than force
- Use force only when all other methods have failed.

The key issue is to establish good order, and so any action which could exacerbate the situation should be avoided. The age and level of understanding of the pupil is very relevant in these circumstances. Physical intervention to enforce compliance with staff instruction is likely to be increasingly inappropriate with older pupils. It should never be used as a substitute for good behaviour management.

Recording Incidents:

Immediately following the incident where force is used (except for minor or trivial ones), the staff member should tell the HT or senior member of staff, and then fill in a restraint form as soon as possible afterwards. This may help to prevent any misunderstanding, and will be helpful should there be a complaint. The school maintains a restraint log kept with the Deputy Head Teacher.

Following an incident a report should go to a member of the SLT who will de-brief any staff involved. When compiling the report, staff might find it helpful to seek advice from a senior colleague. Parents should be informed of the incident, and given the opportunity to discuss it. The HT will need to consider whether parents should be told immediately, or at the end of the school day, and whether they should be informed orally or in writing.

The possibility of a complaint:

The best way of avoiding complaints is to involve the parents when incidents occur, and by following the clear guidelines provided within this policy. Use of force might lead to an investigation either under disciplinary procedures or child protection procedures, possibly leading to a disciplinary hearing, criminal prosecution or civil action. The key issue will be whether the degree of force was reasonable in all circumstances of the case, and whether the school policy has been followed, and whether the action was needed to prevent injury, damage or disruption.

Action in self-defence or an emergency:

Section 550A of the Education Act 1996 does not cover all the situations in which it might be reasonable for someone to use a degree of force. For example, everyone has the right to defend themselves against an attack provided they do not use a disproportionate degree of force to do so. Similarly, in an emergency, for example if a pupil was at an immediate risk of injury or on the point of inflicting injury on someone else, any member of staff would be entitled to intervene. The purpose of section 550A is to make it clear that teachers and other authorised staff, are also entitled to intervene in other, less extreme, situations.

Physical contact with pupils in circumstances not covered by Section 550A: There are situations, other than those covered in Section 550A, where physical contact with a pupil may be appropriate or necessary - for example in PE lessons, sports, coaching or DT, or if a member of staff has to administer first aid. Also, young children or those with SEN may need physical prompts or help. Touching may be appropriate to comfort a child in distress. However, there may be some children where touching is particularly unwelcome perhaps because of their cultural background or because they have been abused - all staff must be aware of this.

Staff training

At least one member of staff will be trained by accredited providers in physical intervention and restraint techniques. However it should not be assumed that trained members of staff should be solely responsible for dealing with all incidents where physical intervention or restraint is required.

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