



Safe Touch Protocol



Approved by Governing Body on: 30.12.2024

Signed:

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Elizabeth Hopewell'.

Head Teacher: Elizabeth Hopewell

Date of review: Dec 2027

Vision Statement

We aim to create a safe, happy and nurturing environment for all our children!

Mission Statement

The Orchard School strives to provide the best quality teaching and learning with an inclusive and personalised curriculum, where all achievements are celebrated.

Introduction

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. Our protocol takes into account the neurobiological research and studies relating to attachment theory and child development that identify that safe touch makes a positive contribution to brain development, mental health and the development of social skills.

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. Pupils unable to control their actions or unable to appreciate danger have a right to be protected; as do other pupils in school, and staff have a duty of care to exercise.

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.

All staff need to be clearly aware of procedures within this protocol. The protocol should be seen in the wider context of the Positive Behaviour and Relationships Policy and the Safeguarding and Child Protection Policy. Staff always need to be mindful of appropriate behaviour.

Aims

Children have the right to independence, choices and inclusion. 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 protocol aims to:

- Set out how The Orchard School uses positive and nurturing touch to promote child development.
- Address sensory processing issues in relation to physical contact.
- Acknowledge different types of safe touch.
- Who can use positive handling techniques, processes and associated record keeping.
- Policy Monitoring arrangements.

This protocol 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.

A positive and nurturing approach

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.

Attachment theory and child development identifies safe touch as a positive contribution to brain development, mental health and the development of social skills.

Touch is one of the most important senses in our early development. 'As well as being linked with our emotional development, it is also vital for development of the brain in general,' says Anne O'Connor, early years consultant and co-founder of Primed for Life.

Ms O'Connor explains that touch plays an important role in the development of communication; 'Children learn to read our body language as well as understand our words, and touch is important to this. It's also an important way for us to be able to "read" the child and tune into their well-being.' Above all, touch is a vital part of the process of attachment, building relationships with trusted adults that help a child feel secure and safe, giving them a base for further development.

At The Orchard School we believe in the same principles, that safe touch is a right, an essential part of development and about building relationships and connection. For example; hugging releases feel-good hormones in the hugger and 'huggee', which can help soothe stress and forge relationships. This kind of touch can help children develop the ability to regulate their own emotions.

Some, children 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.

Different types of Safe Touch

There are six different types of touch and physical contact that may be used at The Orchard School, 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 them. This might include 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. Some pupils will also have casual/informal and incidental touch between themselves for similar reasons and during shared learning and play activities and would be age and developmentally 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 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. These types of touch would be clearly defined within The Orchard School policies and appropriateness of staff actions. Because of the complex needs of our children reparative touch is used many of the children. Some pupils will also use general reparative touch between themselves for similar reasons and would be age and developmentally appropriate.

3. Contact 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 rough and tumble,

tickle games, being supported to explore in messy play, being held or rocked in physical play or being helped to access playground equipment. It may also include an adult chasing and catching the child and vice versa. All would be age and developmentally appropriate. Pupils will also use take part in contact play between themselves for similar reasons.

4. Interactive Play

This structured play between pupils follows clear rules and is operated under close supervision of staff. It will only ever take place when all participants are in agreement and understand the rules. 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 Neurotropic Factor) – a brain 'fertiliser' that encourages growth.

Interactive play may include: throwing cushions each other, role play of cops and robbers or using foam pool noodles to 'fence' each other; and all would be age and developmentally appropriate games.

5. Intimate Care

Intimate Care refers to any care that involves toileting, washing, changing, touching or carrying out an invasive procedure to children's intimate personal areas. Procedures and processes comply with our Safeguarding Policy. Intimate care is carried out properly by staff, in line with any agreed plans and ensure:

- The dignity, rights and wellbeing of children are safeguarded.
- Pupils who require intimate care are not discriminated against, in line with the Equality Act 2010.
- Parents/carers are assured that staff are knowledgeable about intimate care and that the needs of their children are taken into account.
- Staff carrying out intimate care work do so within guidelines (i.e. health and safety, manual handling, safeguarding protocols awareness) that protect themselves and the pupils involved.

Procedures are carried out within the toilet/changing areas. Changing beds are used in the toilet areas and the curtain will be drawn to ensure a child's dignity. If a child wears pull-ups they may be supported to change in the upright position in a cubicle within the toilet areas. Children may continue to be supported by an adult if they are able to use the toilet, this is to ensure their safety and develop their personal hygiene skills.

Male members of staff can change female pupils, as long as they have an enhanced DBS.

Concerns about safeguarding

If a member of staff carrying out intimate care has concerns about physical changes in a child's appearance (e.g. marks, bruises, soreness), they will report this using the school's safeguarding procedures.

If a child is hurt accidentally or there is an issue when carrying out the procedure, the staff member will report the incident immediately to the Senior Leadership Team.

If a child makes an allegation against a member of staff, the allegation will be investigated according to the school's safeguarding procedures.

Many children at The Orchard need staff to support them to meet their personal care needs. Children will be assisted to take part in self-care activities such as feeding, washing or dressing. Children will also have their intimate care needs met when having their nappy or pad change (Personal care protocol).

6. Positive Handling (calming a dysregulating child)

Staff are trained to support dysregulated pupils using de-escalation strategies, these may include visual cues, verbal cues, different environments and different staff. Trained staff may use positive handling as a last resort when a pupil:

- May cause harm to themselves or others or damage to property.
- Unacceptably threatening, dangerous, aggressive or out of control behaviour.
- Persistently disrupting the education of others.
- To avoid an offence being committed.

This should be reasonable, proportionate and necessary in order protect the child who is in distress, protect other children from a distressed child and to protect oneself and other staff/colleagues.

- This protocol needs to be read in conjunction with the Positive Behaviour and Relationships 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. This will be in line with their Sensory Diets which are monitored by Occupational Therapist and shared with parents.

A detailed written record will be made in the bound book as soon as possible after a positive handling intervention. After an emergency positive handling intervention, the situation will be reviewed and a plan will be made for any future interventions. Physical interventions Plans are written for children where physical interventions may be used more frequently. These are always shared with Parents and is part of a Positive Behaviour plan.

Using Touch to Communicate and Teach

Touch supports staff to communicate with pupils at The Orchard School, it allows staff and pupils to communicate with each other, conveying more meaning and emotion than words alone.

Some children will use a communication method called TaSSeLs, this method encourages learners' fullest participation, allowing the learner to remove their hand so they can withdraw from the interaction. Some children will use the on-body method, allowing the adult directly sign onto the learners body. Though on body signing, children can be alerted to being moved or guided to an activity or task.