

Trinity School-Policy on Touch

This policy is intended to ensure that:

All young people at Trinity School are supported through their development by empathetic staff who use *touch* in a well-informed and respectful way.

Empathetic staff:

- understand that appropriate *touch* is necessary and desirable as part of our pupils' development, emotional wellbeing, care, education and quality of life.
- are sensitive to the danger of *touch* being misunderstood and triggering sexual arousal and that this should be reported.
- understand that a young person may inadvertently touch intimate parts of a member of staff's body when there is no sexual intent or understanding.
- understand the importance of reporting through safeguarding procedures any concerns they have about any aspect of touch

Staff and Governors at Trinity School have an awareness of the importance of appropriate *touch* and the implications for our pupils if they are not equipped for the wider world in terms of –

- their vulnerability to exploitation;
- self advocacy;
- appropriate touch on themselves and towards others;
- concepts of public and private places;
- understanding social signals from other people

The Aims of our approach to *touch* are to:

- Enable staff to support children and young people with respectful, empathetic touch with confidence
- Safeguard and oversee personalised approaches for those young people whose need for *touch* does not leave them vulnerable to exploitation or misinterpretation in School or in the wider world
- Enable families of our young people to know what is appropriate *touch* and how we safeguard their children
- Develop pupil self-esteem and self-awareness, communication and self-advocacy skills and their ability to keep themselves safe and understand what is appropriate on themselves or others
- Equip staff with an understanding of what is inappropriate *touch* and what to do if they witness its use

Agreed Procedures

- Policy on Touch shared and understood by staff across whole school in the context of safeguarding policies and the Emotional and Sexual Development policy.
- There is clear message that it is **never** appropriate for staff to touch a pupils' intimate body areas except as part of intimate or medical care in an efficient and functional way
- A list of guidelines for what we consider to be appropriate *touch* are shared
- A system of *Touch Protocols* recognises the need for developmentally appropriate communication, bonding and intensive interactions and balances this with appropriate and professional distance
- Touch Protocols drawn up and shared with staff involved and families for the most vulnerable students by the Assistant Headteachers with support from the Emotional and Sexual Development team as appropriate

How do we know this approach is working? Our pupils are safeguarded by an empathetic staff without losing access to appropriate touch that supports their emotional wellbeing and communication.

Guidelines for appropriate touch when working with pupils

Touch is important and may be used routinely and transparently for any of the following reasons.

1. **For communication**-particularly taking into account the developmentally early levels of our pupils; eg intensive interactions, greetings etc
2. **For educational reasons**-for support, modelling or guidance in next steps in learning and transitions
3. **To play**-remember play is important in development and many people of any age who are at early levels of development are likely to be quite tactile and physical
4. **For therapy**-physio, OT, massage, sensory integration, tacpac
5. **For emotional reasons**-offering reassurance, warmth, comfort, security
6. **For purposes of care**
7. **For medical and nursing care**
8. **To give physical support**-for pupils who have physical difficulties, transfers etc
9. **To protect from danger by using physical intervention in line with School policy**

It is important to balance developmental age with age-appropriateness and professional distance, bearing in mind how vulnerable our pupils are and using thoughtful planning for those at the very earliest levels of development.

For example, at Year 9, would we as professionals still offer comfort with a hug? However we also recognise that a young person in Year 9 with PMLD benefits from closeness in intensive interactions.

It is important to consider how many of our pupils build routines very quickly that they will not wish to unlearn. For these pupils it is imperative that from an early age we are teaching them what is and is not appropriate-ie lap-sitting; frontal hugs; carrying.

From as early as Lower School, we should be deflecting pupils to sitting alongside; sideways hugs/patting for comfort; insisting that children are not carried unless absolutely necessary. Children for whom a degree of closeness is important during crises should have a Touch Protocol drawn up by the Assistant Headteacher.

Inappropriate touch includes touch of intimate areas; behaviour that is overfriendly/too close and does not recognise professional distance or age-appropriateness; sexual grooming; touch causing arousal or pain; touch that is not gentle or respectful; touch used for bullying; touch that is gratuitous; touch that is hidden.