

Beaucroft School



Touch Policy 2023

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Signed By: <i>J Kenema</i>
Approval Committee: Finance and Staffing Committee

Touch / Physical Contact

Introduction

Touch and physical contact is essential in order to provide sensitive, high quality care and educational provision. Used in context and with empathy, touch supports the development of natural interactions with the young people we teach and care for. This policy sets out the reasons for physical contact between an adult and child. Some elements of touch/physical contacts may relate to Intensive Interaction techniques.

Purpose of touch and physical contact at Beaucroft School

Touch and physical contact may be used for:

- Communication

e.g placing a hand on someone's shoulder when speaking to them; to greet someone (shaking hands).

To support early communication e.g sensitively directing / guiding / supporting children in an educational task

- Learning

To assist, prompt and enable interactions with peers and staff. To support engagement with resources and classroom activities.

- Transitions

e.g During changes between activities

- Play

Many play activities naturally involve touch. People of any age who are at an early stage of development are likely to be tactile and physical

- Therapy

e.g massage, sensory stimulation, physiotherapy, rebound therapy, Intensive Interaction

- Emotional reasons

e.g to communicate affection and warmth, to give reassurance.

- Purposes of care:

touch is necessary in order to carry out personal care for many

- To give medical and nursing care.

- Physical support to people who have physical difficulties

e.g. transfers in and out of wheelchairs, to guide people between places, rooms or activities

- Protect children and young people from danger by physically intervening.

Guidelines

Staff need to be clear and open about why they are using touch and be able to explain their practice. There must be clarity and transparency in issues of touch.

The use of touch should be discussed openly and regularly between staff. People of any age can want and need physical support / touch. Staff should not cuddle a child front to front. If a child attempts to do so the member of staff should encourage the child to accept a sideways hug supporting their shoulders and upper arm. Sideways hugs should be used to offer comfort, reparation and to show support. If it is deemed that a child would benefit from a front to front cuddle this should be written into a plan that is agreed by parents / guardians and the Co-headteachers. Staff should also avoid a child sitting on their laps – again if it was deemed that a child would benefit it should also be written into a plan that is agreed by parents / guardians and the Co-headteachers.

Staff may be concerned about the issue of age-appropriateness; however, the developmental age and emotional and communication needs of the individual are far more important than actual age. While gender and cultural factors have relevance in issues of touch, the emotional and communication needs of the individual are due equal consideration.

Staff should be sensitive to any verbal and non-verbal communication from pupils that might indicate that they don't want to be touched. It should always be considered by staff that for touch to provide positive experiences it should be consensual.

Staff should be sensitive to any changes in the child's behaviour (e.g. overexcitement or negative reactions) that might indicate the need to reduce or withdraw touch; particularly during play or intensive interaction. Significant changes in behaviour should be clearly recorded.

The pupils we support should be given opportunities to touch each other while interacting and playing as would happen naturally for any child or young person. Attention should always be given to ensure that both parties are happy with this.

Staff must be aware of potential hazards in respect of sexual issues:

- staff must be sensitive to the danger of touch being misunderstood and triggering sexual arousal and must be alert to all feedback signals from the person they are working with
- the children we support may occasionally inadvertently touch intimate parts of a member of staff's body when there is no sexual intent or understanding. The member of staff should withdraw without giving significant negative feedback in this situation.

It is *never* appropriate for staff to touch a child's intimate body areas except as part of intimate or medical care (see Beaucroft's Intimate Care Policy).

It is not appropriate for staff to kiss pupils.

If staff are in any doubt about issues concerning appropriate touch or observe any practice that causes concern they should discuss this with the Safeguarding Lead.