


Online safety policy

OAK HILL CE PRIMARY SCHOOL



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Signed by:		Victoria Leather, Chair of Governors

At Oak Hill CE Primary School, we welcome children from all backgrounds. We strive to meet the individual's needs of all pupils to ensure they have a positive and productive educational experience. To enable Thrive to be embedded across the whole school for all children safe touch is essential.

Our policy on Safe Touch was developed in the context of the Local Authority Child Protection Procedures and Policies. It takes into account the extensive neurobiological research and other empirical studies relating to attachment theory and child development that identify safe touch as a positive contribution to brain development, emotional regulation, mental health and the development of pro-social skills.

What is Safe Touch?

The developmentally appropriate and therapeutic use of safe touch is defined by situations in which abstinence would actually be inhumane, unkind and potentially psychologically or neuro- biologically damaging.

Examples include the empirically backed beneficial use of touch in the comforting of a child who is in an acute state of distress and/or out of control. Not to reach out to the child in such circumstances could be re-traumatising and damaging, confirming or inviting anti-social behaviour patterns. Abstinence in the face of intense grief, stress and/or rage reactions can lead to a state of hyper arousal in which toxic levels of stress chemicals are released in the body and brain. The severely damaging long-term effects of this state has intensively been researched worldwide and well documented.

Why is touch an important part of our work?

Research shows clearly that 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 agreed conditions, staff will consider using safe touch as one of the means available to them to:

- Calming a distressed child,
- Contain an angry child,
- Affirm or encourage an anxious child or a child with low self-esteem.

Why have a policy on safe touch?

Oak Hill CE Primary School has adopted an informed, evidence-based decision to allow safe touch in cases as a developmentally appropriate intervention that will aid healthy growth and learning. Safe touch used to calm, soothe and regulate a child's emotions is a needed developmental experience. The brain does not develop self-soothing neuronal pathways until safe emotional regulation is experienced. Where children have had insufficient experience of safe touch and calming regulation this may

be a priority to help the brain to develop access to thinking, judging and evaluating mechanisms.

Other means of calming, soothing and containing children's strong emotions include:

- slowing one's pace,
- lowering the voice,
- breathing more deeply,
- initially matching the pitch and volume of the child's emotional display and then regulating it down talking slowly, firmly and quietly in an unhurried and unflustered way.

To whom does it apply?

It applies to all staff and children working within our schools. Identified staff in our school who are trained in the identification and use of Positive Intervention and safe touch as a developmental intervention.

Different types of touch

There are three different types of touch and physical contact, 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

Staff working with children who are having difficulties with their emotions use this. 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 or an arm, rocking gently, cuddling, tickling or sitting on an adult's lap (lap cushion may be used), hand or foot massage.

3. Contact/interactive Play

Staff adopting a role similar to a parent in a healthy child-parent relationship use contact play. 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, 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 to each other or using soft foam bats to 'fence' each other.

Appropriate and Inappropriate Touch

Our policy rests on the belief that each staff member must appreciate the difference between appropriate and inappropriate touch and will need to demonstrate a clear understanding of the difference, acknowledging both the damaging and unnecessary uses of touch in an educational context. Touch is not to be used as an ill thought out or impulsive act of futile reassurance or as a means to ensure compliance.

All staff should adhere to the following guidelines:

- Parents/Carers should be informed of the school policy around touch. Discussion with parents and pupils about how comfortable their child is with safe touch should be held. For some pupils, safe touch will not be comfortable for them and this should be communicated to staff.
- Staff members should agree the use of safe touch in discussion with the leadership team and its use regularly reviewed.
- Use appropriate gentle contact on open or clothed parts of the body: hands, arms, shoulders, head, and hair.
- To be respectful and understand how touch can differ between different cultures.

Unsafe Touch

At no point and under no circumstances staff members should use touch to satisfy their own need for physical contact or reassurance. Staff need to show awareness of touch that is invasive or that could be confusing, traumatising or experienced as eroticising in any way what so ever. Staff must always be particularly sensitive to pupils who are demonstrating that they are not comfortable with touch even if it appears to be appropriate to the member of staff. It is vital for a member of staff to think about what they represent to a particular child.

A child's history may also influence who represents a 'safe' adult to them. Additionally, some children may be used to experiencing different levels or types of touch as part of their cultural upbringing. Should any such touch be used it would be deemed as a serious breach and will warrant the highest level of disciplinary action.