



Positive Touch Policy

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Positive Touch Policy

At Fairfield School we believe that every student should have the opportunity to take part in positive and nurturing experiences. The use of touch is a vital aspect of our nurturing role and 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, promotes the students social and emotional development and is also a highly effective and powerful method of non-verbal communication.

Purpose of touch and physical contact at Fairfield School:

Touch and physical contact may be used:

- to reinforce communication, for example, by placing a hand on the student's shoulder whilst speaking
- to give physical support and guidance
- to give reassurance: communicate security and comfort
- to physically intervene and manage behaviours (read in conjunction with our Positive Behaviour Policy)
- to play and interact
- to role model positive use of touch
- to respond non-verbally to another person's use of physical contact for communication and to make social connections. This could occur during intensive interaction or day to day greetings e.g. hand shakes
- to direct or physically prompt
- to give personal care (read in conjunction with our Intimate Care Policy)
- to give physical cues for participation or understanding
- medication/treatment, for example: to offer support after seizure/injury
- to aid protection in hazardous situations
- to give therapy, for example massage, sensory stimulation, physiotherapy, rebound therapy etc provided either by a therapist or by another member of staff carrying out a therapy programme or following therapy advice or through other mediums such as The Story Massage Programme or Functional Reflex Therapy led by trained staff
- as the main form of communication
- to respond to a student's use of physical contact or communication and making social connections
- to reward and affirm
- to give the opportunity of choice to lead the communication
- to offer the opportunity to students who do not want or like touch to see the enjoyment and benefit of physical contact
- to give graphic experience of the tempo of life and physical activity enjoyed by another person, for example: a member of staff communicates calm and stillness through physical contact

We have many students who display emotional, physiological, cognitive and communicative behaviours associated with very early levels of development. For students who are at an early stage of development, touch is likely to be the most fundamental, tangible and foundational form of communication; to some extent establishing a foundation for all further communication development.

Many students have sensory impairments including those relating to sight or hearing. This emphasises the necessity to use available forms of communication in order to ensure that all students have rich, social learning experiences.

Physical contact is a deep, fundamental form of communication, and can be particularly effective for ensuring the transmission of profound messages about self-worth and respect, particularly (but not only) when speech communication is not available.

Students that have difficulties with appropriate touch, for example are heavy handed or physically challenging, need experiences of positive touch in order to adapt their behaviour. Appropriate touch cannot be experienced, understood and reciprocated when touch is withdrawn. Appropriate touch may make a student's recognition of inappropriate touch more likely, and therefore maybe a proactive measure against inappropriate touch and/or the effects of the experience of inappropriate touch.

Guidelines:

- Staff need to be clear and open about why they are using touch and be able to explain their practice
- The use of touch should be discussed openly and regularly between staff
- While gender and cultural factors have relevance in issues of touch, the emotional and communication needs of the individual are due equal consideration
- As far as possible, the student involved should consent to any touch given and staff should be sensitive to any verbal and non-verbal communication they give that might indicate that they do not 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 student's behaviour or negative reactions that might indicate the need to reduce or withdraw touch
- If staff are in any doubt about issues concerning appropriate touch or observe any practice that causes concern they should discuss this with the DSL