

'Positive Handling': Safe Touch – Procedures and Policy

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Overview

In this document, 'Positive Handling' is taken to include the trained use of Safe Touch and Safe Holding, Containment and Restraint

The use of Positive Handling includes the use of Safe Touch and Safe Holding and are defined as:

Safe touch is appropriate if a child or young person:

- where its therapeutic use has been agreed because it addresses an identified developmental need on the part of the child or young person.
- Where Safe Touch is to be used it must be done with the full knowledge and consent of parents/carers/guardians by supervised staff in carefully monitored situations.
- Where Safe touch does not help the student and regulate emotions it may be necessary to safe guide or Safe hold to help contain their emotional state and keep themselves, other or property safe.

Safe Guiding (see 'Positive Handling': Safe guiding and holding – Procedures and Policy) is appropriate if a child or young person is:

- Able to follow instructions and be guided away from a place or people being led by a physical touch in an appropriate place such as the arm or elbow
- At risk of hurting himself/herself or others,(or is likely to hurt himself /herself and/or others) or
- damaging property,

Safe Holding (see 'Positive Handling': Safe holding – Procedures and Policy) is appropriate if a child or young person is:

- hurting himself/herself or others,(or is likely to hurt himself /herself and/or others) or
- damaging property, and/or
- incensed and out of control, so that all other attempts to engage him her have failed.

Safe Holding should only be used by staff members who have completed a recognised restrictive physical intervention course such as Mapa, Team Teach or NFPS. The exception being when the immediate risk of harm to self, others or property.

Aim

Positive handling: the use of containment, safe touch and/ or safe holding provides key opportunities for emotional learning. A child or young person who cannot regulate their emotions can be a danger to themselves and others. This in turn makes learning and the development of skills very difficult. Research shows us that fear-based disciplinary systems result in, at best, short-term retention of facts but create mid and long-term difficulties with concentration, memory and retention of learning.

Safe Touch differs from Safe holding in that the staff can recognize early signals of mounting charge or distress and move in to intervene with the child or young person quickly. They stay in close contact with the young person until they have calmed down. The positive touch is used to calm soothe, attune and validate the young person's experience.

In this way, the children and young people learn through their own lived experience that there are ways they can keep themselves safe that do not include threats of punishment, coercion, bribery and aggression are available to keep themselves safe.

Conscious, informed use of safe touch can be transformative for the young people in CMAS' care.

Context

Our policy on Safe Touch has been developed in the context of Child Protection Procedures and Policies. Safe touch is a positive contribution to brain development, emotional regulation, mental health and the development of pro-social skills.

To whom does this policy apply?

- All staff and children working within the CMAS School

Why have a policy on touch?

In order to protect children and CMAS staff from allegations under Child Protection procedures, some schools and LEAs have adopted 'No Touch' policies. However this school is adopting an informed, evidence-based decision to allow safe touch in special cases as a developmentally appropriate intervention that will aid healthy growth and learning.

Children learn who they are and how the world is in relationship. The quality of the child's relationships with significant adults is key to their healthy development and emotional health and wellbeing.

Safe touch is used to calm, soothe and regulate a child's emotions is a needed developmental experience. Safe touch is one of the key ways of regulating children's emotions

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 (shout, cry etc) and then regulating it down
- Talking slowly firmly and quietly in an unhurried unflustered way
- Providing clear predictable consistently held boundaries

The absence of safe touch experiences can be detrimental and sometimes actively harmful.

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.**

Appropriate and Inappropriate touch

Our policy rests on the belief that **every** member of staff needs to appreciate the difference between appropriate and inappropriate touch. They have to show themselves to be highly aware of 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 / gratification or as a block to referral for psychological assessment.
- Equally, when a young person is in deep distress, the CMAS team member is trained to know when and how sufficient connection and psychological holding have been or can be provided / established without touching.

Safe touch

To ensure touch is only used appropriately the following guidelines are followed:

- **THE TWO ADULTS rule:** No adult should use touch when alone with a child or young person
- **Use** brief, gentle contact on open clothed parts of the body: **hands, arms, shoulders, head, hair, shoes.**
- **Parents/Carers/Guardians** should be informed of the school policy around Touch.
- **Parents/Carers/Guardians** wherever possible should be involved in the CMAS Assessments and Action Plans and be regularly updated as to their child's progress through the program
- **Teachers and Support staff** should be aware of the mentoring guidelines in the CMAS approach
- **Teachers and Support staff** should be trained in all aspects of safe touch and safe guiding and holding
- **Staff members** should agree the use of safe touch in discussion with their case supervisor and its use recorded and monitored

Unsafe touch

- × **At no point and under no circumstances** should staff members use touch to satisfy their own need for physical contact or reassurance.
- × **No unsafe touch:** All staff are trained to be fully cognisant of touch that is *invasive* or which could be *confusing, traumatising or experienced as eroticising* in any way whatsoever.
- × **Should any such touch be used it would be deemed as a serious breach warranting the highest level of disciplinary action.**

Step-by-step guidance

Best practice (i.e. with thought and consideration given to develop the child's thinking) is when the adults have prepared the child for the hold and it has actually been rehearsed with them.

For example: The following script could be built up over a few conversations:

“When you get really upset/ hurt/ angry/ misrepresented/ criticised it is awful for you.

I see you get more and more tense/ jittery and you start to get hot/look as if you want to get away.

When this happens I am going to keep you safe. This is how I am going to do it

I am going to / touch your shoe/ put my hand on your back until I feel that you are calm.

1. The child may not be able to manage some or all of this. This whole sequence may happen over an extended period of time.
2. All adults coming into contact with the child must be aware of the plan and know that when an incident occurs, **at least 2 adults** need to be involved.
3. Every instance that the child/young person shows signs that they are beginning to disregulate or that they are unsafe, the adults' response needs to be quick and consistent
4. Once the young person is beginning to calm, the adult can turn their attention to attuning and validating the child's inner experience. This contributes positively to reshaping the neural pathways in the young person's brain and to developing new emotional regulatory techniques in the child.
5. When the child/young person has calmed teach/offer alternative ways of behaving.
6. The next conversation may start *“I wonder what we could do next time”* (wondering aloud rather than asking a question).

Follow up process

- CMAS staff will record all cases of safe touch in the bound and numbered book, log on CMAS Safeguarding reporting system (CPOMS) and report to their line manager.
- CMAS staff will inform parents/carers of the events that took place.
- Where appropriate a follow up using a restorative practice format. (see behaviour regulation policy for further guidance)

Monitoring arrangements

This policy will be reviewed every year by the Executive Head Teacher.

Links to other policies

This policy should be used in conjunction with the following policies:

- Child protection and Safeguarding Policy
- Behaviour Regulation Policy
- Whistle Blowing Policy
- Safe Handling policy
- Complaints Policy

