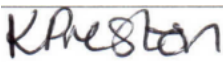


Policy/Procedure Name:	POSITIVE TOUCH POLICY		
Last Update:	August 2024	Next Update Due:	June 2027

Author	Alex Smythe
Signature of Authorised Individual	
Signature of the Director	

Rationale

At Willow Park School, we believe that the use of touch is a vital aspect of our nurturing role and that adult physical contact is not only inevitable but desirable. Touch not only promotes a child's social and emotional development but is also a highly effective and powerful method of non-verbal communication, which is especially important for the communication needs of our pupils at Willow Park. It is key to the development of healthy relationships and a method of stress relief. It can be used to:

- Show acceptance
- Provide reassurance
- Demonstrate affection
- Calm and provide comfort
- Emphasise the spoken word
- Provide sensory stimulation
- Engage in personal care routines
- Deliver various therapy programmes
- Offer an alternative to spoken communication
- Remove a child from danger or keep a child safe

When appropriate touch is not encouraged, as often happens, then all touch has the potential to become sexualised. Children don't learn to distinguish between appropriate and inappropriate touch. They miss out on a whole range of valuable touch experiences – friendly, nurturing, reassuring, comforting and healing. We should be instilling a sense of what appropriate touch is.

This policy complements the following school policies:

- Safeguarding and Child Protection Policy
- Staff Code of Conduct
- Children's Mental Health

Research

Research has shown that positive touch is beneficial for early bonding, stress reduction, and state regulation (Harrison, 2001); it also can improve attentiveness and sleep problems in some children with autism (Escalona, Field, Singer-Strunck, Cullen, & Hartshorn, 2001 Cullen LA, Barlow JH, Cushway D. 2005). For children with delays and disabilities, positive touch has been used effectively to enhance

caregiver-child interactions and increase the child's comfort (Pardew & Bunse, 2005). Field, T (2010) explored the importance of 'Touch for socioemotional and physical well-being'.

Staff

Members of staff in a caring school recognise physical contact as an important part of child development and guidance. They understand that physical contact may be communication and they recognise the importance and significance of non-verbal communication and respond appropriately. This should always be done in a developmentally appropriate way and should a child shun the comfort offered through touch, the child's wishes will be respected by the member of staff dealing with the situation.

When and why to apply therapeutic touch

Therapeutic touch is used in situations where children are distressed. In these situations, research has shown that it would be unkind or increase the child's distress if touch was not employed. When children are very distressed they often ignore information provided by their senses. For example, they may no longer see or no longer hear. When a child is distressed, touch can be the only means of maintaining a connection with the child.

Examples of appropriate touch may include the following:

- Respecting the personal privacy and personal space of children.
- Responses affecting the safety and well being of the child (eg holding the hand of a child while crossing the street, using a Team Teach hold (restrictive intervention) when a pupil becomes a danger to themselves or others).
- Responses supporting social and emotional development such as hugs (usually side on with older pupils to avoid full-body contact), lap sitting for younger children, reassuring touches on the shoulder, back rubs
- Touch for health and hygiene, personal care
- Where a pupil requires intimate personal care, staff should ensure that the pupil is comfortable with the staff member attending to their needs. A pupil's privacy and dignity should always be preserved. (See Intimate Care Policy)

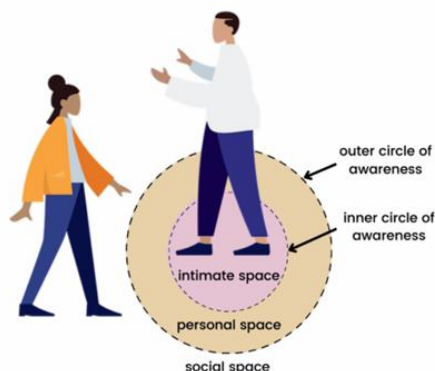
Examples of inappropriate touch include:

- Satisfaction of adult needs rather than that of the pupil
- Coercion or other forms of exploitation of the pupil's lack of knowledge
- Violation of laws against sexual contact between adults and children
- Forced kisses, corporal punishment, slapping, striking or pinching, tickling for prolonged periods, fondling or molestation.

It is vital that staff should always consider the pupil's gender, race, disability, and age when using touch as individuals may be used to experiencing different levels or types of touch. An individual's history may also influence who represents a 'safe' adult to them. In addition, some individuals may be used to differing levels of touch as part of their cultural upbringing. All staff have a responsibility to ensure that all practice at Willow Park school is safe, sensitive and appropriate.

It is also important to understand personal space and that we model this as adults to the children. Entering a child's personal space has inherent risks and staff should be mindful of these. See the school's behaviour policy for more details.

Personal Space



© Team Teach

Above all, staff at Willow Park understand that pupils' behaviour is a form of communication and that we will respond in a CALM manner as described below:

CALM Communication

Communication

C

- How am I standing and holding my body?
- What gestures am I using?
- What facial expressions am I showing?
- How am I giving verbal space?

Assessment & Awareness

A

- What do I know about this person?
- What strategies have worked well in the past?
- What are their known triggers?
- What do I know from their individual plans?

Listening & Learning

L

- What could their body language be communicating?
- How is this behaviour different from their baseline?
- What might happen next?
- How can I show that I'm emotionally available?

Making Safe

M

- What are the risks to the individual and others?
- How can I make the environment safe?
- What can I do to reduce any risks?
- Do I need support with this?

Further details of this can be found in the school's behaviour policy.

Restrictive Intervention

Avoiding Restrictive Intervention

We recognise that, due to the difficulties pupils at Willow Park School face, crisis behaviour for one student may manifest differently to another. Therefore, we commit to the provision of an individualised Positive Handling Plan (PHP) for each student at Willow Park School. These plans will detail known behaviours and effective responses for staff to support a student through the 6 stages of conflict:

1. Anxiety
2. Defensive
3. Crisis
4. Recovery
5. Depression
6. Follow Up.

These plans staff enable staff to be better equipped to recognise triggers and low-level behaviour and support a pupil, without using physical intervention, to avoid crisis-level behaviour.

Using Reasonable Force or Restrictive Intervention

'Reasonable force' covers a range of interventions that involve physical contact with pupils. All members of staff have a duty to use reasonable force, in the following circumstances, to prevent a pupil from:

- Causing disorder
- Hurting themselves or others
- Damaging property
- Committing an offence

Incidents of reasonable force must:

- Always be used as a last resort
- Be applied using the minimum amount of force and for the minimum amount of time possible
- Be used in a way that maintains the safety and dignity of all concerned
- Never be used as a form of punishment
- Be recorded and reported to parents/carers (see appendix 3 for a behaviour log)

When considering using reasonable force, staff should, in considering the risks, carefully recognise any specific vulnerabilities of the pupil, including SEND, mental health needs or medical conditions.

Methods of restraint

There is no universal judgement regarding what is appropriate, safe or legally justifiable in every case. Staff must be guided by their own professional judgement. The school commits to have at least three members of staff trained in the use of physical restraint. At the time of writing, 6 members of staff completed 'Team Teach' training in July 2024. Whenever possible these staff will advise others on appropriate use. However, in the interests of safety, all members of staff are authorised to use physical restraint, *if absolutely necessary*.

The restraint applied should be non-aggressive, as limited as possible and sufficient only to maintain the pupil in a safe state. In exceptional circumstances, it may not be possible (or in the pupil's best interests) to exercise physical restraint.

Follow-up & Records

- If a pupil is restrained, it **MUST** be recorded on the school's restraint incident form (Appendix 2) to ensure that all relevant staff know about the event and that it comes clearly within the school's Behaviour Policy. Parents **MUST** also be informed. It is essential that staff inform the Head teacher verbally after a restraint incident, complete the restraint incident form and then record the details on Horizons
- **All of our pupils will have an 'Individual Personal Handling and Behaviour Plan' (Appendices 3 and 4 of the Behaviour Policy) and this must be regularly monitored for its effectiveness.**

Parental Contact

Ideally, when Physical Restraint has been used, parental contact should be made verbally and face-to-face, so we would expect that a member of staff speaks to the parent after school. Where parents do not come to school, telephone contact should be made. In all cases, the parent should be invited to come to school to discuss the incident. If it is impossible to contact the parent on the same day as the incident, they should be contacted as soon as possible afterwards, verbally (preferably face-to-face; otherwise, by phone) or at least by letter (records/copies should be kept).

Links with other policies

This policy is linked to the following policies

- Behaviour Policy
- Exclusions policy
- Safeguarding and Child Protection policy
- Anti-Bullying Policy
- Staff Code of Conduct

Equality Statement

At Willow Park School, we actively seek to encourage equity and equality through our teaching and our employment practices. As such, we seek to advance the equality of opportunity between people who share any of the following characteristics:

- age
- disability
- gender reassignment
- being married or in a civil partnership
- being pregnant or on maternity leave
- race including colour, nationality, ethnic or national origin
- religion or belief
- sex
- sexual orientation

The use of stereotypes under any of the above headings will always be challenged.

Inclusion

Our school is an inclusive school. We aim to make all pupils feel included in all our activities. We try to make all our teaching fully inclusive. We recognise the entitlement of all pupils to a balanced, broadly-based curriculum. We have systems in place for early identification of barriers to their learning and participation so that they can engage in school activities with all other pupils. We acknowledge the need for high expectations for and of all children.