



POSITIVE TOUCH POLICY

Chatten Free School

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| Approved by: | Head of School (LGB aware) |
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Background to the Positive Touch Policy

We are highly aware of the current climate in which touch/physical comfort as a natural and important form of human connection has been almost vetoed in some schools, because of fears of abuse. As a school that takes very seriously its responsibilities to safeguard children and young people, we share these important concerns. Chatten Free School works with very vulnerable and challenging pupils who are experiencing difficulties which may leave them feeling distressed, angry or disorientated.

In these circumstances it is natural for children to seek comfort from the adults they trust. If these adults feel they must never reach out to comfort a child at such a time, it would be deeply concerning, particularly in light of situations where the withholding of touch with a very distressed or dysregulated child can be damaging to a child's recovery and future development.

Many neuroscientific and psychological studies have shown that a lack of soothing touch in childhood, particularly during times of distress, can result in physical ill-health and problems with anxiety, aggression or depression in later life.

Positive touch

The appropriate therapeutic use of touch is defined by situations in which abstinence (i.e. not to touch the child) would actually be inhumane, unkind and potentially psychologically or neurobiologically damaging.

There is strong, empirically backed evidence that the use of touch in the comforting of a child who is in an acute state of distress is very beneficial. Not to reach out to the child in such circumstances, could also be re-traumatising.

The damaging long-term effects of this have been extensively researched worldwide and are well documented. In many states of distress, touch can often be the only means of maintaining a connection with the child when he or she can no longer hear or make therapeutic use of the adult's words.

Positive touch as a preventative measure

Therapeutic touch can also be appropriate as a way of preventing a behaviour or state of heightened anxiety occurring before it occurs, for example, to calm a pupil or to guide them away from a stressful situation.



Positive touch to support sensory processing

Many of our pupils suffer with sensory processing disorders which can also lead to heightened anxiety and/or sensory seeking behaviours. The use of therapeutic touch in these circumstances is also acceptable. This may include squeezing and hugging providing it is done in an appropriate manner (sideways)

Positive touch to support positive behaviour and build relationships

Some pupils may seek therapeutic touch in response to positive behaviour. For example, hugging (from the side) tickling or physical play within an appropriate setting. It may also be beneficial to use therapeutic touch to support the building of positive working relationships especially when we consider that many of our pupils are unable to communicate and form bonds through a verbal medium.

Guidelines around appropriate touch

For the most part positive touch should only involve the extremities or the back. For example, a hand on the arm or shoulder. Supportive hugs where appropriate need to be 'side on' so that genitals are not touching. Obviously positive touch should not involve private areas of the body and should never be done in way which makes the pupil feel uncomfortable or violated. This constitutes a safeguarding issue as described below.

The Use of Touch in the Context of Safeguarding Children

Chatten Free School staff are aware of touch, which is posing as therapeutic, but which is actually being used to satisfy the practitioner's need for contact rather than that of the children.

Naturally, staff are also fully cognisant of touch that is invasive, or which could be confusing, traumatising, or experienced as stimulating in any way whatsoever. Should any such touch be used, it would be deemed as the most serious breach of our Safeguarding Policy.

Therapeutic touch is for the benefit of the pupil not the staff member.



Restrictive physical intervention

Please note that in the terms of Chatten Free School therapeutic touch is not the same as a restrictive physical intervention. We sure th have a separate policy for this.

Staff training in using appropriate positive touch

All Chatten Free School staff have received specialist, advanced training from members of the senior leadership team on working with children and young people. This training is updated regularly. Staff are trained to use touch only when it is necessary in the scenarios mentioned above and only when non-physical means of are not enough. The training forms part of staff induction and will take place before staff have direct contact with pupils. In the training staff will be provided information regarding:

- Appropriate positive touch
- When to use positive touch
- When not to use positive touch
- How to follow a support/sensory/behaviour/learning plan with regards to positive touch
- What to do if they are unsure in any way about what is appropriate