Harford Manor School

Foundations For Futures

Touch Policy

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Person(s) responsible for review:	Kerry Locke

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Touch is essential in order to provide sensitive and good quality care and learning for the children and young people we support.

Context

Used in context and with empathy, touch supports the development of our natural interactions with the children and young people we care for. It can also be key to developing fundamental social, behavioural and attention skills. Staff may have concerns and fears about the use of touch for various reasons. This policy sets out to clarify the reasons and conditions for touch.

Purposes

Touch is important and may be used routinely for any of the following reasons:

- Communication – to reinforce other communication (e.g. hand on shoulder when speaking) or to function as the main form of communication in itself. To respond non-verbally or to respond to another person's own use of physical contact for communication and to make social connections. This is particularly likely to occur during intensive interaction or day to day greetings (handshakes, side hugs etc.)
- Educational reasons – as part of the process of establishing the fundamentals of communication for people at early communication levels: enjoying being with another person, developing the ability to attend to that person, concentration and attention span, learning to do sequences of activity with the other person, taking turns in exchanges of behaviour, sharing personal space, using and understanding eye contact, using and understanding facial expressions, using and understanding physical contacts, using and understanding non-verbal communication, using vocalizations with meaning, learning to regulate and control arousal level.
- Touch can also be used directly with children in educational tasks and essential skills and as support or guidance, for example during transitions between activities and during swimming or P.E. sessions.
- Play activities naturally include touch. People of any age who are at early levels of development are likely to be quite tactile and physical.
- Therapy – (e.g. massage, sensory stimulation, physiotherapy, rebound therapy etc.) either by the therapist or by another member of staff carrying out a therapy programme or following therapy advice.
- Emotional reasons – to communicate affection and warmth. To give reassurance, to communicate security and comfort. To enable the person to develop understanding of these positive emotions and the ability to communicate them.

- Purposes of care -Touch is necessary in order to carry out personal care for many of the people we support. (See Policy on Intimate Care and child's Intimate care Plan)
- Give medical care Physical support – to give physical support to people who have physical difficulties (e.g. transfers in and out of wheelchairs) and in order to guide people between places, rooms or activities.
- Protection - to protect children and young people from danger by physically intervening and managing challenging behaviours including the use of restraint, following Norfolk Steps (See policies on Behaviour Management and Physical Intervention, Whole school policy for Safeguarding Incorporating Child Protection and the individual's Support and Intervention Plan).

Guidelines:

Staff need to be clear and open about why they are using touch and be able to explain their practice. There must be clarity and transparency in issues of touch. Wherever possible, a description and rationale for physical contact and the details of it should be documented in the young person's intimate care plan and/or in their Support and Intervention Plan, following discussion with parents and other relevant people. The use of touch should be discussed openly and regularly between staff. People of any age can want and need physical support/touch.

Staff need to consider the issue of age-appropriateness. However, the developmental age, emotional and communication needs of the individual are far more important than actual age, so appropriate ways should be sought to meet the young person's needs. 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 young person 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 don't 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 young person's behaviour (e.g. over-excitement or negative reactions) that might indicate the need to reduce or withdraw touch, particularly during play or intensive interaction. Significant changes in behaviour should be clearly recorded. The people we support should be given opportunities to touch each other while interacting and playing as would happen naturally for any child or young person. Attention should always be given to ensure that both parties are happy with this.

Staff must be aware of potential hazards in respect of sexual issues:

- staff must be sensitive to the danger of touch being misunderstood and triggering sexual arousal and must be alert to all feedback signals from the person they are working with

- the young people we support may occasionally inadvertently touch intimate parts of a member of staff's body when there is no sexual intent or understanding. The member of staff should withdraw without giving significant negative feedback in this situation and the incident should be recorded.

It is *never* appropriate for staff to touch a young person's intimate body areas except as part of intimate or medical care. (See policy on Intimate Care). If staff are in any doubt about issues concerning appropriate touch, or observe any practice that causes concern, they should discuss this with the school's Designated Safeguarding Lead (DSL). Staff should be aware that there have been many instances of abuse perpetrated in a range of educational and care establishments. The best method of prevention is transparency, openness and teamwork, and staff should try to monitor and assist each other in carrying out their work.

Conclusion

Touch is necessary and desirable as part of the development, emotional wellbeing, care, education and quality of life of the young people we support. This policy outlines when this may be needed and gives staff the direction and security for this to occur positively and productively, whilst still protecting the people in our care.

This policy should be read in conjunction with the following school policies and government guidance:

- **Documents which informed this policy:**
- Behaviour and Physical Intervention Policy 2025
- Whole school Policy for Safeguarding Incorporating Child Protection 2025
- Staff Code of Conduct 2025
- Keeping Children Safe in Education 2025
- Reducing the need for restraint and restrictive intervention 2019Behaviour in Schools – Advice for headteachers and school staff February 2024