

Ysgol Gynradd Herbert Thompson

Herbert Thompson Primary School



Safe Touch

Policy

Safe Touch Policy

Why have a policy on touch?

Herbert Thompson is adopting an informed, evidence-based decision to allow safe touch in special cases as a developmentally appropriate intervention that will aid healthy emotional growth and learning. Research shows clearly that healthy pro-social brain development requires access to safe touch as one of the means of calming, soothing and containing distress for a frightened, sad or angry child. It is essential for all children to learn the difference between safe and unsafe touch and to experience having their strongest emotions contained, validated, accepted and soothed by a significant adult.

If children are behaving in unacceptable, threatening, dangerous, aggressive or out of control ways, they have not yet learned how their strongest emotional reactions can be contained, channelled and communicated safely. In recognition of this, under special, agreed and supervised conditions, staff will consider using safe touch and or Team Teach methods, for example to calm a distressed child, to contain an angry or wild child and/or encourage or affirm an anxious child or to support a child with low self-esteem. The brain does not develop neuronal pathways to initiate calming and self-soothing unless and until this safe emotional regulation has been experienced within a positive relationship with a significant adult. Where children have had insufficient experience of safe touch and calming regulation, this may be a priority to help their brains to develop access to thinking, judging, evaluating and choosing mechanisms. These are sometimes known as ‘higher executive skills’ and they are an intrinsic part of cognitive regulation. Safe touch is one of the key ways of regulating children’s emotions, but it is a strategy that staff will use only under supervision and in line with a whole school Policy on Touch.

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

Not to reach out to the child in distressing circumstances could be re-traumatising and neuro-biologically damaging as well as confirming or inviting anti-social behaviour patterns. Refraining from physically, safely holding a child in the face of their intense grief, stress and/or rage reactions can lead to a state of hyper-arousal, in which toxic levels of stress chemicals are released in the body and brain. The severely

damaging long-term effects of this state have been intensively researched worldwide and are well documented.

Moreover, gentle safe holding and or Team Teach holding is appropriate if a child:

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

What about other physical contact with pupils?

It is not illegal to touch a pupil. There are occasions when physical contact, other than reasonable force, with a pupil is proper and necessary.

Examples of where touching a pupil might be proper or necessary:

- Holding the hand of the child at the front/back of the line when going to assembly or when walking together around the school;
- When comforting a distressed pupil;
- When a pupil is being congratulated or praised;
- To demonstrate how to use a musical instrument;
- To demonstrate exercises or techniques during PE lessons or sports coaching
- To give first aid.

Guidelines for the use of Safe Touch

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

- Parents/carers should be informed of the school policy on Touch.
- Parents/carers should provide signed consent for their child to be part of the Thrive program
- Parents/carers wherever possible should be involved in the Thrive Assessments and Action Plans and be regularly updated as to their child's progress through the program

- Teachers/support staff should be trained in the Thrive approach
- Teachers/support staff should be trained in all aspects of safe touch
- Staff members should agree the use of safe touch in discussion with their manager.
- Child should be consulted, appropriate to their understanding, and involved in the development of a plan, based on a comprehensive risk assessment.
- Strategies should be rehearsed and practised (as is possible) with the child in preparation.
- An Individual Behaviour Management Plan or Safety Plan should be completed and its use recorded and monitored. This will supplement the Thrive Action Plan which will also include the use of safe touch as a strategy.
- TWO Adult rule: No adult should use safe holding when alone with a child. Both adults should have the closest / best relationship with the child. Where touch is used, contact should be brief and gentle, on clothed or publically visible parts of the body: hands, arms, shoulders, head, hair, shoes.
- 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.
- Serious Breach: Should any such touch be used it would be deemed as the most serious breach of the Code of Ethics warranting the highest level of disciplinary action.

Peer message

Peer message is clothed massage given to children by children. It is restricted to back, head, arms and hands and is given and received with the child's permission. Each message lasts around 10 minutes. Teachers and children decided when is an appropriate time during the day to carry it out.

A number of studies have been done in the UK (see http://www.touchlinetraining.co.uk/downloads/MISP_research_overview2015.aspx).

The outcomes from the studies show that the main benefits of Peer Massage are.

- Improved calmness and concentration
- Increased self confidence and self esteem
- Improved social skills with a greater number of relationships/friendships with peers and adults
- Happier and more relaxed children
- A reduction in aggressive behaviour and bullying
- A more positive attitude and greater engagement with learning
- Improved ability to work in groups and independently

- Greater creativity and problem solving
- Increased awareness of the body and signs of stress and anxiety

Policy Date: April 2022

Policy Review Date: April 2025

Governors Signed:

Headteacher Signed: