Educate U

Positive Touch Policy

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Positive Touch Policy

Rationale

At Educate U, touch is recognised as a fundamental form of communication, especially for pupils in the early stages of development. While physical contact should be appropriate to professional roles and codes of conduct, a complete "no touch" approach is impractical and sometimes inappropriate. Physical contact should be responsive to the pupils' needs, age, stage of development, and cultural background. Staff must exercise professional judgment when determining the appropriateness of physical contact. All instances of physical contact should be transparent, child-centred, and never for the personal gratification of the adult.

Purpose:

The Positive Touch Policy aims to provide practical guidelines and safeguards for staff in using physical contact as a form of positive reinforcement, communication, and support. It is developed within the context of safeguarding and child protection policies and guidelines.

Suitability:

This policy applies to all staff (paid or unpaid) working within our school. Physical touch is essential for providing sensitive and high-quality care to pupils in all stages of development.

Use of Positive Touch:

- Positive touch, such as gentle contact on clothed parts of the body (hands, arms, shoulders, head, hair, and feet), may be used to prompt, guide, reassure, comfort, and support pupils.
- Low-level touch, like an elbow guide, arm around the shoulder, or held hand, may be employed to encourage stillness, aid transitions, ensure access to the curriculum, or maintain safety.
- A small number of pupils may require deep pressure touch e.g., Reflexology, which should be recorded on their sensory profile, reviewed regularly, and shared with the class team. Staff should be trained in safe use methods.

Examples:

Show acceptance - Touch can convey acceptance and create a sense of belonging for a child. A gentle touch can communicate that they are valued and cared for.

Provide reassurance - Touching a child in a comforting way can provide reassurance during times of distress or anxiety, helping them feel secure, supported and not alone.

Demonstrate affection - Physical touch, such as hugs or handholding, is a primary way of expressing affection and building emotional bonds between caregivers and children.

Calm and provide comfort - Touch has a calming effect on children and can help soothe them when they are upset, promoting emotional regulation and relaxation.

Emphasise the spoken word - Touch can be used alongside verbal communication to reinforce messages, especially with young children or those with special needs. For example, a pat on the back or handshake while praising can emphasize the positive feedback.

Provide sensory stimulation - Different types of touch, such as textures, pressure, or gentle movements, can stimulate a child's senses, contributing to their sensory development.

Deliver various therapy programs - Touch is utilized in several therapeutic approaches, including massage therapy to address specific developmental or sensory needs of children.

Offer an alternative to spoken communication - In situations where verbal communication is challenging or not possible, touch can serve as an alternative means of expressing needs, comfort, or consent.

Remove a child from danger, keep a child or others safe - In dangerous situations or when a child is in harm's way, or could harm themselves or others, touch may be necessary to quickly and safely intervene, protect, or guide them. Please refer to Educate U's Trauma Informed Behaviour Policy.

Consent and Sensitivity:

- Staff should seek a pupil's permission before initiating touch, where feasible.
- Staff should observe, listen, and be attentive to a child's verbal and non-verbal cues, ensuring that touch is acceptable to the child.
- Touch should never be invasive, confusing or traumatising. Staff should be mindful of cultural, religious, and personal boundaries.

Planning and Documentation:

- The use of touch within the curriculum should be discussed openly and regularly among staff (transparent).
- Touch should be described, justified, and where necessary documented following discussions with the pupil, parents/carers, and relevant staff.
- Planned use of touch should be included in a child/young person's EHCP e.g. for pressure seeking behaviours.

Hazards and Reporting:

- Staff should be aware of potential hazards and exercise caution to prevent touch from being misunderstood or triggering inappropriate responses.

- In the event of accidental inappropriate touch, staff should withdraw without negative feedback and report the incident to the designated safeguarding lead.
- It is never appropriate to touch a child/young person's intimate body areas.
- If staff have concerns about appropriate touch or observe questionable practices, they have a duty of care to the child/young person and should immediately intervene and report to the designated safeguarding lead.

Physical Contact Guidance:

Hugging - At Educate U we encourage staff who are using touch for comfort or reward to use a 'school hug'. This is a sideways on hug, with the adult putting their hands on the child's shoulders. This discourages 'front on' hugging, and the adult's hands on the shoulders limits the ability of the child to turn themselves into you. This can be done either standing or sitting.

Hand-Holding - We recognise that children sometimes enjoy being able to hold hands with adults around them. This is perfectly acceptable when the hand holding is compliant. However, if the handholding is being used by an adult as a method of control to move children, this can become a restraint. Therefore, we encourage the use of the 'school handhold'. This is done by the adult holding their arm out, and the child is encouraged to wrap their hand around the adult's lower arm. The adult's other hand can then be placed over the children for a little extra security if it is required.

Lap-Sitting - At our school the children may seek to sit on a lap when needing comfort. If a child sits on a lap, please ask the child to sit next to you if it is appropriate. At times, children may in such crisis or distress that they hold you in a way which is not described as above (e.g., 'front on' hug/lap sitting). If this should happen, please ensure that you have informed another member of staff to protect yourself and that you are not alone with the child/young person. Afterwards, please make a note, by emailing that member of staff of a lap sitting / comfort hug. This is to record and monitor the number of times the child/young person is doing this to staff to see whether this is a 'controlling' behaviour, or whether the child is displaying distressed behaviour regularly.

Restrictive interventions are only used in an unforeseen emergency with potential risk/damage to others, self or property. For students with known needs, a risk management plan is drawn up. Please refer to Educate U's Trauma Informed Behaviour Policy.

By implementing this Positive Touch Policy, we aim to nurture respectful and caring relationships while ensuring the safety and well-being of our pupils. It is important to note that while appropriate touch is beneficial, it is crucial to maintain boundaries and ensure the safety and well-being of children. Educating children about appropriate and inappropriate touch, setting clear boundaries, and promoting open communication are essential in developing healthy relationships. Positive touch will be used in a sensitive, consensual, and professional manner, providing positive reinforcement, communication, and support for our children and young people.

Other useful information is contained in Appendix 1 - 'Guidance for safer working for adults who work with young people'. Staff have a 'Duty of Care' towards the students in their care. Therefore, if a student is likely to be at risk from harm if you do not physically intervene in an emergency, you must take action. The action you take will be dependent on the dynamic risk assessment that you take at that moment in time. Whilst we have a positive touch policy this does not mean that you have to touch children, and it should also be realised that some children will not want to be touched.

Appendix 1: Guidance for Safer Working with Young People

1. Maintain Professional Boundaries
   Always keep relationships professional and appropriate. Avoid behaviours or language that could be misinterpreted or cause discomfort.
2. Respect Privacy and Dignity
   Respect young people's privacy, especially during personal care or sensitive situations. Knock before entering rooms and explain your actions clearly.
3. Work in Open or Visible Areas
   Where possible, ensure interactions with young people happen in environments visible to others, reducing the risk of misunderstanding or allegations.
4. Follow Safeguarding Procedures
   Be vigilant for signs of abuse or distress. Report any concerns promptly through the correct safeguarding channels and record onto MyConcern.
5. Avoid One-to-One Situations When Possible
   If private conversations are necessary, keep doors open and inform colleagues where you will be.
6. Use Technology Responsibly
   Communicate with young people using approved platforms only and completely avoid personal social media connections. Ensure your own social media is set to private.
7. Respect Boundaries Around Physical Contact
   Only touch young people when necessary, appropriate, and with their consent, considering cultural sensitivities. If young people seek hugs and contact, ensure safe hugs are given as outlined in the Positive Touch policy.
8. Be Clear About Your Role
   Explain your role and purpose to young people to avoid confusion or unrealistic expectations.
9. Keep Accurate Records
   Document any significant interactions, concerns, or incidents factually and promptly.
10. Clearly follow Lone Working policies and risk assessments