



Safe Touch Policy

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| Audience: | School and academy staff, Local Governing Bodies |
| Adopted: | June 2020 Reviewed April 2021 Reviewed May 2022 |
| Other related policies / procedures | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Safeguarding & Child Protection Policy ● Equality Policy ● Anti-Bullying Policy ● Positive Behaviour Management Policy ● E-Safety Policy ● PREVENT Strategy & Duty Guidance HM Gov ● Keeping Children Safe in Education DfE 2021 ● Staff and Volunteer Code of Conduct Policy ● Working Together to Safeguard Children HM Gov 2018 ● Staff and Volunteer Code of Conduct |
| Owner | Safeguarding Lead |
| Policy / procedure model | <p>MAT policy: all Crofty schools use this policy</p> <p>Aligned: Policy to be adapted to school where indicated</p> <p>School policy: specific to needs of the school</p> |

Safe Touch Policy

1. Introduction

Children need to learn who they are and how they fit into the world. The quality of the child's relationships with significant adults is key to their healthy development and emotional health and wellbeing.

Research shows clearly that healthy prosocial 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, channeled and communicated safely.

In recognition of this, under agreed and supervised conditions, specially trained staff will consider using safe touch as one of the means available to them for:

- Calming a distressed child.
- Contain an angry child.
- Affirm or encourage an anxious child or a child with low self-esteem.

Crofty Multi Academy Trust (MAT) is adopting an informed, evidence based decision to allow safe touch in special cases as a developmentally appropriate intervention that will aid healthy growth and learning.

Safe touch used to calm, soothe and regulate a child's emotions is a needed developmental experience. The brain does not develop self-soothing neuronal pathways until this safe emotional regulation has been experienced.

Where children have had insufficient experience of safe touch and calming regulation this may be a priority to help the brain to develop access to thinking, judging and evaluating mechanisms. Safe touch is one of the key ways of regulating children's emotions but it is a strategy that fully trained staff will use only under supervision.

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 and then regulating it down, talking slowly, firmly and quietly in an unhurried and unflustered way.
- Proving clear predictable consistently held boundaries.

2. Definition

The developmentally appropriate and therapeutic use of safe touch is defined by situations in which abstinence would actually be inhumane, unkind and potentially psychologically or neuro-biologically damaging. Examples include the empirically backed beneficial use of touch in the comforting of a child who is in an acute state of distress and/or out of control. Not reaching out to the child in such circumstances could be re-traumatising and damaging, confirming or inviting anti-social behaviour patterns.

Abstinence in the face of intense grief, stress and/or rage reactions can lead to a state of hyperarousal 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.

In addition, gentle safe holding in line with the Trust's policy on Positive Handling (Team Teach) is appropriate if a child:

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

Such necessary interventions are fully in line with guidelines set out in the Government Document 'Use of reasonable force- advice for headteachers, staff and governing bodies'.

Staff in each school of Crofty MAT have been thoroughly trained in the safest and gentlest means of holding a child (Team Teach) which is designed to enable the child to feel safe and soothed whilst bringing them down from uncontrolled states of hyper arousal. Without this intervention, the child can be left at risk of actual physical or psychological harm.

3. Appropriate and Inappropriate Touch

Our policy rests on the belief that each staff member must appreciate the difference between appropriate and inappropriate touch and will need to demonstrate a clear understanding of the difference, acknowledging both the damaging and unnecessary uses of touch in an educational context. Touch is not to be used as an ill thought out or impulsive act of futile reassurance or as a means to ensure compliance.

All staff should ensure the following guidelines are adhered to:

- When positive handling has been used, parent/carers will be informed within 24 hours of use.
- If positive handling is identified within a behaviour plan, parent/carers will be informed and asked to formally sign the plan to indicate understanding.
- Staff members should agree the use of safe touch in discussion with the SMT and its use regularly reviewed.
- 2 adult rule. No adult should use touch when alone with a child.
- Use brief, gentle contact on open or clothed parts of the body; hands, arms, shoulders, head or hair.

- Parents/Carers should be informed of the Trust practice by all schools displaying the policy on their website.

4. Unsafe Touch

At no point and under any circumstances should staff members use touch to satisfy their own need for physical contact or reassurance. Staff need to show awareness of touch that is invasive or which could be confusing, traumatizing or experienced as eroticizing in any way whatsoever.

Staff must always be particularly sensitive to pupils who are demonstrating that they are not comfortable with touch even if it appears to be appropriate to the member of staff. It is vital for a member of staff to think about what they represent to a particular child. A child's history may also influence who represents a 'safe' adult to them. Additionally, some children may be used to experiencing different levels or types of touch as part of their cultural upbringing. 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.