



Connection ● Communication ● Independence ● Aspiration

# Positive Touch Policy

## Positive Touch Policy

At Redwood School we believe that the use of touch is a vital aspect of our nurturing role, and that adult physical contact is not only inevitable but desirable.

Touch not only promotes a learner's social and emotional development but is also a highly effective and powerful method of non-verbal communication, is key to the development of healthy relationships and a method of stress relief. It can be used to:

- Show acceptance
- Provide reassurance
- Demonstrate affection
- Calm and provide comfort
- Emphasise the spoken word
- Provide sensory stimulation
- Engage in personal care routines
- Deliver various therapy programmes
- Offer an alternative to spoken communication
- Remove a learner from danger or keep a learner safe

When appropriate touch is not encouraged, as often happens, then all touch has the potential to become sexualised. Learners don't learn to distinguish between appropriate and inappropriate touch. They miss out on a whole range of valuable touch experiences – friendly, nurturing, reassuring, comforting and healing. We should be instilling a sense of what appropriate touch is. While all touch carries the potential to be misinterpreted, it is important to recognise that some learners may have experienced negative touch in the past, such as physical abuse or restraint. Our role is to help reverse these associations by modelling and promoting healthy, positive touch that is safe, respectful, and supportive.

Research has shown that positive touch is beneficial for early bonding, stress reduction, and state regulation (Harrison, 2001); it also can improve attentiveness and sleep problems in some children with autism (Escalona, Field, Singer-Strunck, Cullen, & Hartshorn, 2001 Cullen LA, Barlow JH, Cushway D. 2005). For children with delays and disabilities, positive touch has been used effectively to enhance caregiver-child interactions and increase the child's comfort (Pardew & Bunse, 2005). Field, T (2010) explored the importance of 'Touch for socioemotional and physical well-being'.

Members of staff in a caring school recognise physical contact as an important part of child development and guidance. They understand that physical contact may be communication and they recognise the importance and significance of non-verbal communication and respond

appropriately. This should always be done in a developmentally appropriate way, and should a learner shun the comfort offered through touch, the learners' wishes will be respected by the member of staff dealing with the situation.

Therapeutic touch is used in situations where learners are distressed. In these situations, research has shown that it would be unkind or increase the child's distress if touch was not employed. When children are very distressed, they often ignore information provided by their senses for example they may no longer see or no longer hear. When a learner is distressed touch can be the only means of maintaining a connection with the learner.

Where a learner presents a danger to themselves or to will at times be necessary for physical intervention or safe holding using Team Teach principles. This should be carried out by trained staff wherever possible, but in exceptional circumstances, under the clear direction of a trained member of staff, other adults may need to assist to ensure safety. Some learners cannot be safely supported by one person alone. This is appropriate if a learner is hurting either him/herself/themselves, others or is damaging property and is so distressed and out of control that all verbal attempts to reduce/stop the behaviour have failed. Such interventions are supported and documented in the government document 'Use of Reasonable Force in School: Advice for headteachers, staff and governing bodies' (July 2013). These techniques can be the safest means of holding a learner to feel safe and soothed and to calm them down when they are very distressed, are used to prevent the learner from exposing themselves or others to physical or psychological harm. At such times staff should always take care to explain what they are doing and that the actions taken are for safety reasons. As the situation de-escalates, touch can be appropriately used to move from one situation of control to one of care, such as the friendly hold.

Examples of appropriate touch may include the following:

- Respecting the personal privacy and personal space of learners.
- Responses affecting the safety and wellbeing of the learner (e.g. holding the hand of a child while crossing the street, using a Team Teach hold when a learner becomes a danger to themselves or others).
- Responses supporting social and emotional development such as hugs (usually side on with teenagers to avoid full-body contact), reassuring touches on the shoulder, back rubs.
- Touch for health and hygiene, personal care.

Where a learner requires intimate personal care, staff should ensure that the learner is comfortable with the staff member attending to their needs. A learner's privacy and dignity should always be preserved. (See [Intimate Care Policy](#))

Examples of inappropriate touch include:

- Satisfaction of adult needs rather than that of the learner.
- Coercion or other forms of exploitation of the learner's lack of knowledge.

- Violation of laws against sexual contact between adults and learners.
- Forced kisses, corporal punishment, slapping, striking or pinching, tickling for prolonged periods, fondling or molestation.

It is vital that staff should always consider the learner's gender, race, disability, and age when using touch as individuals may be used to experiencing different levels or types of touch. An individual's history may also influence who represents a 'safe' adult to them. In addition, some individuals may be used to differing levels of touch as part of their cultural upbringing. All staff have a responsibility to ensure that all practice at Redwood School is safe, sensitive and appropriate.