



*Inspire Education Trust*  
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# Safe Touch Policy



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## Aim

To take into account the extensive neurobiological research and other empirical studies relating to attachment theory and child development that identify safe touch as a positive contribution to brain development, emotional regulation, mental health and the development of pro-social skills.

## To whom does it apply?

It applies to all staff and children working within the School. As a Thrive Licensed Practitioner, these trained delegates are then trained by Thrive staff to combine their practice with the Thrive Approach so they can identify and use safe touch as a developmental intervention. The Thrive Practitioners will deliver regular training sessions on Thrive to all staff. Within the School there are named members of staff who will receive specific 'Manual Handling' and 'Team Teach' training and all staff will be trained in 'Positive Touch' to know how and when to hold children in safe ways within governmental guidelines.

## Why have a policy on touch?

In order to protect children and school staff from allegations under Child Protection procedures many academies have adopted 'No Touch' policies. However, such policies do not address the emotional health and social wellbeing needs of children.

The Inspire Education Trust 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 (see Appendix 2) 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 who have been trained with Thrive will consider using safe touch as one of the means available to them, 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.

Safe touch when used to calm, soothe and regulate a child's emotions is a needed developmental experience. 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
- Talking slowly, firmly and quietly in an unhurried, unflustered way
- Providing clear predictable consistently held boundaries.

The developmentally appropriate (and reparative) 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 to reach out to the child in such circumstances could be re-traumatising and neuro-biologically damaging as well as confirming or inviting anti-social behaviour patterns.

Refraining from physically and 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 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.

Staff trained in Thrive are able to use the safest and gentlest means of holding a child that is entirely designed to enable the child to feel safe and soothed, and to bring him or her down from uncontrollable states of hyper-arousal.

Whilst limits and boundaries in such circumstances can be a vital corrective emotional experience, without such an intervention (holding) the children can be left at risk of actual physical or psychological damage.

Such necessary interventions are fully in line with guidelines set out in the Government Document, 'New Guidance on the Use of Reasonable Force in School.' (DfEE 1998) and 'Use of Reasonable Force' (2013).

**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 exercise or techniques during PE lessons or sports coaching; and
- To give first aid.

## **Appropriate and inappropriate touch**

We are highly aware of the current atmosphere where due to fears of abuse, touch as a natural and important form of human connection has been almost vetoed in some school contexts. Our policy rests on the belief that every member of staff needs to appreciate the difference between appropriate and inappropriate touch. Hence, all staff members need to demonstrate a clear understanding of the difference. They need to show themselves to be highly aware of 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/gratification or as a block to referral for psychological assessment.

Equally, when a child is in deep distress, the Thrive Licensed Practitioner is trained to know when and how sufficient connection and psychological holding have been or can be provided/established without touching.

## **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 discussions between the Thrive Practitioners, Executive Head Teacher and Head Teachers.
- 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.

### **Unsafe touch**

- At no point and under no circumstances should staff members use touch to satisfy their own need for physical contact or reassurance.
- All staff are trained to be fully cognisant of touch that is Invasive or which could be confusing, traumatising or experience as eroticising in any way whatsoever. **THIS IS NEVER TO BE USED.**
- Serious Breach: If an unsafe touch is used then it would be deemed as the most serious breach of the Code of Ethics warranting the highest level of disciplinary action.

Date approved by Local Governing Body: 2019

Date to be reviewed:

Signed: \_\_\_\_\_