



St. Anne's CE Primary and Nursery School

Safe Touch Policy

September 2021 (Mrs. L. Sixsmith)

Minds to learn, hearts to care.



Jesus replied: "Love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind." This is the first and greatest commandment.

And the second is like it: "Love your neighbour as yourself." *Matthew 22:37-39*



*Our school vision is to be the best version of ourselves
that God created us to be - with minds to learn and hearts to care.*

Our values are the building blocks for strong foundations for lifelong learning and lifelong faith.



Vision and Values

Our school vision is to be the best version of ourselves that God created us to be – with minds to learn and hearts to care.

Who are we as a school? This is our deeply Christian vision which is firmly rooted in the bible.

Jesus summed up his most important teaching by quoting the greatest commandment – love the Lord your God with all your heart, with all your soul with all your mind. And love your neighbour as yourself. (Matthew 22v37-39) At St Anne's our vision is for everyone who is part of our school community to live life to the full and to treat everyone with compassion and respect.

This vision shapes all we do and helps us understand who we are as a school, why we are here, and then how we live. Our values are the building blocks for strong foundations for lifelong learning and lifelong faith.

Why are we here? These are our values:

Loving God with all of our heart

We want everyone at St Anne's to be the best version of themselves. We believe this is about everyone being authentic, open and honest.

We are dedicated to continuous improvement, challenging ourselves, celebrating our successes and always aspiring to be "the best we can be".

To enable each child and adult to flourish and achieve.

Loving God with all our soul

We want to nurture the spiritual life of everyone in our school family recognising that "spirituality is like a bird; if you hold it too tightly, it chokes; if you hold it too loosely, it flies away. Fundamental to spirituality is the absence of force." Rabbi Hugo Gryn

To promote our Christian ethos and values through lively, intelligent and creative participation.

To provide an inviting, inclusive school environment where all members of the school community, of all faiths or none, are valued, respected and care for one another.

To encourage and develop links between the school, home, our parishes and the local, national and global community.

Loving God with all our mind

To provide a high quality and nurturing learning environment.

To be dedicated to continuous improvement, challenging ourselves, celebrating our successes and always aspiring to be "the best we can be".

To enable each child and adult to flourish and achieve.

How then do we live? All of this shapes our school life.

Daily collective worship is at the centre of school life and enables children to experience the diversity of Christian practice and tradition.

High quality, effective, academic religious education allows pupils and adults alike to flourish.

Throughout all our school life our Christian vision and values promote social and cultural development through the practice of forgiveness and reconciliation. They encourage good mental health and enable children and adults, whatever their background or ability, to flourish and live well together.

The vision is used to ensure our policies, curriculum and extracurricular opportunities meet the academic and spiritual needs of all learners.

We describe all our activities in terms of how the vision and values inspire our whole school community, children and adults, to engage in social action and to be courageous advocates for change in their local, national and global communities

Our Christian vision supports the character and moral development of all pupils and adults, giving them aspiration for themselves and hope for the communities of which they are a part. It fosters dignity and respect, enabling everyone to be the person God created them to be, to achieve the most they can, and to inspire hope for others in the local community and beyond.

The Thrive Programme

Thrive case-work with individuals is monitored by the Head teacher or nominated Senior Manager. This monitoring is also a feature of Thrive-Online and regular reports and updates of Action Plans, together with evidence of impact, can be generated on demand.

In training, our Thrive Practitioner had her case-work closely mentored by a Thrive Licensed Trainer. It is a feature of her on-going licensing that she meets annual Continuing Professional Development (CPD) requirements which should include an element of mentoring.

The policy set out below is intended to inform and guide thinking about the development of school/work place policy on the use of 'safe touch'. This is a sensitive and potentially controversial topic. We believe that we as a learning and care community 'Minds to Learn, Hearts to Care' need to consider this important topic in depth. If 'safe touch' is to be used, it must be done

- (i) with the full knowledge and consent of parents/carers by trained and
- (ii) by supervised staff in carefully monitored situations where its use has been agreed because it addresses an identified developmental need on the part of the child.

The use of 'safe touch' by designated adults needs to be supervised, monitored and reviewed on a regular basis, as indeed does the policy, to ensure that it continues to meet the needs of children, parents/carers and staff. In addition, Thrive Licensed Practitioners are given specific guidance on 'Containment and Safe Holding as a response to High Scale behaviour'.

The Developmentally Necessary experience of Safe Touch

Children learn who they are (and how the world is) within their significant relationships. The quality of the child's relationships with significant adults is key to their healthy development and emotional health and wellbeing. Touch is recognised as being a physical way of soothing, calming and containing distress.

Berne I identified touch as a human 'hunger'² necessary for survival and well-being. Many research studies have indicated the necessity of human contact and touch in the healthy development of children. It is a factor in children who experience neglect and 'fail to thrive'³.

1 Berne, E (1964 rep. 2010) 'Games People Play' pub Penguin 2 Stewart and Van Joines, (1987) TA Today pub Lifespace 3 See www.livescience.com/21778-earlyneglect-alters-kids-brains.html or www.bbc.co.uk/programmes/b015p62y or www.romania-insider.com ©Fronting the Challenge Projects Ltd 2015.

Context

Our policy on Safe Touch (sometimes termed 'Safe Holding') has been developed in the context of the local authorities' Child Protection Procedures and Policies and Government guidance^{4, 5} (See Appendix) It takes 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 specialist Thrive provision. It may be extended, at the school discretion to all staff. Named members of staff need to have received 'Positive Handling' or Restraint or 'PIPS' or 'Positive Touch' (or equivalent) training to know how and when to hold children in safe ways within governmental guidelines. 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.

Why have a policy on touch?

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

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.

4 ©Crown (2013) *DE Advice for Headteachers, Staff and Governing Bodies 'Use of Reasonable Force in schools.'* www.gov.uk 5 © Crown NHS www.legislation.gov.uk/ukxi/2003/2824
Management of Abusive, Difficult and Violent Patients ©Fronting the Challenge Projects Ltd 2015. VI60128

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, specially trained staff 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 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 fully trained 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

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, 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.

Trained staff team members are trained in 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 child 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? (2013, Crown op cit)

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; 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 *©Fronting the Challenge Projects Ltd 2015. All rights reserved. VI60128 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 programme
- 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 programme
- 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 publicly 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.
- 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. ©*Fronting the Challenge Projects Ltd 2015. All rights reserved. VI60128 Appendix 1 USE OF REASONABLE FORCE ADVICE FOR HEAD TEACHERS, STAFF AND GOVERNING BODIES*

When can reasonable force be used?

- Reasonable force can be used to prevent pupils from hurting themselves or others, from damaging property, or from causing disorder.
- In a school, force is used for two main purposes – to control pupils or to restrain them.
- The decision on whether or not to physically intervene is down to the professional judgement of the staff member concerned and should always depend on the individual circumstances.
- The following list is not exhaustive but provides some examples of situations where reasonable force can and cannot be used.

Schools can use reasonable force to:

- Remove disruptive children from the classroom where they have refused to follow an instruction to do so;
- Prevent a pupil behaving in a way that disrupts a school event or a school trip or visit;
- Prevent a pupil leaving the classroom where allowing the pupil to leave would risk their safety or lead to behaviour that disrupts the behaviour of others;
 - Prevent a pupil from attacking a member of staff or another pupil, or to stop a fight in the playground; and
- Restrain a pupil at risk of harming themselves through physical outbursts.

Schools cannot:

- Use force as a punishment – it is always unlawful to use force as a punishment.

Source: Extract from Department of Education, Use of reasonable force Advice for head teachers, staff and governing bodies - July 2013 Section 93, Education and Inspections Act 2006