



ROSEWOOD FREE SCHOOL

Title: Touch Policy

Lead Reviewer: Deputy Headteacher and Early Years Lead

Who this is aimed at: All Staff

Version	Reason for Change
V1	

Date Initially Implemented	Feb 2021
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Policy Statement

Many of our learners have emotional, physical, physiological, communication and cognitive skills associated with very early levels of development. Additionally, many of our learners have impaired sensory processing which reduces their ability to derive meaning from visual or auditory cues.

Touch is the first and foremost form of communication, developing early in utero. It is therefore the most tangible and fundamental form of communication in early life, and likely to be a key factor in ensuring that our learners are provided with rich and meaningful social experiences which promote learning. We consider that our learners developmental needs are a more important indicator of their learning and support needs than their chronological age, and, though seeking to be age respectful, would not deny a pupil what they need developmentally merely on the grounds of 'age-appropriateness'.

Touch is an essential part of providing sensitive and high quality care and is vital for regulating and maintaining well-being for our learners. When used in appropriate contexts, and with empathy, touch enhances natural interactions and play, and therefore supports the development of communication and cognitive skills. Our learners require physical assistance to support them with movement, to help them develop their functional fine and gross motor skills and to transition between activities, equipment or environments. Touch is therefore a vital component in supporting our learners' physical development, reducing their dependency and maximising their independence.

Appropriate, empathetic and sensitive touch is considered vital to support the learning of learners at Rosewood.

For the purpose of this Policy, it is important to define Touch.

Research carried about Sheffield University defines it as:

Professional love is about adults' sensitivity towards the very young children in their care and "reading" what is needed to make a child feel loved at any moment in time. What is appropriate will vary between children, between different practitioners even towards the same child and even between moments in time (where a cuddle may

be needed one day it may not the next). This sensitivity is the difference between an adequate practitioner and an outstanding one.

At Rosewood, we assume Touch means one person making contact or a connection with another at the level appropriate to their developmental age. This may include kissing, when parental or carer consent has been given to kiss (for the purposes of this Policy, kiss means mouth on an appropriate area of the body of our learners, NOT mouth kissing mouth).

The nurturing power of touch has been proven in many research studies that evidence the impact on those that have been deprived of touch and human contact.

We communicate our working practices with families during initial meetings in family homes and during pre and post admission meetings.

Application

This Policy applies to all employees directly employed by the School, volunteers and agency staff.

Aims

- To be respectful of individual learner's responses to touch, seeking to ensure all experiences of touch are as positive as possible for them.
- To use touch in ways that enhance a learner's opportunity to make links between experiences.
- To use touch to initiate, respond to and extend interactions, being alert to any indication that the learner is not receptive to touch at this time.
- To respond to touch initiated by learners, and to enable learners to experience touch from one another.
- To use touch to facilitate movement experiences, including following physio and hydro programmes, positioning protocols

and rebound therapy sessions seeking always to give 'as much support as necessary but as little as possible'.

- To use touch to support the development of eating and drinking skills, and to ensure safety at mealtimes.
- To use touch to comfort, alert or support learners in order to maximise their well-being, and to assist them in learning to self-soothe or self-regulate.
- To use massage which is responsive to the mood and communicative behaviours of our learners in order to support their learning needs and well-being.
- To use empathic and sensitive handling or touch during care routines, being respectful of learners preferences in terms of touch and allowing time for quality interaction.
- To seek to build up a limited number of trusting relationships in school within which touch based interactions occur and to promote the development of secure attachments.
- To use touch when it is necessary to prevent learners from harm, either from their own actions or from the environment.
- To NOT use touch when that would interfere with our learners' learning, remembering they may have single sensory processing abilities and/or be unable to share attention between an adult and an object.

Methodology

- To allow time and provide meaningful cues for learners before and during interactions which involve touch.
- To use established body cues consistently for all learners indicating when they will move 'up', 'down' or 'go', providing the opportunity for learners to be able to anticipate and understand what is about to happen to them.

- To ensure, as far as possible, that permission is sought from the learner before and whilst touch is being used. This is essential in intensive interaction, massage and play sessions, when touch should cease immediately if the learner indicate any displeasure, dislike or discomfort.
- To ensure that adults know they also have the right to say 'no' to proximity or touch they are not comfortable with, and to withdraw themselves from it.
- To seek alternative strategies where some forms of touch are resisted by learners, but are necessary. For example, firmer touch may be preferred, touch may be tolerated if enough cueing in is provided, or if a familiar song is used to accompany it.
- Sometimes touch may be necessary to ensure a learner's safety, and therefore may have to be used without the learners permission. In these instances, the minimal amount of touch should be used for the shortest amount of time and in the least offensive way to the individual learner, whilst maintaining the learner's safety.
- Touch is often used as part of 'preparation for learning', which may involve positioning, putting glasses on or hearing aids in, using specialist footwear or orthotics including braces, AFO's, hand splints, stretches or passive movements to limbs etc. This touch should always be used in the context of social interaction, with alertness to learners' communicative responses and regard to their preferences in terms of pace.
- To use touch responsively and respectfully in intensive interaction sessions. The adult must be alert to the smallest cues that the touch is not acceptable to the learners today, being mindful we all vary in our receptiveness to touch at different times, and an activity that was great fun yesterday may not be today.
- To provide opportunities for learners to encounter and interact with each other using touch, being mindful of both how the touch is offered and how it is received, and ensuring that both parties are at ease with the interaction. We are mindful the

positioning equipment used by our learners reduces opportunities for touch, and therefore intentionally create opportunities for learners to encounter each other in less physically restrictive environments. Sessions where interaction between learners may occur include physical / floor based sessions, Sherborne Movement sessions, hydro sessions and sessions on the resonance boards.

- To maximise the opportunities afforded by the pool environment for communication and physical development, both of which are supported by the considered, respectful and skilled use of touch.
- To maximise the opportunities afforded by the trampoline in rebound therapy sessions for communication and physical development, both of which are supported by the considered, respectful and skilled use of touch.
- To ensure that where behaviour programmes involve adults using touch with learners, the plans are shared and understood by all the adults supporting the learner, and are applied consistently.
- To ensure that our learners are physically safe may necessitate the use of touch, for example to prevent arms from banging on doorframes, or to maintain an airway whilst chest harnesses are secured etc.

Extra Considerations

It is NEVER appropriate to touch a learner's intimate body parts except in the privacy of the bathroom or changing areas as part of established care routines or medical interventions. There should always be two people present at these times, unless there is a plan in place, which has been agreed for specific individuals for whom this is not appropriate.

For learners who are reaching or post puberty it is important to recognise physical touch may be misconstrued or may trigger sexual arousal. In such instances, careful consideration will need to be given to ways to best support the learner. Touching may need to be carefully restricted, without reducing the social interaction available to the learner.

It is important that touch is never used covertly, but we maintain an open attitude to our use of touch in School and we discuss openly any issues that arise. Any *inappropriate* use of touch observed must be disclosed immediately. This would include any touch not used in a caring, warm, person centred and respectful way, or involves inappropriate use of force.

Related Documents

This document should be read in conjunction with other Trust Policies, including those relating to Safeguarding and Child Protection Policy, Behaviour Policy, Intensive Schemes of Work, Sherborne Schemes of Work.

Complaints

Any employee is entitled to make a complaint in respect of any breach of this Policy through the Trust's Grievance Policy and Procedure.