

# Safe Touch



## Oastlers Policy

<b>Approved by Governing Body On</b>	<b>April 2022</b>
<b>To be Reviewed On</b>	<b>July 2024</b>
<b>Signed on Behalf of the Governing Body</b>	<b>Sue Mawson</b>



## Rationale:

Oastlers School believes that safe touch is to be encouraged, provided it is undertaken within a framework which is understood by all, and protects everyone's interests.

Touch is essential in order to provide sensitive, high quality care and to support natural interactions. Positive touch supports the development and emotional well-being of our learners and it is beneficial for both psychological and physiological development.

Oastlers School believes touch is an essential part of human relationships and supports the development of our natural interactions.

To this end, staff at Oastlers School may use safe touch such as guides, prompts and reassurance to promote the feeling of safety, security and well-being.

The guiding principle of this policy is that in all circumstances, staff must only touch if it is appropriate to the professional role and the young person has given permission before initiating physical contact, unless the circumstances giving rise for the need to touch are extreme and relate to the school's management of challenging behaviour. To this end, this policy must always be used in conjunction with the school's Care & Control Policy, Whistle Blowing Policy and the school's Safeguarding and Code of Conduct Policy.

The policy refers to Keeping Children Safe in Education (Sept, 2019), Guidance for Safer Working Practice for those working with children and young people in education settings (May, 2019), The Children Act (2004) and Managing Actual and Potential Aggression (MAPA) Guidelines.

## Purpose for touch:

Touch is important and may be used routinely for any of the following reasons:

For **communication**: to reinforce other communication (e.g. to gain or maintain attention) or to function as the main form of communication itself. Additionally, touch may be present to respond non-verbally with another or to make social connections. This type of physical communication may include handshakes, hugs, placing hand on shoulder, arm etc.

For **educational reasons**: touch may be necessary to direct learners in educational tasks and essential skills. For example, support in PE or when moving learners between activities by way of support or guidance. Examples of this type of touch would include gentle guidance while touching hands, elbow or arm.

To **play**: play activities naturally include touch. People of any age are likely to be tactile or physical during play or PE/games activities. Examples of touch in these situations may include holding, tackling etc

For **therapy**: the school offers therapeutic play and will be offering other therapies in the future that may include touch. For the most part this will be incidental touch as the school currently does not offer massage, physiotherapy or other therapies that requires intimate touch.

For **emotional reasons**: to communicate warmth, to provide reassurance and to communicate security and comfort. Touch in this instance helps learners to understand and receive positive emotions and be able to communicate them. Examples of this type of touch may include short hugs, hand on shoulder, hand on forearm, 'athletes embrace' etc.

For the **purpose of care**: touch is necessary in order to carry out personal care for those who need it. In school this would include washing hair and combing (for lice). There is very little else that would require intimate touch. Learners who have difficulties with personal care will not be assisted by staff but will be provided with appropriate materials (soap, towels etc) to enable the learner to self-care.

To give **medical care**: to anyone who requires first aid or medical attention may require touch that would include touching and attending to injuries etc.

To give **physical support**: for those who may need guiding between places, rooms or activities.

To **protect** our learners from danger physical intervention may be necessary in order to maintain good order, protect learners from significant harm (to self or others) and to avoid damage to property. This may include physical intervention or frisking for banned items that may present risks to health and safety. See the school's Care & Control Policy for guidelines relating to physical intervention.

Oastlers School understands that safe touch will take place in an open forum; it must be consensual (that is, with permission), appropriate and consistent with the developmental age of our learners. Safe touch is an essential ingredient in maintaining the excellent standards of care and protection afforded by the school and will be offered when it is appropriate and contact is acceptable and/or necessary.

Touch, however, can be misconstrued and in acknowledging this fact the policy has been developed so as to include indications of what constitutes inappropriate touch and the possible consequences of inappropriate touch.

### **Inappropriate touch:**

Staff will follow a general rule that no part of a learner's body that is normally covered by a bathing suit will be touched. If touch in such an area is required (medical emergency or first aid) another responsible adult must be present and consent gained from those involved and their parent or carer.

Staff who find themselves in a situation where a learner is displaying overly familiar affections, or who appear to be becoming in any way aroused by the physical contact or who displays emotional/physical agitation must withdraw themselves immediately from the situation and report the matter directly to the Named Person for Child Protection, Joanne Taylor or their line manager.

Staff will not allow learners to sit on their laps or engage in any form of touch in a situation where there are no other people present. They will never allow a learner to stand between their legs when seated.

Staff will not engage in contact that is prolonged. Hugs of any kind must be kept to a minimal, from a sideways position and short in duration.

Staff must be mindful of touch taking place between opposite genders. Female staff should not hug male learners front facing. Hand around a shoulder, sideways on is sufficient. Male staff should adopt the same position with female learners.

It is never acceptable to tickle, kiss or fondle learners. It is also unacceptable to engage in or encourage all forms of 'play fighting' or 'horseplay'.

Staff will be sensitive to signals (non-verbal and verbal) that a learner dislikes touch, for example pulling away or grimacing, and respond appropriately in this situation.

If any member of staff is in any doubt about any issues concerning safe touch, or they observe any practice that causes concern, they should discuss this with their line manager. Alternatively, refer to the school's Whistle Blowing Policy.

All staff have a responsibility to ensure safe and appropriate practice at all times.