



Carew Academy Safer Touch Policy

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Carew Academy Safer Touch Policy

The safe use of everyday touch in the workplace

1. Aims of policy

This policy sets out to define and boundary the safe use of everyday touch in the workplace in order to safeguard both students and staff members. We encourage staff to use safe, positive touch, however, all touch must be conducted with sensitivity and in a way that keeps students' best interest at heart and their sense of agency in-tact. The aim of this policy is to enable all staff members to feel safe and confident at applying everyday safe touch in a consistent and developmentally appropriate manner.

This policy takes into consideration current research on child development, interpersonal neurobiology and attachment theory that promotes safe touch as a positive contribution to a child's developing brain, their ability to self-regulate and develop pro-social skills, as well as to improve mental health. Positive touch is a vital part of physical and emotional development which all children need to thrive. A lack of caring touch early in a child's life can have lifelong, negative consequences on a child's development and sense of wellbeing.

This policy also takes into consideration the neurodiverse nature of the school cohort and how everyday touch may trigger certain responses and behaviours.

This policy does not address the safe use of safe holding and protecting students from physical harm. In these instances, please refer to the Positive Behaviour Policy and the Physical Restraint Policy.

This policy is non-gender specific and relates to all staff members.

2. Why do we need a policy?

As members of a public organisation that works with vulnerable children and young people in schools, staff members carry a duty of care towards all students and must be aware of the boundaries involving physical touch.

All students have a right to receive an education in a place where they feel safe, secure and respected. Similarly, all staff members have the right to feel confident at how they use every day safe touch in the workplace.

There have been unfortunate instances of abuse in schools and all staff members need to be aware of the guidelines and reporting procedure for concerns to ensure that everyone is safe and protected. Instances where touch is applied without a firm understanding of the guidelines can carry the risk of false allegations and investigation and/or disciplinary procedures.

This policy aims to help clarify and promote discussion on any grey areas around touch in order to safeguard both students and adults in the school community.

3. What is everyday safe touch?

Safe touch is defined as physical contact that, if not provided, when necessary, could be defined as unkind, neglectful, and potentially emotionally damaging to the student.

As a school, we understand that safe touch may be used in the following instances:

- When comforting or soothing an upset or distressed student
- Congratulating or praising a student
- Holding the hand or arm of a student when guiding them to lessons. This may be more relevant to students in the lower school or those at a lower developmental stage
- Administering First Aid
- Administering Occupational Therapy, Physiotherapy or Speech and Language Therapy.
- Demonstrating and assisting with learning techniques and using equipment, such as in PE, music, dance, or other practical activities
- Repositioning a hand when using classroom tools, when using cutlery and/or utensils
- Assisting a student with safe movement for example, when ascending or descending stairs, with chair and/or toilet transfers, when assisting students on and off transport
- Assisting with dress, such as fastening buttons, ties, or shoelaces

- In play activities with students, such as playground and classroom games and nurturing/restorative play for regulation.
- Administering personal care. This is to be conducted in line with the school's personal and intimate care policy

When used in a safe, nurturing and developmentally appropriate way, touch can have enormous physical and emotional benefits. Touch can:

- Build connections and relationships with others
- Comfort and soothe
- Help contain strong emotions and help students to regulate. Providing positive touch to a child who has not had adequate touch in their earlier lives can help them to regulate and feel emotionally safe
- Improve body awareness and awareness of self
- Promote positive emotions
- Provide reassurance

4. Best practice

As a staff team, we should:

- Never assume that students are happy to receive touch.
- Where possible, ask for a student's permission/consent to receive touch.
- Understand that a no-touch approach is not helpful to a child's development.
- We should always avoid engaging in touch when working alone with a child. In instances where this is not possible, ensure that the door has glass fronted panels and/or the door is left open
- Consider the student's age and stage of development, the need, gender, and diversity such as ethnicity, culture, religion, disability, sexual orientation, and background prior to engaging in touch
- Understand that touch can be overwhelming for some students and, in some instances, could be traumatic. We are aware that touch, when applied to or withdrawn from students who have experienced relational trauma, such as: physical, emotional, sexual abuse or neglect, may trigger strong emotional responses

- Act with an awareness of our role in the child's life
- Understand that many of our students may struggle to define and express body boundaries
- Model appropriate body boundaries for our students to help them develop a sense of their own boundaries. This includes all interactions between staff members. In the presence of students, staff members must embody the principles of this policy with each other to act as role models in a professional setting.
- Share best practice among colleagues, in addition to any discoveries about how certain students may feel about touch. This can help keep the boundaries consistent with the student and the supporting staff team
- Respect a student's wish to not be touched
- Understand that a student's response to touch may vary from one day to the next and that we should always negotiate touch with them
- Understand that the use of touch can make students with sensory processing difficulties hyper- or hypo- aroused. This can cause unwanted responses and behaviours and can cause students to go into a state of fight, flight or freeze or fawn
- Conduct any Occupational Therapy or Physiotherapy exercises in line with the students Education Health Care Plan and under the guidance of a qualified occupational therapist or physiotherapist

We also need to consider that many of our students may not have the capacity to provide consent or communicate how they feel about touch. Additionally, some of our students may have the mental capacity to provide consent but may have limited communication skills such as in instances of selective mutism. We need to consider how best to provide autonomy to these students in a way that is accessible and meaningful for them. We therefore encourage staff members to work together to find ways of meeting certain individuals' needs such as providing bespoke visual symbols or working with the student on communicating via body language, signs, facial expressions, gesture, and vocalisations. In cases where it is not possible to gain consent, we rely on staff members to follow the principles of this policy and work sensitively with students. In working in this way, it will be of benefit to place ourselves in the

position of students and think about how they might feel. The thinking we want to instil is: if it would not feel okay for you, it will likely not feel okay for the student. This considered approach helps us to become reflective practitioners who place our students' best interests at the centre of our practice.

5. Guidelines

Safe touch in the school context is the use of everyday positive touch which is either initiated by the child or provided as a response to the child's needs. We set out the following guidelines for school staff below:

- Areas deemed appropriate for safe touch are: the arms, shoulders, hands, upper back. This should, wherever possible, be negotiated with the student
- Hugs are to be engaged in a side-on embrace; if a student embraces a staff member using a forward-facing hug, staff members should turn their body to the side and hold the child's opposite arm or shoulder
- If a student indicates that they are becoming distressed or uncomfortable with a certain level of touch, the staff member should respect the student's wishes and withdraw the touch
- When using touch, it is strongly advised for another staff member to be present. If this is not possible, please ensure that the room has either a glass fronted panel, or the door is left open. This reduces the risk of false allegations
- If a child is becoming reliant on touch and is encroaching a staff member's personal space, the student should be reminded of appropriate body boundaries in a way that is both relationally sensitive, as well as cognitively and developmentally appropriate for the child
- In instances when accidental, inappropriate touch has taken place, such as accidentally touching or stroking a body part deemed inappropriate, staff members should report this to the Designated Safeguarding Lead as soon as possible, in writing
- If a child is engaging in inappropriate touch with you or another staff member, please report this to the Designated Safeguarding Lead as soon as possible

- If staff members feel that certain student's needs cannot be met through this policy, an Individual Safer Touch Plan may be created. This will form part of the student's individual behaviour profile. Staff members must follow Carew Academy's guidelines when applying for a Safer Touch Plan which must, in all instances, be discussed with phase leads and relevant therapists, and be consented to by parents/carers.

6. Inappropriate touch

- Under no circumstances should staff members partake in safe touch with a student to satisfy their own needs for gratification, nor to dominate or control a student
- Safe touch should never be applied in either invasive or humiliating ways
- We do not endorse the use of piggy backs, fireman's lifts or any other form of lifting that may cause a risk to both student and staff member. In instances of emergency evacuation, please refer to the Fire Safety Policy
- We do not apply touch in instances that may be deemed patronising or intrusive to the child. Examples of this include pats on the head, strokes on the face or head, cleaning a child's face or helping a child to dress without request or consent
- We do not encourage students to sit on staff members' laps and we recommend staff members to use alternative ways of soothing and comforting students
- Stroking or touching an area that is not outlined above is not deemed appropriate and will result in investigation and/or disciplinary procedures

7. How to raise concerns about the use of touch in the workplace

It is our individual responsibility to ensure that everyone is adhering to the policy and that we encourage a transparent approach of challenge and protect. We challenge each other on the appropriateness of everyday touch in order to keep the students in our care, and ourselves, safe.

Staff members should report any concerns about inappropriate touch to the Designated Safeguarding Lead in accordance with the school's safeguarding

policy and procedures. If your concern is about the Principal please report your concerns to Jackie Van West, Director of Safeguarding at OHCAT.

If you are unclear about any of the aspects in this policy, please speak to a member of the senior leadership team for clarification.

This policy was written in line with the following legal documents:

Keeping Children Safe in Education (KCSiE 2023)

Working Together to Safeguard Children (2023)

8. Linked policies and procedures

[Child Protection, Adult Protection & Safeguarding Policy](#)

[Conflict of Interest Policy](#)

[Dignity at Work Policy](#)

[Disciplinary and Procedure Policy](#)

[Equality and Diversity Policy](#)

[Fire Safety Policy](#)

[Health and Safety Policy](#)

[Lone working Policy](#)

[Personal and Intimate Care Policy](#)

[Physical Restraint Policy](#)

[Positive Behaviour Policy](#)

[Staff Code of Conduct Policy](#)

[Student Mental Health and Wellbeing Policy](#)

[Whistle Blowing Policy](#)