



Regency High School Safe Touch and Holding Policy

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***THIS POLICY SHOULD BE READ IN CONJUNCTION WITH SCHOOL POLICIES
ON BEHAVIOUR MANAGEMENT, POSITIVE PHYSICAL INTERVENTION,
SAFEGUARDING AND HEALTH AND SAFETY***

1. Introduction

It is inspired and based upon the THRIVE approach incorporating extensive neurobiological research and other studies.

1.1 What is Thrive?

It is a systematic approach to the early identification of emotional development need in children. A differentiated provision can be implemented to support our students by staff working most closely with the student. It is preventative, reparative, pragmatic and easy to apply.

1.2 Why use Thrive?

It addresses emotional developmental needs, builds resilience and resourcefulness, decreases the risk of mental illness, reinvigorates the learning provision and helps those students who are at risk of under achieving or exclusion to remain in school and re-engage with learning.

1.3 Who Created Thrive?

A multi-agency team who have worked with staff in education and care settings since 1994 to develop the approach. The team consisted of two former teachers/advisors/OFSTED inspectors; social worker/trainer of social workers, family therapist/foster and adoption specialist.

1.4 Who is it Useful For?

- **All students:**
It sets out age appropriate developmental tasks for students. This enhances their emotional and social skills, improves their emotional wellbeing and develops their emotional literacy.
- **The vulnerable and challenging:**
Those students whose early life experiences have not equipped them to manage their strong sensations and emotions well. These students might be under-achieving or causing concern because of their behaviour. They may not be able to assess personal risk or function well in social situations.
- **When life happens:**
For those students who have had 'good-enough' experiences in their early life but who suddenly experience hurtful, shocking, strange or traumatic life events.

1.5 What Are the Benefits?

THRIVE approach looks at students behaviours and gives an understanding of what is going on.

It can help to:

- Use methods to improve attitudes to learning
- Increase attendance
- Improve emotional and social skills
- Improve relationships
- Provide evidence of progress in emotional and social development
- Support staff

The THRIVE approach will be used dependent on need. If the student requires 1:1 intervention the parent/carers must sign a consent form. The practitioners can provide plans that all staff can deliver. These can be delivered as a 1:1, small or class group intervention. The practitioners can screen a student and provide a plan that can be used at home. We would encourage close relationships and working practice between parents/carers and practitioners/school staff.

2. Safe Touch and Holding Policy

This safe touch and holding policy has been developed in context of the local authority child protection procedures and government guidance and policies to support and guide students and staff.

2.1 The Policy is Applicable to:

It applies to named staff who have received Team Teach training and know how and when to hold a student in safe ways within government guidelines (Use of reasonable force, Advice for head teachers, staff and governing bodies, July 2013).

A THRIVE Practitioner, can then guide the trained delegates in TEAM TEACH to combine their practice with the THRIVE Approach so they can identify and use safe touch as a developmental intervention.

2.2 Why Have A Policy on Safe Touch?

In order to protect students and 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 students.

This academy, Regency High School, 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.

2.3 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 person. It is essential for all students to learn the difference between safe and unsafe touch and to have their strongest emotions contained, validated, accepted and soothed by a significant adult.

If students are behaving unacceptably, are threatening, dangerous, aggressive, or out of control, 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 means available to them: for example, to calm a distressed student, to contain an angry student and/or encourage or affirm an anxious student, or to support a student with low self-esteem.

Safe touch used to calm, soothe and regulate a student's emotions is a needed developmental experience. The brain does not develop neuronal pathways to initiate calming and self-soothing unless and until this emotional regulation has been experienced within a positive relationship with a significant adult. Where students have had insufficient experience of safe touch and calming regulation, this may be a priority in development to help their brains develop access to thinking, judging, evaluating and choosing mechanisms. These are known as 'higher executive skills' and they are an intrinsic part of cognitive regulation.

Safe touch is one of the key ways of regulating student emotions, but it is a strategy that fully trained staff will use only under supervision and in line with the school policy on 'Safe touch'.

2.4 Ways of Regulating Students Emotions

Other means of calming, soothing and containing students strong emotions include:

- Slowing one's pace
- Lowering the voice
- Breathing deeply
- Initially matching the pitch and volume of the students 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 student 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 student 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 well documented.

2.5 Gentle Safe Holding Is Appropriate if a Student Is:

- Hurting themselves or others
- Likely to hurt themselves or others
- Damaging property
- Incensed and out of control, so that all verbal attempts to engage him/her have failed
- Require physical support to manage and develop emotional resilience

Trained staff team members are trained in the safest and gentlest means of holding a student that is entirely designed to enable the student 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 intervention (holding) the student 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).

2.6 What About Other Physical Contact with Students?

It is not illegal to touch a student. There are occasions when physical contact, other than reasonable force, with a student is proper and necessary.

Examples of where touching a student might be proper or necessary:

- Holding the arm of the student at the front/back of the line when going to assembly or when walking together around the school;
- When comforting a distressed student;
- When a student 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.

2.7 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 licenced practitioner is trained to know when and how sufficient connection and psychological holding have been or can be provided/established without touching.

2.8 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 via the school website.
- Parents/carers should provide signed consent if their child has 1:1 intervention.
- Parents/carers can be part of the assessment procedure.
- Staff to be guided by THRIVE practitioners. THRIVE practitioners to offer basic awareness/training sessions.
- Staff members to agree the use of safe touch, agree with THRIVE practitioners and document strategies in individual student behaviour plans.
- Students should be consulted, appropriate to their understanding, and involved in the development plan, based on a comprehensive risk assessment.
- A record/plan of safe holding.

Where touch is used, contact should be brief and gentle, on clothed or publicly visible parts of the body.

2.9 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 experienced as eroticising in anyway whatsoever. Serious breach: should any inappropriate/unsafe touch be used it would be deemed as the most serious breach of the code of ethics warranting the highest level of disciplinary action.

2.10 Records and Procedures

All incidents that involve a safe hold/ positive physical intervention that is restrictive in practice will follow guidelines set out in the schools 'Positive Handling Policy'. Incidents that require alternative safe touch and appropriate strategies eg singing, gentle shoulder touch etc. will be documented in individual behaviour support plans. Class teams will monitor the effectiveness of safe touch and note its impact on calming and soothing the student.