

CONIFERS PRIMARY SCHOOL

Safe Touch Policy

January 2020



Children learn who they are and how the world works through relationships. The quality of a child's relationships with significant adults is key to their development and emotional health and wellbeing.

Extensive neurobiological research and other first-hand studies relating to attachment theory and child development identify 'Safe Touch' as a positive contribution to brain development, emotional regulation, mental health and the development of pro-social skills.

A 'Safe Touch' policy will apply to all staff working in the school.

Why have a policy on 'Safe Touch'?

To protect the children and school staff from allegations under Child Protection procedures most schools and LEA's have adopted 'No Touch' policies. However, this school is adopting an informed, evidence-based decision to allow 'Safe Touch' in special cases as a developmentally and appropriate intervention that will aid healthy growth and learning.

Research shows that healthy and positive brain development required access to 'Safe Touch' as one of the means of calming, soothing and containing distress for a frightened, sad or angry child, or supporting a child with low self-esteem. 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.

Using 'Safe Touch' to calm, soothe and regulate a child's emotions is an essential developmental experience. The brain does not develop self-soothing neurological pathways unless this safe emotional regulation has been experienced. Where children have had insufficient experience of 'Safe Touch' and calming regulation, it may be a priority to help them develop their brain to access thinking, judging and evaluating skills. Other means of calming, soothing and containing 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 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 therapeutic) use of 'Safe Touch' is defined by situations in which self-denial would actually be inhumane, unkind and potentially psychologically or neuro-biologically damaging. Examples include 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, confirming or inviting anti-social behaviour patterns. Abstinence in the face of intense grief, stress and/or rage reactions, can lead to a state of hyper-arousal, in which toxic levels of stress chemicals are released into the body and brain. The severely damaging long term effects of this state have been intensively researched worldwide and are well documented.

If children are behaving in an unacceptable, threatening, dangerous or aggressive way, 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 Holding'** as one of the means available to them to either; calm a distressed child or contain an angry child who has, temporarily, lost control of their emotional reactions.

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 has temporarily lost emotional control, so that all verbal attempts to engage him/her have failed.

'Safe Holding' is just one key way of regulating a child's emotions, but it is a strategy that **fully trained staff will use only under supervision of a member of the school's Senior Leadership Team and in line with a whole school policy on touch.**

The staff team members are thoroughly trained in the safest and gentlest means of holding a child which is entirely designed to enable the child to feel safe 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 child could be left at risk of actual physical or psychological damage.

"Team Teach techniques seek to avoid injury to the service user, but it is possible that bruising or scratching may occur accidentally, and these are not to be seen necessarily as a failure of professional technique, but a regrettable and infrequent "side-effect" of ensuring that the service user remains safe".

George Matthews – Team Teach Founder

Staff members under supervision of the Senior Leadership Team, should agree the use of 'Safe Holding' and it should be **recorded and monitored. Any member of staff who has been involved in a 'Safe Hold' situation will be expected to debrief with the School Counsellor.**

Parents/carers will be informed in all circumstances where 'Safe Hold' has been used to calm, allow the child to regain emotional control, prevent injury to oneself or others and/or damage to property.

No adult should use a 'Safe Hold' when alone with a child.

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 have to demonstrate a clear understanding of the difference. They have 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.

Safe Touch/Hold

To ensure touch is only used appropriately the following guidelines are followed:

Parents/carers should be informed of the school policy on 'SafeTouch/Hold'.

Parents/carers where appropriate, should provide signed consent for their child to be part of a planned THRIVE program, within a structured environment.

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 program.

Teachers/Support staff should be trained/have knowledge of the THRIVE approach.

Designated Teachers/Support staff will be trained in all aspects of 'Safe Holding'.

Unsafe Touch/Hold

At no point and under no circumstances should staff members use touch or holding to satisfy their own need for physical contact or reassurance.