



**FIRST BASE**  
**TOUCH POLICY**

Date Adopted	Signature of Chair	Review date
20.3.13	M Durrant	

## **Background**

In recent years a wide variety of issues have influenced the approach to touch and personal care (ie toileting) in settings, not least child protection concerns and the experience/fear of allegations. As a result we have adopted a variety of approaches and follow guidance on appropriate touch and personal care.

## **Why is touch an important part of our work?**

At First Base we believe that touch is a very important part of our work with children who have Emotional, Social and Behavioural difficulties. The importance of touch should not be underestimated as it can:

- Demonstrate affection
- Show acceptance
- Emphasise the spoken word
- Provide reassurance
- Offer an alternative to spoken communication.
- Assist development of skills, ie writing, eating, dressing, etc.

However, staff should feel confident and pupils should feel secure with all forms of appropriate safe touch. Staff must always be particularly sensitive to pupils who are demonstrating that they are not comfortable with touch even if it appears to be appropriate to the member of staff. This will be a major factor in avoiding any misunderstandings about experiences of touch. Eg a child who moves away when being comforted after a fall must be allowed his space.

## **What we need to consider**

Given that touch is not the same for everyone and that we all have different experiences of positive and negative touch, we need to consider three main issues to ensure that any use of touch or experience of intimate personal care is appropriate and safe:

- **WHO** – It is vital for all members of staff to think about what they represent to a particular child. Personal likes and dislikes will play a part in any relationship but we must ensure that all such contacts are based on what is appropriate. Staff should also consider the power influences involved in relationships such as gender, race, disability, age, sexual identity and role status. A child's history may also influence who represents a 'safe' adult to them. Additionally, some children may be used to experiencing different levels or types of touch as part of their cultural upbringing.
- **WHERE** – The intended message behind touch can be hindered by where it takes place. The same action in a lounge full of people could have a different message in a car. Staff should always ensure that any form of touch is an open act and that other staff are aware of the circumstances, such as where you are and who you are with.

Staff should always encourage children to say when they feel uncomfortable in any area of life, this is especially important in the area of touch and personal care.

- **WHEN** – The context or environment in which touch takes place between members of staff and children, is the decisive factor determining the emotional and physical safety of both parties.

Staff should always be aware of where they are and who they are with. Touch should be avoided in an isolated one to one situation with a child, where possible. The best way to protect both yourself and the child is to ensure that all forms of touch are open to the scrutiny and observation of others.

It is also important for staff to recognise the different messages which can be given in physical intervention situations. Always ensure that other staff are present to observe/assist. Staff need to be aware that in extreme circumstances, some children may even provoke a restraint situation as a way of gaining physical contact from adults.

### **Points to remember**

First Base staff should always consider and abide by the following points when carrying out their duties.

- Touch should not be in response to or be intended to arouse sexual expectations or feelings (Department of Health Circular LAC (1993)(13).
- Play-fighting is not a substitute for appropriate affection towards children, it gives confusing messages to children about personal and professional boundaries.
- Where a pupil requires personal care, staff should ensure that the pupil is comfortable with the staff member attending to their needs, and where possible, have a member of staff of the same sex assist. Other staff should always be around to monitor events and the child's privacy and dignity should always be preserved.
- Privacy issues are always to be considered. A safe environment which respects privacy and shows regard for personal boundaries should be encouraged. Thought also needs to be given to how staff present themselves (eg how they dress), and how they show professional respect when relating to each other and to children.
- Where a member of staff feels that it would be inappropriate to respond to a child seeking physical comfort, outward rejection should always be avoided in favour of diversion or some other such tactic and the reason, where appropriate, for avoiding physical contact should be given to the child.
- Unwelcoming touch, where a child indicates that touch from an adult is not welcome, perhaps by moving away or flinching to avoid, the staff member should acknowledge to the child a respect for personal boundaries.
- Where a child presents a danger to themselves or to others it will at times be necessary for staff to use means of physical intervention as described in the Behaviour policy. At such times staff should always take care to explain what they are doing and that the actions taken are for safety reasons. As the situation de-escalates, touch can be appropriately used to move from a situation of control to one of care.
- Clarity should always be our aim. A child should never be left in any doubt about the member of staff's intention behind any physical contact. Clumsy or unconsidered use of touch may be experienced by a child as being confusing, uncomfortable or

distressing. A decisive, firm and planned form of open touch within an appropriate context and a safe relationship is less likely to lead to unease and confusion.

## **HOW DO WE TOUCH?**

### **Hugging**

At First Base we encourage staff who are using touch for comfort or reward to use a 'school hug'. This is a one-armed sideways-on hug, with the adult putting their hand on the child's shoulders. This discourages 'front on' hugging, and the adult's hands on the shoulders limits the ability of the child to turn themselves into you. This can be done either standing or sitting.

### **Hand Holding**

We recognise that children sometimes enjoy being able to hold hands with adults around them. This is perfectly acceptable when the hand holding is compliant. However, if the handholding is being used by an adult as a method of control to move children, this can become a restraint. Therefore, we encourage the use of the 'school hand-hold'. This is done by the adult holding their arm out, and the child is encouraged to wrap their hand around the adult's lower arm. The adult's other hand can be placed over the child's for a little extra security if it is required.

In summary, it is generally deemed appropriate to touch others on the upper arm which would appear to be regarded as a neutral zone in most cultures.

### **Lap Sitting**

At First Base we actively **discourage** lap-sitting. Children should be taught to seek comfort/attention through other means, for example the school hand hold or hug. If a child attempts to sit on your lap, explain to them that this is not what we do here, and ask them to sit next to you if it appropriate.

At times, children may be in such crisis or distress that they hold you in a way which is not described as above (eg 'front-on' or hug/lap sitting). If this should happen please ensure that you have informed a senior member of staff to protect yourself. You may be asked to make a note of this, this will be in order to record.

### **Stroking**

At First Base we recognise that children sometimes require high levels of sensory stimulation to calm or nurture them. Stroking a child's hand with a paint brush or during educational activities such as nursery rhymes is acceptable but must always be after a verbal request by the member of staff and an explanation to the child has been given as to the purpose of the activity. These activities should usually be from the hand to elbow area only.

All staff have a responsibility to ensure that all practice at First Base is safe and appropriate. We should all expect to be observed by others and be prepared to discuss any concerns we have in a professional manner. Any member of staff who is concerned

about another member of staff's practice should discuss their concerns with the Head Teacher as appropriate.