



Safe Touch and Positive Handling Policy

St. Matthias CE Primary School

Presented to Governors: June 2015

Member of staff responsible: Mrs Sarah Flubacher

Review Date: June 2017

1. Aims

At St Matthias Primary School we believe that children have the right to independence, choice and inclusion, and we seek to provide opportunities for personal growth and emotional health and wellbeing. However, rights also involve responsibilities; such as not harming other people's rights. Children who are unable to control their actions or unable to appreciate danger have a right to be protected just as do other children attending school. Staff have a duty of care to exercise in ensuring this is the case.

2. Rationale

Children learn who they are and how the world is, by forming relationships with people and things around them. The quality of a child's relationship with significant adults is vital to their healthy development and their emotional health and wellbeing.

St Matthias Primary School has put in place specific provision (Thrive) for children who need additional support for their emotional health or well-being. The THRIVE programme is designed to support emotional development. A key strand of this programme is the understanding that staff may need to respond to a child's developmental needs by using appropriate safe touch.

Our policy takes into account the extensive neurobiological research and studies relating to attachment theory and child development that identify safe touch as a positive contribution to brain development, mental health and the development of social skills. At St Matthias Primary School, we have adopted an informed, evidence based decision to allow safe touch as a developmentally appropriate intervention that will aid healthy growth and learning.

Our policy rests on the knowledge that every member of staff has been trained to know the difference between appropriate and inappropriate touch.

3. Different Types of Touch

There are four different types of touch and physical contact that may be used, these are:

1. Casual / Informal / Incidental Touch.

Staff use touch with pupils as part of a normal relationship, for example, comforting a child, giving reassurance and congratulating. This might include putting an arm out to bar an exit from a room, taking a child by the hand, patting



on the back or putting an arm around the shoulders. The benefit of this action is often proactive and can prevent a situation from escalating.

2. General Reparative Touch

This is used by staff working with children who are having difficulties with their emotions. Healthy emotional development requires safe touch as a means of calming, soothing and containing distress for a frightened, angry or sad child. Touch used to regulate a child's emotions triggers the release of the calming chemical oxytocin in the body. Reparative touch may include stroking a back, squeezing an arm, rocking gently, cuddling, tickling, sitting on an adult's lap, or a hand or foot massage.

3. Contact Play

Contact play is used by staff adopting a role similar to a parent in a healthy child-parent relationship. This will only take place when the child has developed a trusting relationship with the adult and when they feel completely comfortable and at ease with this type of contact. Thrive activities that incorporate a close contact might include feather tickling, hand and foot painting, story-telling and massage.

4. Positive Handling (Calming a Dysregulated Child)

Trained staff will restrain a child when behaviour is:

- Unacceptably threatening, dangerous, aggressive or out of control;
- In order to avoid harm to self or others or damage to property;
- To avoid an offence being committed and / or a breakdown of good order and discipline.

The restraining techniques used should be familiar to the staff involved, and they should be appropriately trained and be able to use them safely.

A child who is in a state of dysregulation and has no mechanism for self-calming or regulating their strong emotional reactions, will be physically contained by staff. This kind of containment will usually involve a member of staff sitting behind the child and enveloping the child in their arms whilst providing a safe, calm and soothing presence. It may also be necessary for another member of staff to control a child's kicking legs.

Staff will employ the safest and gentlest means of holding a child, which is entirely designed to enable the child to feel safe and soothed and bring him or her down from an uncontrollable state of hyper arousal. Maintaining boundaries in such cases can be a vital corrective emotional experience, without which the child can be left at risk of actual physical or psychological damage. The brain does not develop self-soothing neuronal pathways unless this safe emotional regulation has been experienced. Physical containment of a dysregulated child can be the only way to provide the reassurance necessary to restore calm. 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) op cit.

During any incident of restraint, staff must seek as far as possible to:

- Lower the child's level of anxiety during the restraint by continually offering verbal reassurance and avoiding generating fear of injury in the child;



- Cause minimum restriction of the movement of limbs consistent with the danger of injury (so, for example, will not restrict the movement of the child's legs when they are on the ground unless in an enclosed space where flailing legs are likely to be injured);
- Ensure at least one other member of staff is present when possible.

4. Steps to Take Before Positive Handling

Prevention strategies and calming measures will be employed and the following action should be taken before a restraint is used.

- Conversation, distraction, coaxing skills, gentle persuasion or redirection to other activities (e.g. touching the child's arm and leading him / her away from danger, gently stroking the child's shoulder)
- Encourage the child to help him/her feel more secure by wrapping a blanket tightly around him/her or holding on tightly to a large cushion or stuffed toy
- Put distance between the child and others - move others to a safer place
- Calmly remove anything that could be used as a weapon, including hot drinks, objects, furniture
- To prevent a child continuing to pose harm in a dangerous situation, advise surplus adults to leave, but remain with the child yourself
- Use seclusion only if necessary for a short period while waiting for help, preferably where a member of staff can observe the child
- Keep talking calmly to the child, explain what is happening and why, how it can stop, and what will happen next
- Use first aid procedures in the event of injury or physical distress when safe to do so

5. Who Can Use Positive Handling?

Staff using positive handling techniques will have been fully trained in either the Thriveftc approach and / or Team Teach positive handling techniques. In either instance, the specific guidance from these approaches will be followed in regards to when / how to use positive handling as an appropriate course of action.

There are some situations where those without training might find it reasonable to use a degree of force.

- Everyone has the right to defend themselves against an attack provided they do not use a disproportionate degree of force to do so
- In an emergency, for example, if a child was in immediate risk of injury or on the point of inflicting injury on someone else, **any** member of staff would be entitled to intervene

6. Sharing Information

With all Team Teach incidents a detailed written statement recording a physical restraint will be made in the Bound Book as soon as possible after the incident and will include:

- What took place, to and by whom, it's severity and how long it lasted;
- What effects there were and to whom;
- Circumstances leading up to the incident (who was involved, time of day and where it occurred, what activities were taking place etc);
- Actions that were taken by staff to avoid restraining;

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- Details of other children or staff who were present at the time.

This will be followed up with a letter home to inform parents of the incident and the Local Authority Positive Physical Interventions Team informed.

Following an incident staff will consider future plans to support the child involved with a particular focus on identifying strategies to prevent the need for using Team Teach.

Parents / carers of all children attending the THRIVE programme (and considered to be at risk) will be sent a copy of this policy and will be asked to sign a declaration that they have received and read it.