



HILL WEST  
*Primary*

FOUR OAKS

# SAFE TOUCH POLICY

Hill West Primary School is a member of the Arthur Terry Learning Partnership

# HILL WEST PRIMARY SCHOOL

## *ACE: Ambitious, Curious and Ever-Respectful*

### SAFE TOUCH

At Hill West Primary School, we understand that appropriate relationships between staff and pupils are paramount to promoting the safeguarding of pupils at our school. This policy has been created with the aim of ensuring that all members of staff are aware of their responsibilities in terms of appropriate and inappropriate touch when involving pupils. All pupils are entitled to receive an education in an environment where they feel safe, secure, respected, loved and know that they belong. The school is dedicated to ensuring that no pupil feels threatened or disrespected in terms of physical contact between themselves or a member of staff. At Hill West we know that safe use of touch is an important and sensitive aspect of our work. On the one hand, the use of safe physical touch is an important way to provide comfort and physiological regulation to children – particularly those who may have experienced trauma and loss in their early lives. On the other hand, it is equally important to ensure that as a school we have adequate safeguards in place around the use of touch to ensure that both children and staff are protected.

***Our rule of thumb is that safe touch is usually touch instigated by the pupil and then reciprocated by the staff member. At Hill West, staff will refrain from touching pupils unless they are at significant risk of hurting themselves or others.***

### LEGAL FRAMEWORK

This policy has due regard to statutory legislation including, but not limited to, the following:

- Equality Act 2010
- The Children Act 1989
- This policy also has due regard to government guidance including, but not limited to the following:
  - DfE (2022) Keeping Children Safe in Education
  - DfE (2022) Working Together to Safeguard Children
  - DfE (2013) Use of reasonable force.

This policy operated in conjunction with the following school policies

- Safeguarding and Child Protection Policy Research

### 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 child. 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. If children are behaving in unacceptable, threatening, dangerous, aggressive or out of control ways, 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 of the means available to them, for example to calm a distressed child, to contain an angry child and/or encourage or affirm an anxious child or to support a child with low self-esteem.

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

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

## **WAYS OF REGULATING CHILDREN'S EMOTIONS**

Other means of calming, soothing and containing children's 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 (shout, cry etc) and then regulate it down
- Talking slowly, firmly and quietly in an unhurried and unflustered way
- Providing clear predictable and 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 child 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 child 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 are well documented.

Moreover, gentle safe holding is appropriate if a child:

- hurting himself/herself or others, (or is likely to hurt himself/herself and/or others) or
- is damaging property, and/or
- is incensed and out of control, so that all verbal attempts to engage him/her have failed.

Our leadership team members and a small number of additional staff are trained in the safest and gentlest means of holding a child that is entirely designed to enable the child to feel safe and soothed, and to bring him or her down from uncontrollable states of hyper-arousal (TEAM TEACH). Whilst limits and boundaries in such circumstances can be a vital corrective emotional experience, without such an intervention (holding) the child 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)

## **ROLES AND RESPONSIBILITIES**

All members of staff at our school have a duty of care towards pupils and will be aware of the boundaries involving physical contact. The LDSL is responsible for conducting termly safeguarding training for members of staff and ensuring that they are aware of their responsibilities, in line with the school's Safeguarding and Child Protection Policy. The Headteacher is responsible for ensuring that all staff engage in safe touch with pupils, and only where necessary to sooth the child. All members of staff are responsible for ensuring that no pupil feels threatened or unsafe at our school as a result of inappropriate touch. All members of staff have responsibility to report any instances of inappropriate touch to the LDSL. The Headteacher, Deputy Head Teacher and Assistant Head Teachers are responsible for communicating with parents and ensuring that they are aware of this policy. The school has a responsibility for ensuring that it creates and promotes a culture in which pupils' wishes and feelings are respected.

## **WHAT IS SAFE TOUCH**

For the purposes of the policy, "safe touch" is defined as physical contact that, if otherwise avoided, would be inhumane, unkind and potentially emotionally or physically damaging for the pupil. Safe touch should never be invasive, humiliating or flirtatious. The school understands that the following examples are instances of safe touch which may occur between staff and pupils:

- Comforting an upset or distressed pupil
- Congratulating or praising a pupil
- Holding the hand of a pupils to guide them, such as when crossing a road or walking into assembly
- Giving first aid to a pupil
- Demonstrating exercises or techniques during PE lessons
- Administering medicine
- Using musical instruments

## **TYPES OF SAFE TOUCH**

Hill West understands that certain types of physical contact between staff and pupils are inappropriate, and that contact should either be as a result of pupil need or request and always with consent. We recognise that the only appropriate places to touch pupils are on the shoulders, arms and back.

When hugging a pupil we encourage staff to use the 'school hug', rather than an embrace. A school-hug is a sideways hug whereby the member of staff places their hand on the pupil's shoulders. This type of hug prevents the pupil from turning themselves towards the member of staff and thus engaging in a 'front' embrace, which could leave staff and children in a vulnerable position.

We understand that there are times when a member of staff will need to hold a pupil's hand, either for comfort and nurture or to guide them away from a troubling situation. When holding a pupil's hand at Hill West staff members ensure that arms are held away from the body so that there is clear space between the hands and the body.

We understand that with our very youngest children and with children who may have experienced early trauma and loss there may be instances where the child would benefit from closer contact in the form of lap-sitting. In instances where this is deemed necessary to offer comfort member of staff ensure that this is always consensual.

If a member of staff attempts to use one of the safe methods of touch and a pupils is unhappy with this, particularly with regards to those with SEND, the member of staff will retract immediately in order to respect the pupil's wishes.

## UNSAFE TOUCH

- At no point and under no circumstances should staff members use touch to satisfy their own need for physical contact or reassurance.
- No unsafe touch: All staff are trained to be fully cognisant of touch that is invasive or which could be confusing, traumatising or experienced as eroticising in any way whatsoever.
- Serious Breach: Should any such touch be used it would be deemed as the most serious breach of the Code of Ethics warranting the highest level of disciplinary action.

## REASONABLE FORCE

At Hill West we understand that there are times, although very rare, when members of staff must provide physical intervention whereby a pupils presents danger to themselves or others. All staff have the legal power to use reasonable force. In these instances, staff must always explain the reasons for their actions to the pupil and why it was necessary. ***Reasonable force will only ever be required in extreme circumstances where there is reason to believe a child is at significant risk of harm.*** The decision on whether or not to physically intervene is down to the professional judgement of the staff member concerned and should always depend on the individual circumstances. Any occurrences of the use of reasonable force will be reported to the Headteacher, who will keep a written record of this and communicate it to the pupil's parents. Hill West will ensure it has considered the risks involved when using reasonable force involving pupils with SEND, particular recognising the additional vulnerability of this group.

## **REPORTING INAPPROPRIATE TOUCH**

If a pupil attempts to engage in any inappropriate touching, the member of staff involved will report this immediately to the Headteacher, in order to prevent any allegations of inappropriate physical contact. If another member of staff suspects or witnesses inappropriate physical contact, whereby the member of staff is willingly involved, they will report this to the Headteacher immediately. The Headteacher will keep a written record of all instances of reported inappropriate touch. Any allegations against staff will be dealt with as a matter of urgency, and in accordance with the procedures outlined in the school's Safeguarding and Child Protection Policy.

## **TRAINING FOR STAFF**

The LDSL will conduct regular safeguarding training for all members of staff and reminders will be issued in relation to safe touch, including use of reasonable force. All staff will be regularly reminded of the methods of safe touch employed by our school by our Assistant Head Teachers who are also our Phase Leaders.

## **MONITORING AND REVIEW**

This policy will be reviewed on an annual basis by the Headteacher and DSLs, who will make any necessary changes and communicate these to all members of staff. All members of staff are required to familiarise themselves with this policy as part of their induction.