

The Centre School

TOUCH POLICY

Our policy on touch has been developed with due consideration of neuro-biological research and studies based on and around the positive impact of touch.

We define the appropriate use of touch as in situations in which abstinence would actually be inhumane, unkind and potentially psychologically or neurobiologically damaging. Examples include the natural and beneficial use of touch in the comforting of a student who is in an acute state of distress. Not to reach out to the student in such circumstances could be re-traumatising and neurobiologically damaging. Failing to physically soothe a student when in the face of intense grief and/or upset 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 have been well researched world-wide and are well documented). In such states of distress, touch can often be the only means of maintaining a connection with the student when he or she can no longer hear or make use of words or soothing tone/eye contact and therefore is in danger of dissociating, with all the detrimental effects that this can bring.

Moreover, gentle safe holding is appropriate if a student is hurting either him or herself, others, or is damaging property and is so incensed and out of control that all verbal attempts to engage him or her have failed. 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 are included in our Behaviour/Anti- Bullying Policy. The staff at The Centre School are trained in the safest and gentlest means of holding a student, which 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 experience, moreover, without such an intervention, the student can be left at risk of actual physical or psychological damage.

The staff at The Centre School initiate and respond warmly to appropriate touch from all students. Each morning the students are both greeted into the school and then again into their individual classrooms. Interactions in the corridor or at the above times will often include a physical interaction. This creates the nurturing, warm, caring environment that is so enabling for our students at The Centre School.

The staff at The Centre School are highly aware of the current atmosphere where, due to fears of abuse, touch as a natural and vital form of human connection has been almost vetoed in some schools. Our policy adheres to the belief that every individual needs to appreciate the difference between appropriate and inappropriate touch. Staff are highly aware of both damaging and unnecessary uses of touch e.g. touch as an avoidance of the student’s feelings and emotional pain, as an avoidance of real contact, as a block to painful memories, as an ill thought out or impulsive act of futile reassurance/gratification, as a block



to important therapeutic work and conflict resolution. Equally, when a student is in deep distress, staff are aware when sufficient connection and psychological holding have been established *without* touching.

Appropriate Touch

By 'Appropriate Touch' we mean touch that is not invasive, humiliating or could possibly be considered as eroticising/flirtatious. We agree that 'appropriate' places to touch are 'shoulders, arms, back.

Naturally, staff are also fully aware of touch that is invasive or which could be confusing, traumatising, or experienced as eroticising in anyway whatsoever. 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.

Our Safeguarding Policy and Positive Handling further outline the necessity to ensure all students are safe in their bodies and their feelings and how the staff at The Centre School work together to ensure this is the case.

Where staff are acting in the best interests of the student, they will be supported by the school.

This Policy was reviewed by the Governing Body in September 2018.

It will be reviewed in September 2020.