



Relationships and Safe Touch Policy

"The greatest gift you can give to others is unconditional love and acceptance." Carl R. Rogers.

Updated September 2023

Aims:

At Penpol, we aim to provide a safe, patient and understanding space for personal growth, supporting good emotional health and wellbeing for all.

Rationale:

The quality of a child's relationship with significant adults is vital to their healthy development, emotional health and wellbeing. It is integral to the role of all Penpol staff to build supportive, resilient and positive relationships with our pupils, showing compassion and unconditional positive regard – even when this is tested the most.

Nurturing Positive Relationships

Children learn who they are and how they fit into the world by forming relationships with people and things around them. Penpol staff show each child that they are warmly valued and that their feelings matter. We do this in a myriad of ways, from a brief smile of encouragement to an affirming 'walk and talk'. We treat each child fairly but not always the same.

As with all learning and for all individuals, mistakes are as important as successes in contributing to the pathway to progress. We recognise that some children's experiences leave them with greater obstacles to building relationships and that this may lead to behaviours which challenge. If a child is behaving in an unacceptable or aggressive way, they have not yet learnt how their strongest emotions can be contained, channelled and communicated safely. Our Behaviour for Learning policy is applied carefully to provide all children with clear and consistent expectations. When relationships have been endangered by behaviours which challenge, all adults work carefully to show children that they are still safe and that they remain warmly valued.

Some children work closely with additional adults on this journey through programmes such as Trauma Informed Schools. These are

important strategies which support children whose adverse childhood experiences have challenged their readiness to build trusting relationships. These strategies are based upon extensive research and support individuals to grow and to more positively relate to their peers.

At Penpol, we have agreed a PACER approach to supporting behaviours which challenge:

P = Playful: Build bridges through play/fun.

A = Accept: 'I can see you're...'

C = Curious: 'I'm wondering...I've noticed...Help me to understand...'

E = Empathy: 'That must have made you feel...'

R = Restore: 'How can you (the child) put things right?'



Safe Touch

Research shows clearly that healthy pro-social brain development requires access to safe touch as one of the means of calming, soothing and containing difficult emotions.

At Penpol, we adopt an evidence-based approach to safe touch as a developmentally appropriate intervention that will aid healthy emotional growth and learning.

What is safe touch?

It is important that all children learn the difference between safe and unsafe touch and to experience having their strongest emotions contained, validated, accepted and soothed by a significant adult.

In recognition of this, and with appropriate training, staff will consider using safe touch as one of the means available to them when:

- calming a child who is distressed
- affirming or encouraging a child who is anxious or has low self-esteem
- containing a child who is feeling angry

Other means of calming, soothing and containing a child's strong emotions include:

- slowing the pace
- lowering the voice
- regulating the pitch and volume of the child's emotional display, talking slowly and firmly in an unhurried and flustered way.

We know our pupils well at Penpol and support them in the way that we know they are most likely to respond positively to.

As professionals, we are alert to our own readiness to support a child with safe touch. Where we assess safe touch to be what would best support a child and are not in a position to provide it ourselves, we seek the help of a colleague.

Types of safe touch:

Casual or informal touch

Staff use touch as part of a normal relationship, for example comforting a child, giving reassurance and congratulating. This might include taking a child by the hand, giving a 'high five' or putting an arm around the shoulders.

General reparative touch

This is used by staff working with children who are having difficulties regulating their emotions. Healthy emotional development requires safe touch as a means of calming, soothing

and containing distress for a child. Touch is used to regulate emotions. This may include stroking the back, rocking gently or, for a much younger child, sitting on an adult's lap.

Contact play

Contact play is used by staff adopting a similar role to a parent in a healthy child-parent relationship. This will take place when the child has developed a trusting relationship with an adult and they feel comfortable and at ease. Contact play may include an adult and child playing a game of building towers with their hands or the adult joining in with a game of football and 'high fiving' when celebrating a goal.

Physical intervention strategies are appropriate if a child: (Also see separate Physical Intervention Policy)

- is hurting themselves or is likely to hurt others
- is putting themselves in the way of harm
- (in extreme cases) is damaging property

Specific members of staff have been trained in the Physical Intervention approach which encompasses a broad range of strategies that support children to de-escalate from difficult situations.

These staff members act in accordance with Physical Intervention training at all times.

There are some situations where colleagues without Physical Intervention training may find it reasonable to use a degree of force:

- All staff members have the right to defend themselves against an unpredictable attack, providing that proportionate force is used.
- In an emergency, for example if a child was in immediate risk of injury or on the point of inflicting injury on someone else, it would be appropriate for any member of staff to intervene with proportionate physical intervention.

Appropriate and Inappropriate Touch:

Our policy is supported by regular safeguarding training for all staff and our Child Protection and Safeguarding Policy. Staff have a clear understanding of the difference between appropriate and inappropriate touch. Touch is not used as an impulsive act nor as a means of compliance.

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

Staff must always be particularly sensitive to pupils who are demonstrating that they are not comfortable with touch. It is important for a member of staff to think about what they themselves represent to a particular child. A child's history may influence who represents a 'safe' adult to them. Additionally, some pupils may be more or less accustomed to different levels or types of touch as part of their cultural upbringing.

All staff should ensure the following guidance is adhered to:

- Parents/Carers should be made aware of the school's safe touch policy.
- Any specific information about a child's history/experience which might affect how comfortable they are with safe touch should be communicated to staff.
- A detailed written statement should be completed when Team Teach physical intervention has been used, within 24 hours of the event. This is saved as a PDF so that it is date-stamped. Staff should also have a debrief session offered to them with a member of SLT.
- The parents/carers of the child should be made aware that a particular handling technique was used.
- Staff should then discuss actions that may be needed to prevent a future incident.

Written: September 2023

