



Touch Policy

Introduced April 2016

Creating Opportunities, Inspiring Change

At the Compass we work collaboratively with young people, their families and other agencies to provide a safe and creative therapeutic educational environment.

We believe that every child has the right to love, care and have a stimulating educational experience. Our fully integrated approach allows young people to learn, develop resilience and feel important.

Relationships are at the heart of everything we do; it is this which allows us all to learn and grow our personal social, moral and spiritual compass. With the Compass approach families, staff and all those working with us also have opportunities to develop.

This policy should be read and reviewed in conjunction with our other Short Stay School – Compass policies including our SAEN, Safeguarding, Anti-bullying, Behaviour and Absconson policies to ensure the consistent support of our children and their families and in acknowledgement of our legal duties as stated in the Equality Act of 2010.

Our Compass Schools provide a welcoming, caring environment where children are supported and encouraged to learn through personally tailoring curriculum opportunities and therapeutic approaches to individual needs.

Children referred to the Compass Schools, at times display high levels of dysregulated behaviour and have a history of poor engagement in educational settings. Our staff are trained to work therapeutically by providing emotional attunement, consistent care and unconditional positive regard.

At Compass we believe:

- **Everyone should feel safe and secure at our school**
- **Everyone should feel cared for and valued**
- **Everyone has a responsibility in creating and sustaining a positive environment**
- **Everyone is equal regardless of race, colour, gender or religion**

Why do we need a touch policy?

It is important that the children in our schools experience appropriate and safe forms of touch. The importance of touch should not be under-estimated as a way of:

- Demonstrating affection and care
- Showing acceptance
- Providing physical re-assurance
- Supporting our children in developing their non-verbal communication and an opportunity to communicate positive regard
- As part of childhood play

In our school we may choose to support children with touch for a variety of reasons:

- As a form of comfort or acknowledgement
- To support health or wellbeing
- As part of prompting, guiding or supporting children
- At times of extreme challenging behaviour as part of a restraint.

The children referred to Compass Schools experience a range of difficulties predominantly arising from early trauma, attachment difficulties and emotional and behavioural difficulties. We believe that the refusal and abstinence of touch may in itself cause harm, be unkind and potentially reinforce previous negative experiences. The natural and beneficial use of touch in the comforting of a child/ young person has been well researched and documented world-wide.

Our schools promote the belief that every individual needs to appreciate the difference between appropriate and inappropriate touch. Staff are highly aware of the benefits of appropriate touch, for example as a way of acknowledging the child's feelings and providing emotional support.

To whom does the policy apply?

This policy applies to all staff and children working within Compass Schools.

What is appropriate touch?

Appropriate touch is:

- Caring
- Thoughtful
- Consistent
- Not withdrawn as a consequence

Appropriate touch is a **not**:

- Invasive
- Humiliating
- Unwelcome
- Or could possibly be seen as flirtatious or sexually gratifying.

The staff at Compass Schools respond warmly to appropriate touch from all children in our care.

Each morning our children are greeted by staff at our reception areas and again at the entrance to their classrooms following breakfast. This may include physical

interactions to welcome and promote sense of belonging. This supports the creation of a warm, caring environment that is indicative of Compass Schools.

The staff at Compass Schools are trained in the safest and most appropriate forms of physically supporting and holding a child in moments of dysregulation, via the Norfolk Steps training courses. These techniques are designed to enable all children to feel safe and secure and to prevent harm or significant damage.

Staff should refer to Risk Reduction Plans and guidance from therapy teams to support the use of appropriate responses to individual children.

What is the purpose of appropriate touch?

Communication:

At times of emotional dysregulation, physical touch can be a means of communicating and making a connection with a child who is no longer responding to non-verbal and verbal communication. E.g. hand on shoulder, hug, hand on back

Educational reasons:

Particularly with children at early education levels, physical touch can be used to direct children and support the development of essential skills. E.g. P.E sessions and transitional changes between activities.

Play:

Play forms a fundamental part of Compass life, positive experiences of play are essential to children's development, play naturally often includes touch.

Therapy:

Physical touch is common practise in many forms of therapy e.g. theraplay.

For emotional reasons:

To communicate affection and warmth, to give reassurance and to communicate security and comfort. To enable the person to develop understanding of these positive emotions and the ability to communicate them.

For the purposes of care:

Appropriate touch can be necessary in order to provide medical care.

Further guidance:

Staff must always be clear and open about why they are using appropriate touch to support children. Where it is deemed appropriate that touch is a planned response to a child's needs this must be discussed with parents/ carers and detailed within individual children's care plans.

The use of appropriate touch should be discussed openly and regularly between all stakeholders.

People of any age can want and need physical support/ appropriate touch. When using appropriate touch developmental age and emotional and communication needs of an individual are far more important than actual age.

Gender and cultural factors have relevance in issues of appropriate touch, these should be considered alongside the emotional and communication needs of any child.

Staff must be sensitive to the danger of touch being misunderstood and triggering sexual arousal and must be alert to all feedback signals from children. If a staff member is concerned this should be raised with their clinical supervisor and line manager.

The children we support may inadvertently touch intimate areas of a staff members body; the member of staff should withdraw without giving negative feedback of the situation and record as a safeguarding concern. It is never appropriate for staff to touch a child/ young person's intimate areas. If staff are in any doubt about issues concerning appropriate touch or observe any practise that causes concern these must be reported to the Designated Safeguarding Professional.

Exceptions

At times, children may be in such crisis or distress that they hold you in a way which is not as described above (eg cuddling, clinging or lapsitting). If this should happen please ensure that you have informed a senior member of staff. You will be asked to make a record of the interaction, with an explanation. This is in order to record and monitor the amount of times the child is seeking this comfort or control.

Conclusion

Please note that although we have a touch policy and believe that touch can be a positive experience for the children, this does not mean that you *have* to touch children. It should also be realised that some children will not want to be touched.

At Compass Schools we also have a restraint policy, for the prevention of imminent harm. Please ensure that you are familiar with this.

Parents/carers will be made aware of this policy when their child is admitted to this school.

If you have any questions or would like a further discussion regarding this policy, please speak to your line manager at the earliest available opportunity.

Glossary

Hug – always given from a sideward stance to the child with one hand placed on child's shoulder for support, unless stated otherwise as a planned response within a child's care plan.

Physical intervention – any form of touch that doesn't restrict a child's movement or choice of movement

Restrictive Physical intervention – an intervention that restricts a child's movement as detailed within our restraint policy.