

Safeguarding and Welfare Requirements: Child Protection
Providers must have and implement a policy, and procedures, to safeguarding children.



3.9 **SAFE TOUCH**

The Ark Centre acknowledges that the students will require appropriate touch and this policy to guide and support staff.

Why touch is an important consideration:

The importance of touch should not be underestimated as it can:

- Demonstrate affection
- Show acceptance
- Emphasise the spoken word
- Provide reassurance
- Offer an alternative to spoken communication
- Allow children to access the curriculum
- Offer support after injury/seizure/other medical incident.
- Aid protection in hazardous circumstances.
- Reward and affirm
- Lead a student into play and activity
- Provide personal care

In addition to this:

- Inappropriate responses to touch cannot be combated by not touching
- For students who are at an early level of development touch is likely to be the most fundamental, tangible, foundational form of communication
- Good experiences of positive touch may make the recognition of negative inappropriate touch more likely
- Some students need to experience the 'tempo' of life through examples of physical state (e.g. experiencing calm, excitement etc through physical touch and modeling)
- However staff should feel confident and students should feel secure with all forms of appropriate safe touch.
- Staff must always be particularly sensitive to students who are demonstrating that they are not comfortable with touch even if it appears to be appropriate to the member of staff. This will be a major factor in avoiding any misunderstandings about experiences of touch. E.g. a child who moves away, when being comforted after a fall must be allowed his space. Staff should bear in mind the following things:
Physical contact could ...
 - Contribute towards sexual arousal.
 - May be inappropriate dependent upon a student's personal history (e.g. children who have suffered abuse).
 - Cause distress with students with certain special needs (e.g. Autism).
 - Be wrong for the member of staff carrying it out (at all times, with a certain student or on a certain day or as a result of an incident that has taken place).
 - Mean that the student's touch is presently too extreme for the comfort of the member of staff.

Both staff and pupils are equally important partners in the process and use of touch.

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What We Need to Consider:

Given that touch is not the same for everyone and that we all have different experiences of positive and negative touch, we need to consider three main issues to ensure that any use of touch or experience of intimate personal care is appropriate and safe:

Who:

It is vital for a member of staff to think about what they represent to a particular student. Personal likes and dislikes will play a part in any relationship but we must ensure that all such contacts are based on what is appropriate. Staff should also consider the power of influences involved in relationships such as gender, race, disability, age, sexual identity and role status. E.g. older pupils are less likely to need close supervision for personal care, or gender difference may make individuals feel uncomfortable. A student's history may also influence who represents a 'safe' adult to them. Additionally some students may be used to experiencing different levels or types of touch as part of their cultural upbringing.

Where:

The intended message behind touch can be hindered by where it takes place. The same action in a lounge full of people could have a different message in a car or a child's bedroom. Staff should always ensure that any form of touch is an open act and that other staff, are aware of the circumstances, such as where you are and whom you are with. Staff must always consider very carefully what constitutes intimate parts of the body for the student. A student may still be developing a sense of what is intimate and less intimate, particularly if they have experienced damaging or inappropriate behaviour from other people or if they have limited social understanding. Generally touching an arm, shoulder or hand is more appropriate and feels less intimate than a student's legs or torso.

Staff should always encourage students' to say when they feel uncomfortable in any area of life; this is especially important in the area of touch and personal care.

When:

The context or environment, in which touch takes place between members of staff and the students, is the decisive factor determining the emotional and physical safety of both parties. Staff should always be aware of where they are and whom they are with. The best way to protect both yourself and the student is to ensure that all forms of touch are open to the scrutiny and observation of others. It is also important for staff to recognise the different messages, which can be given in physical intervention situations. Always ensure that other staff are present to observe/assist. Staff need to be aware that in extreme circumstances, some students may even provoke a restraint situation as a way of gaining physical contact from adults.

There will be occasions at The Ark Centre that education, therapy, care or nursing of the pupils requires that a member of staff may spend one-to-one time alone with a pupil.

At The Ark Centre touch is an accepted part of much of the work we do with our students. We acknowledge the importance of ensuring that this touch is safe, welcomed and is used to enhance the opportunities and relationships the child will have in our care. Staff engage in regular training and use of discussion, moderation and assessment of services. This helps to build a picture of what touch is used, when and why and assists in the development of a

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consistent and open organisation. The use of touch at The Ark Centre should be continually reviewed to ensure its effectiveness and manage risk.