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Agreed by: Learning and Achievement Committee Date: 18/08/25

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Signature: Electronically on Governor Hub

Physical Touch and Handling Policy June 2025

Highfield Nursery School, Children's Centre positively encourage staff and children to develop secure happy relationships with each other. The Headteacher fully supports the staff who work on a daily basis with young children. We know that touch is a normal, healthy part of all parent- child interaction and is very important for the healthy development of all children and as such we promote the use of safe touch in our interactions with children.

Physical contact is mostly initiated by the child, at a young age they use eye pointing and body language to communicate their needs and agreement and staff are trained and experienced to interpret the communication of young children and are sensitive to each individual child, so when a child wants a cuddle or to sit on a lap, then of course staff will be happy to offer this. Practitioners observe and support each other on a daily basis to ensure safe touch is upheld at all times.

It is important for the children to see staff interacting and relating in positive ways. The following suggestions are ways in which personal relationships develop:

- Talk about things that can make children and adults sad and happy and discuss emotions
- Cuddling children to express delight in their achievements
- Holding children gently to reassure them
- Sit children on your lap to give comfort when they are upset

Staff at Highfield implement and consider the following key approaches:

- Physical touch/contact is done with the child's consent, for example a member of the team may say 'would a cuddle help?'
- The team do not favour some children over others, offering more personal contact and cuddles
- The team are fair and consistent with all children
- The team respect that some children require their own space
- Parents/carers are always welcome to come to our setting to observe how the team comfort, lift and handle children throughout the day

The team at Highfield is also aware of inappropriate physical contact, and always considers the following points:

- Consider how to handle children who are in a state of undress – it may be appropriate to put a nappy on before cuddling a child

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- Consider the physical contact you might have with special educational needs children; is it necessary and appropriate?
- Kissing a child is inappropriate; however, a child may want to kiss a member of staff goodbye and if staff are uncomfortable with this they may just offer an alternative, like a big wave

To support children with emotional and social needs practitioners at Highfield follow the protocols and adhere to the principles of THERAPLAY and Developmental Movement Play (DMP) and have practitioners trained in both practices.

THERAPLAY and Developmental Movement Play are child and family programmes that enhance attachment, self-esteem, trust in others and joyful engagement. They are physical and fun. THERAPLAY interactions focus on four essential qualities found in parent –child relationships: STRUCTURE, ENGAGEMENT, NURTURE and CHALLENGE. We will develop the active and emotional connections between each child and parent or practitioner, resulting in the child’s view of himself as worthy, loveable and with an experience of relationships as positive and rewarding.

Touch is a normal, healthy part of all parent- child interaction and is very important for the healthy development of all children. Touch is playful and engaging as seen in many of the surprising and delightful activities. It is nurturing in the care giving activities, it is organising and modulating in the structuring activities; it is used to help to guide the child in the challenging activities. At all times our goal is to maintain the safety and meet the developmental needs of the child. Children who are extremely sensitive to touch need physical closeness and playfulness and our programme seeks and provides ways to provide these experiences in ways that are tolerable for the child and we aim to expand his tolerances for new sensory experiences. (A child who has been inappropriately or hurtfully touched in the past needs to relearn what gentle, firm and appropriate touch feels like, and therefore learn that he is worthy of this kind of treatment)

If a child is angry, deregulated or out of control in a session and has not responded to other efforts to calm him, the practitioner will contain the child in some way: this may involve cradling the child on the lap of the adult, an arm around the child, or close soothing physical contact. If you are able, and are sharing a support session, you the parent will contain the child with support from the practitioner. As soon as the child settles, the containment stops and the practitioner will continue to interact with the child. Containment in our programme is done in response to the child’s deregulated behaviours, and is never provoked by the practitioner. The model for this type of containment and support is that of a parent who holds an over tired, over stimulated or frightened toddler to calm him.

The reasons for containing a child are:

- To keep the child and the practitioner or parent safe
- To communicate to the child that the practitioner and his parents can protect him from aggressive and self-injurious impulses
- To let the child know that the practitioner /parent can accept and assist him with strong emotions
- To control the situation until the child is able to regain self control

Parents are given a written explanation of our Developmental Movement Play and THERAPLAY programmes and how we approach the use of safe touch and promote rough and tumble type play and sign consent for their children to participate.

The Head Teacher ensures the physical touch and holding policy is implemented at the Centre.

This policy should be read in line with our Single Equalities, Nappy changing, Intimate care, supporting behaviour and Child protection policies and with our policy, dealing with allegations of abuse against a person in a position of trust.

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Legislation:

Use of Reasonable force DFE 2015

Guidance

Keeping staff and Children Safe SCC 2016

Complaints about the use of reasonable force

These are investigated in line with our complaints policy and Supporting Behaviour Policy