

Touch, Physical Contact and Personal and Intimate Care Policy

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Developed by: Head of Residential Care

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**Southfields
Multi-Academy
TRUST**



**Southfields
Academy**



**Linden Lodge
School**

A Specialist Sensory & Physical College

Touch and Physical Contact

Touch and physical contact are essential at Linden Lodge in order to provide sensitive, high quality care and individual educational support. Used in context and with empathy, touch supports the development of natural interactions with the pupils we teach and care for.

We acknowledge the importance of ensuring that this touch and physical contact is safe, welcomed and used to enhance opportunities and relationships for our pupils.

As our pupils have visual impairment, multi disabled visual impairment, dual sensory impairment or have profound learning difficulties, touch and physical contact play an essential role in the day to day life at Linden Lodge.

Some of our pupils are tactile-defensive so this has to be taken into account when touch or physical contact needs to take place.

This policy sets out the reasons for physical contact between staff and pupils, and between pupils, and provides guidance for use in such situations.

Purpose of touch and physical contact at Linden Lodge School

The main reasons for touch and physical contact at Linden Lodge are:

- To provide a sighted guide to visually impaired pupils
- To carry out personal and intimate care
- To provide support with self-care routines such as toileting or washing
- To give medical and nursing care
- To provide physical support to those who have physical difficulties
 - Transfers in and out of wheelchairs
 - Transfers into specialist seating and standing equipment
 - Transfers to and from hoists
- To provide a physical cue, alongside a verbal cue for pupils to anticipate or to be aware of what is going to happen

However, touch and physical contact may also be used for a number of other reasons, including:

Communication

- Placing a hand on someone's shoulder, arm or hand when speaking to them
- Greeting someone e.g. shaking hands or touching their hand to announce a person's presence and proximity
- Supporting early communication (e.g. sensitively directing, guiding, supporting children in an educational task)

Learning

- To assist, prompt and enable interactions with peers and staff
- To support engagement with resources and classroom activities
- To offer physical support with an activity during teaching a skill, e.g. hand over hand cutting, playing a musical instrument
- To offer physical support to access a lesson e.g. art & craft
- To support physical activity during PE
- To assist use of the trampoline
- Within the swimming/hydrotherapy pool

Transitioning

Offering a hand or arm to guide or prompt a pupil during changes between activities / environments.

Playing

Many play activities naturally involve touch or physical contact.

Therapy

- Massage Therapy
- Sensory stimulation
- Physiotherapy
- Occupational therapy
- Rebound therapy
- Dance Movement therapy
- Intensive Interaction

Emotional support

- To communicate affection and warmth
- To give reassurance
- To comfort a pupil in distress

Reducing the risk of harm

- To protect pupils from danger by physically intervening (see our Positive Behaviour policy regarding the use of holding skills) when physical intervention is warranted to manage risk behaviours
- To avert danger to the pupil or pupils in an emergency situation

Early Years and Foundation Stage (EYFS)

Pupils working within the Early Years and Foundation Stage are by definition much younger than pupils elsewhere in the school. Children can be as young as two years of age when starting at Linden Lodge. Many have impaired development of emotional and physical skills and abilities. Pupils are encouraged to develop meaningful relationships with the members of staff that they work with on a daily basis. This often involves physical contact. Many statements from the Personal, Social and Emotional Development area of the EYFS framework explain how very young pupils need consistent physical contact and reassurance from a familiar adult.

Personal and Intimate Care

On a day to day basis, members of staff will, at times, work with pupils of the opposite sex, this is accepted as good care practice. Linden Lodge's policy dictates that in these circumstances the staff will fulfil their duties with respect for the pupil, regardless of the gender or disability of either party.

It is however, acknowledged that male members of staff are not authorised to deal with personal hygiene issues in relation to female pupils.

If invasive medication needs to be given e.g rectal diazepam, to a female pupil, wherever possible this should be administered by a trained female member of staff. This needs to be taken into consideration when organising trips out. If no female is available a senior member of staff must be contacted for further direction.

Personal Care

Personal care covers a variety of forms of support for a pupil including:

- Eating or drinking (including all forms of tube feeding)
- Toileting (including in relation to the process of menstruation)
- Washing or bathing
- Dressing or undressing
- Oral care
- Care of skin or hair
- Administering medication e.g. injections, topical creams such as sun cream
- Care of a tracheostomy

In providing any form of personal care, staff must be aware of the fact that they will be in close personal contact with the pupil and they should determine in advance how the pupil may feel about this. Staff need to be aware of their own body position and whether the pupil may show signs of being uncomfortable about their proximity.

It is inevitable in the undertaking of personal care that some form of contact will be made, which each pupil will experience differently and not always consistently (depending on their mood etc.). Staff must learn how individuals feel about the personal care they are receiving from them at any time and must show the pupils respect and dignity at all times. Staff should be prepared to take into account any cultural factors that might affect individual pupils.

Intimate care

We recognize that some adults have been known to use intimate care as an opportunity to abuse children, with physical contact sometimes part of a process of 'grooming'. It is also well established that, for a number of reasons, disabled children are at particular risk of significant harm or abuse. Through its policies and procedures, Linden Lodge will always seek to present a hostile environment for potential abusers and all staff will, therefore, need to bear in mind that the practice of intimate care and physical contact could be open to misinterpretation if our procedures are not followed.

Pupils who require help with intimate personal care that could include pad changing, dressing, washing, bathing etc. are probably most at risk of inappropriate touching and physical contact. Staff are also put at risk of accusations and allegations made against them whilst carrying out such tasks and we have a duty of care to protect them as well from false allegations or misunderstandings that might arise.

Therefore we encourage pupils to do as much for themselves as possible in respect of any aspect of intimate personal care as part of their personal and social development, and for staff to carry out these tasks only when the pupil is clearly unable to do so.

It is **never** appropriate for staff to touch a pupil's intimate body areas except as part of personal or medical care. It is not appropriate for staff to kiss pupils and pupils must be discouraged from kissing staff.

Guidelines for staff

Staff need to be clear and open about why they are using touch and be able to explain their practice. There must be clarity and transparency in issues of touch and physical contact. The use of touch should be discussed openly between staff. People of any age can want and need physical support and touch. Staff may be concerned about the issue of age appropriateness. However, the developmental age and emotional and communication needs of the individual are far more important than actual age. While gender and cultural factors have relevance in issues of touch, the emotional and communication needs of the individual are due equal consideration.

As far as possible, consent to any touch should be sought in advance from the pupil involved and staff should be sensitive to any verbal or non-verbal communication the pupil gives that might indicate that they do not want to be touched. Staff need to bear in mind that for touch to provide positive experiences it must be consensual. Staff should be sensitive to any changes in the pupil's behaviour (e.g. overexcitement or negative reactions) that might indicate the need to reduce or withdraw touch; particularly from those pupils who are nonverbal.

The pupils we support need to be given opportunities to touch each other in an appropriate way while interacting and playing, as would happen naturally for any child or young person. However, staff need to ensure that both parties are happy with this.

Staff must be aware of potential hazards in respect of sexual issues:

- Staff must be sensitive to the danger of touch being misinterpreted and triggering sexual arousal, and they must therefore be alert to all feedback signals from the pupil they are working with.
- Due to their visual impairment the pupils we support may occasionally inadvertently touch intimate parts of a member of staff's body when there is no sexual intent or understanding. The member of staff should withdraw without giving significant negative feedback in such a situation and the incident should be recorded and reported to a senior member of staff.

- If staff are in any doubt about issues concerning appropriate touch or physical contact or observe any practice that causes concern they should discuss this with the Designated Members of Staff for child protection.
- The best way to protect both staff and pupils is to ensure that all forms of touch and physical contact are open to the scrutiny and observation of others. However, we acknowledge that there will be times when carrying out various activities that staff will be working 1:1 with pupils, and staff need to be aware of the potential risks that such situations will present.

At Linden Lodge our clear message to staff is that as far as possible all appropriate touch and physical contact should be in clear view and with other adults present wherever possible.

If the touch or physical contact involves personal care two members of staff should be present wherever possible