



# **Appropriate Physical Contact with Children Including Restraint and Intimate Care Policy**

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## Physical touch as a communication

At The London Acorn School, we hope children feel valued and cared for at all times. Physical touch can be a way of communicating empathetically, and during the normal course of working with children, physical contact is to be expected, but staff must be aware that:

- **Children may respond to touch in different ways**

We cannot assume that a child will understand a touch that is intended as a friendly gesture. Children in our care may have backgrounds where there has been inappropriate physical contact or even abuse. These children will be confused about adult-child contact and may experience it as intrusive. This can have consequences for the child and for any staff member where a touch, meant as a caring gesture, is reported as inappropriate.

- **Abusers can use caring touch to disguise their behaviour.**

In line with our child protection policies at The London Acorn School, we maintain the attitude that child abuse is not only a problem for other institutions, but “it could happen here”. Our policies on physical contact with children must take into account the need to protect children from the possibility of abuse by carers.

Staff should be role models as children learn to understand the appropriateness of physical contact in different situations.

It is often appropriate for children to be given some physical contact and comfort, but this must always be offered with the following caution:

- Ensure there are other adults around and staff should be prepared to be accountable to them
- Do not show favour to individual children.
- The area between a child’s waist and mid-thigh or near the chest should not be touched in normal circumstances
- Where a child tries to become physically closer than appropriate, it is important they do not feel rejected, but are gently guided to a more appropriate behaviour by a positive suggestion.
- Cuddles should be short and side by side.
- Never kiss a child, and do not encourage children to kiss adults other than their parents.
- A school-age child should only sit on an adult’s knee for a short time and for a specific reason such as following an injury, and not too close to the body.
- For younger children in Kindergarten, there is a greater need for a more nurturing environment where it may be more appropriate for closer physical contact during some activities. The above cautions still apply, except that sitting on a knee, or longer cuddles may be more acceptable.
- Where children require help with changing or toileting, the dignity of the child must be respected. Great care must be taken to ensure that all physical contact is specifically and only for the purpose of the operation being carried out.
- Wherever a member of staff feels uncomfortable about the way in which a child or staff member is using or abusing physical contact, even if this concern is small or uncertain, this must be immediately discussed with a member of the safeguarding team.
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## **Physical touch and intimate care**

Intimate care means helping children perform personal tasks, especially those to do with “private” areas of their bodies. This may include assisting with the toilet or nappies, dressing, showering etc.

The following are the fundamental principles upon which the Policy and Guidelines are based:

- Every child has the right to be safe.
- Every child has the right to personal privacy.
- Every child has the right to be valued as an individual.
- Every child has the right to be treated with dignity and respect.
- Every child has the right to be involved and consulted in their own intimate care to the best of their abilities.
- Every child has the right to express their views on their own intimate care and to have such views taken into account.
- Every child has the right to have levels of intimate care that are as consistent as possible.

Only named and fully employed staff at the school should undertake the intimate care of children.

All staff undertaking the intimate care of children should be familiar with this Touch and Intimate Care Policy, together with associated policy such as The London Acorn School First Aid Policy and Safeguarding Policy.

All staff must be trained in the specific types of intimate care that they carry out and understand this guidance within the context of their work.

Intimate care arrangements should be agreed by the parents and child in advance where possible. However, in childcare, unexpected accidents happen, for example when a normally toilet trained child soils him/ herself unexpectedly. Staff have a duty of care towards children which means a child-centred, pragmatic approach should be taken.

If regular intimate care is required, this should be discussed verbally with the parent (and child if appropriate) and a plan should be documented, stored securely in the office and reviewed at least every six months. In Kindergarten this may mean identifying that a child needs toileting help initially but six months later this may no longer be the case.

The child should be involved in their intimate care and staff should encourage a child's independence as far as possible.

Every child should be treated with dignity and respect. Privacy appropriate to the child's age and situation is important, for example ensuring older children are not disturbed whilst changing from sports lessons, and younger children have a quiet area for nappy changes.

Staff should perform care activities they understand and feel competent and confident to carry out, and should feel encouraged to ask for further training were needed.

Staff should be mindful of the earlier aspects of this guidance- that some children may experience even well intentioned intimate care as intrusive, and that abusive individuals could use intimate care as an opportunity for abuse. Staff should ensure their practice reflects this awareness, where possible aiming to be “beyond reproach”. An example of this is standing

outside the toilet cubicle and providing verbal guidance whilst an older child cleans themselves, instead of entering the cubicle to perform the care themselves.

The approach staff take to intimate care can convey lots of messages to a child about their body and self-esteem. This can be an important opportunity to communicate about the child’s right to consent/ withhold consent and to expect privacy.

## **Restraint: Emergency Procedures for Physical Intervention**

Physical contact can keep children safe. Teachers have a ‘duty of care’ to all pupils and must act if pupil is becoming a danger to himself or others- in rare, exceptional cases, this may involve restraining a child. Physical Restraint is defined as the “positive application of force with the intention of overpowering the child”.

Restraint is always a last resort. The first line of approach is verbal, using a variety of techniques, according to the development of the child, to deescalate, distract and instruct. Where these approaches are unsuccessful, there may be the need to intervene physically to prevent someone putting themselves or others in danger.

For example

- A child running into the road
- A child about to hurt someone else

The intervention must use minimal, proportionate force: only enough to stop the incident and for the minimal possible time. The child must first be made aware of what is going to happen if the situation does not stop and explanations should continue during the restraint.

Examples could be:

- Blocking a pupil’s path from stepping into a road
- Holding, pushing or pulling away from assaulting another pupil
- Leading by the arm away from a dangerous situation
- Guiding pupil away from danger with the teacher’s hand in centre of the back

### **Restraint and the law**

Legislation that came into force in September 1998 (section 550 of the Education Act 1996) together with national guidance (DfEE Circular 10/98) establishes the powers of teachers to use reasonable force in order to prevent children they are responsible for committing a crime, causing injury or damage, or causing disruption.



If at all possible, a second adult should be called. This is to serve 2 functions:

- a second adult may be able to reduce risk.
- another adult may serve as witness.

School staff must avoid any threat or act of punitive violence.

The school is reminded that violent behaviour is a criminal act. In the unlikely event that a child is out of control and needs restraining physically, or where a child is not obeying a lawful instruction, the police may be called

Restraining a child must be an extremely rare, unavoidable, exceptional circumstance, and reported fully in writing to the headteacher at the first opportunity (certainly on the same day).

The parents of any child who has been restrained should be informed immediately, before the child returns home.

The school will ensure that all staff are familiar with the school's policy on physical restraint and will ensure all staff act within it.

In revising this policy, The London Acorn School has been mindful of legislation and guidance including:

The Education Act 2002, including section 175

The Equality Act 2010

UN Convention on the Rights of the Child

The Children Act 2000