

Guidelines to promote a safeguarding approach to positive physical contact with learners with profound and complex needs.

These guidelines are intended to support staff in their roles working with learners with profound and complex needs at Leicester College and to protect learners within a safeguarding context.

This includes:

- The context and importance of positive physical contact (also called touch)
- A Statement of Intent (The purpose of positive physical contact)
- Guidelines for Staff
- How to work collaboratively to ensure a person centred approach.

The context and importance of positive physical contact.

For learners who have profound and complex needs who are at the earliest stages of development the use of touch is recognised as a fundamental communication tool.

The use of touch to communicate positive messages between humans is well researched and shows how a lack of touch, particularly at the early stages of development can have negative effects on all aspects of a person's physical and emotional well being.

Physical contact with other people is a natural aspect of living and enables people to share emotions and pass messages to each other about care, respect and enjoyment of being with another person. Learning about giving and receiving physical contact is a vital part of learning for life.

The Learning for Living Programme aims for learners to develop social relationships, communication, citizenship and self-determination.

Positive physical contact supports learning strategies as it encourages and stimulates interaction, developing the skills necessary to understand intentional communication. Learning through touch and about positive touch is part of everyday living and therefore it is absolutely appropriate it is discussed within the curriculum and viewed as an opportunity for learning.

For learners who find physical contact challenging and themselves use physical touch that challenges others, the withdrawal of physical contact will not improve their understanding or learning. Appropriate touch can only be learnt when there are examples of positive touch to follow.

For learners who also have sensory impairments the use of touch is essential to enable them to understand their environment and activities. Body signing is an example of an acceptable method of developing communication skills.

For learners for whom non-verbal communication strategies are the only strategies available the use of physical contact to communicate becomes one of the most important strategies to develop and promote positively.

People with profound and complex needs may rely on caregivers to meet their basic human needs such as eating, drinking and going to the toilet. They may be used to touch that has a functional purpose. It is important that people also experience touch that is focused on their social, emotional and educational needs.

Developing a person centred approach supports knowing the individual well and what is important 'to' them. This understanding is vital to developing use of touch with individual learners and responding to the individual's needs.

Our learners are from a wide diversity of cultures, faith groups and ethnicities. It is recognised that within these communities the use of touch-particularly with regard to gender, has important meanings. We will always seek to ensure learners' receive appropriate care and treatment with regard to their faith and culture and we will work with families and carers to develop our understanding and practices around positive physical contact in this regard.

If positive physical contact, usually in the form of touch, is recognised as having a vital role in an individual's development then strategies to use touch must be balanced with guidelines that safeguard learners and staff.

Safeguarding learner's needs is central to our work. If we recognise physical contact as important educationally, emotionally, socially and physically we must also recognise the need to keep learners and staff safe from inappropriate or unwanted touch and provide an open, honest environment where everyone can discuss issues around physical contact.

People with learning difficulties have been the subject of abuse-both intentional and non-intentional. The best way to prevent abuse and promote safeguarding is through transparency and openness in all situations. Opportunities for communication between staff and families and carers alongside multi-disciplinary partners is crucial to the promotion of a person centred curriculum and the aims of the Learning for Living Programmes at the Frith Outreach Centre.

A Statement of Intent (The purpose of positive physical contact):

This list demonstrates the ways in which positive physical contact may take place, but will not be exhaustive.

To develop learner's communication in an educational context

- Demonstrate acknowledgment of a person, greetings and goodbyes.
- To encourage interaction and extend the fundamentals of communication
- Reciprocate touch to show you have 'heard' someone.
- To give reassurance and emotional support
- To prompt an action or support continuing an action
- To initiate an activity e.g. using hand over hand.
- Massage for therapeutic and educational purposes.
- Encouraging the acceptance of touch, particularly for people who are tactile defensive.
- To explore tactile resources which stimulate interest and interaction.
- To show you are having fun together-a pre-requisite of good learning.
- To communicate a mutual enjoyment of another person's company, an appreciation of their personality and the gifts of their personality that they bring to college.
- *As part of an intensive interaction session.

To meet learner's care needs:

- To provide medication.
- To assist in eating and drinking.
- To assist in personal care needs, including: going to the toilet, washing hands or face, brushing hair.
- To support mobility.
- To support a learner out of their wheelchair for positive positioning and back to their wheelchair.
- To support a learner whilst out of their wheelchair, following a physiotherapy plan.
- To prevent dangerous situations to the learner or to others.

*The use of Intensive Interaction as an approach to build relationships and develop communication may involve the use of physical contact that can appear as unusual and therefore it is important college staff, (on site and wider team), parents, carers, and multi-disciplinary team are supported to understand the purpose of intensive interaction strategies. These will be recorded on learners' Individual Learning Plans and shared with parents and carers in Person Centred Learning Reviews.

Staff may not use physical contact to:

- Exploit or force a learner to do something.
- Touch genital areas unless necessary whilst providing personal care.
- Satisfy the staff member or the needs of the organisation above the needs of the learner.
- Engage in sexual contact or encourage sexualised behaviour.
- Punish or reprimand.
- Make jokes at the learner's expense, to humiliate or force affection.

All of the above examples constitute abuse-if it is intentional or not and will be investigated by the College Safeguarding Team.

'Learning for Living' Guidelines on the use of positive physical contact:

Follow College Policy and Procedure.

- Staff will follow the Leicester College's Safeguarding Children and Vulnerable Adults Policy at all times. This includes the reporting of any concerns and liaison with the wider college Safeguarding Team.
- College will provide an environment where physical contact with learners is discussed openly and honestly. Any staff queries will be dealt with promptly and documented as a record that discussion has taken place.
- Staff will follow Classroom Management procedures where if, for any reason, a staff member is alone with a learner the door will be kept open. If this presents a risk to staff or learner this must be discussed and the reasons documented.
- There may be some specific uses of touch which are in place to support a learner to protect their safety or that of others. This must be documented in positive behaviour plans and risk assessments and only staff trained in these forms of touch may use them. They must always be recorded and lead to a discussion around the prevention of triggers and escalation using a Strategies for Crisis Prevention (SCIP) approach.

Understand the learner and how they give consent

- The learner should always give consent to the type of physical contact they receive. Staff may have to interpret how a learner who does not use verbal communication gives consent. The understanding of this should come from information collated during transition and through regular discussions with staff and parents and carers.
- If in doubt about consent issues discuss your views with your Line Manager.
- College will discuss physical contact with families and carers to ensure the learner's voice is represented in any decisions made regarding touch.
- All staff will be clear why and how touch is being used with any learner. This comes from understanding the individual learner's needs through reading information which explains these in a person centred context e.g. One Page Profiles, Transition Passports, Positive Behaviour Plans.

- Staff will be sensitive to the verbal and non verbal communication of learners when assessing if touch is consensual. There may be exceptions when physical contact is not wanted by the learner but is necessary for their protection or that of others. This physical contact should be documented in risk assessments, daily programmes, multi-disciplinary care plans and one page profiles. It should always be reported and discussed by staff to ensure abuse is not taking place or staff are being put at risk of allegations.

Know why you are using touch with an individual

- Take responsibility to record the learner's preferred physical contact and use of touch to communicate
- Read learner's supporting documents and clarify any questions you have about the kind of physical contact you think you should be having.
- Understand why the use of touch is important to our learner's education and well-being.

Work as a team to protect learners and staff

- Staff will work as a team to regularly assess and review positive physical contact for any learner and its implications for members of staff working with the learner.
- If you have any concerns over the use of touch report them immediately to the Programme Area Manager or to another member of the College Safeguarding Team.
- The use of positive physical contact must be balanced with a sensitivity to learners who may become sexually aroused by certain types of touch. Staff will avoid any touch to chest and genital areas of the body-regardless of gender-unless absolutely necessary e.g. permitted when involved in personal, intimate care where staff must maintain the dignity of the learner as paramount.
- During intensive interaction staff and learners may be involved in reciprocal touch which is consensual. The development of this should be recorded and discussed by those working with the learner in the session and led by the Lecturer with responsibility for that lesson or by the Course Team Leader responsible for the learner. Issues of concern must be taken to the Programme Area Manager for discussion.

The use of physical contact should be discussed openly-there is no 'hidden' curriculum

- It is acknowledged that staff will have a range of emotional responses to physical contact with learners, dependent on culture, gender, age, ethnicity and faith. Staff must not be placed in situations where they feel unable to support learners because they do not understand why physical contact is being encouraged or feel uncomfortable in carrying them out. Staff should feel they can discuss these issues openly and with their Line Manager to resolve difficulties as soon as possible. Staff are not expected to have physical contact that they are uncomfortable with-this would negate any positive benefits that touch brings as positive touch must be mutually consensual.

- Ways to support learners through positive physical contact should be documented and regularly reviewed by staff, including but not only at Person Centred Learning Reviews.

Ensure physical contact is not only for functional purposes

- Many of our learners receive touch for functional purposes such as personal care and assistance with eating and drinking. These forms of touch should be sensitive to individual need and follow any available plans and guidelines for the individual.
- Learners will also learn about communication through these forms of touch and so it is important opportunities for interaction are maximised throughout the day. Giving medication or PEG feeding can be excellent opportunities for supportive and positive touch.

Potential Risks:

The use of positive physical contact may give rise to sexual arousal in a learner, although this is not intentional. This may be because the learner is experiencing the physical and psychological changes in puberty or have not developed their understanding of sexualised behaviour. In this case it will be necessary to review how physical contact is used by staff to reduce this risk and promote the learner's understanding of their behaviour so they may have greater control over their own emotional responses.

If a learner touches a member of staff in an *intimate place or in a way that makes the staff member feel uncomfortable-but the learner has no intention or understanding that this causes discomfort-staff may need to withdraw from physical contact but not seek to reprimand the learner as this may encourage more of this behaviour through the negative response. If this behaviour continues it will need to be discussed and strategies developed to support alternative behaviour through the use of a Positive Behaviour Support Plan. Staff will always be supported if they feel they have been touched by a learner in a way either intentionally or non-intentionally that is uncomfortable for them.

Staff are not expected to tolerate forms of touch they are uncomfortable with but do need to develop their understanding that some learners with profound and complex needs will not have the cognitive understanding to deliberately cause pain or social embarrassment. Learners may have learnt behaviour, over time, which has always produced a response that is stimulating to them. Understanding the learner's individual learning needs and the social and cultural meanings of touch will enable staff to develop a greater understanding of their learner's needs.

*Intimate area describes areas of body on torso-chest and genital areas. It may also include other areas of the body e.g. head, where for cultural and/or faith reasons, this is also viewed as an intimate area of the body.

How to work collaboratively to ensure a person centred approach.

At the heart of ensuring staff and learners are safeguarded around physical contact is the need to communicate as a team, share information and respond to different perspectives with respect and understanding.

Hearing the learner voice is essential to understanding how learners prefer to communicate physically and to receive positive physical contact. Staff training which encourages understanding of how learning takes place for people with profound and complex needs is central to developing this understanding.

As part of a mainstream further education college staff at the Frith Outreach Site have a responsibility to share their knowledge with wider college staff to ensure practices around positive physical contact are not misunderstood and to promote opportunities for inclusive learning.

Recognising the value of positive physical contact in our learners' lives and harnessing it to promote the fundamentals of communication through a person centred curriculum is key to learners' achievement and success.

This document intends to give staff the protection to undertake their responsibilities with confidence and to ensure learners are safeguarded within a learning environment.

Documents to support evidence based practice and understanding of the importance of positive physical contact with people with profound and complex needs:

This document has been developed from:

- Specimen Policy on Touch from www.intensiveinteraction.com.
- St. Piers School Physical Contact Policy. from www.intensiveinteraction.com
- Policy on the use of Touch with Vine Learners-from www.lsis.org.uk
- Discussions with the Frith Staff Team.

Additional Reading:

Dobson, S. Upadhyaya, S. Conyers I and Raghavan R. (2002) Touch in the care of people with profound and complex needs-a review of the literature. *Journal of Learning Disabilities*, 6 (4) pp.351-362.

Hewett, D. (2007) Do Touch: physical contact and people who have severe, profound and multiple learning difficulties. *Support for Learning*, 22(3) pp. 116-123.

Montague, A. (1986) *Touching: the Human Significance of the Skin*. New York, Harper and Rowe.

Nind, M. And Hewett, D. (2005) *Access to Communication; developing the basics of communication with people with severe learning difficulties through Intensive Interaction* (2nd edn.) London: David Fulton.