



## **Positive Handling Policy- Including the Use of Physical Intervention and Use of Reasonable Force**

**October 2025**

There are circumstances when it is appropriate for staff in school to use positive handling including the use of physical intervention to safeguard all children and young people. The term 'reasonable force' covers the broad range of actions used by staff that involves a degree of physical contact to keep a child safe from harming themselves or others. This is the only time physical intervention should be used. This can range from guiding a child to safety by the arm to leave a situation for support or to extremes such as breaking up a fight. 'Reasonable' in these circumstances means 'using no more force than is needed' and for no longer than the required period of time to quickly deescalate a situation. The use of force may involve either passive physical contact, such as standing between pupils or blocking a pupil's path, or active physical contact such as leading a pupil by the arm out of the classroom. Departmental advice for schools is available at:

<https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/use-of-reasonable-force-in-schools>

<https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/reducing-the-need-for-restraint-and-restrictive-intervention>

The school does not have a 'no contact' policy as this could lead to our staff being unable to fully support and protect pupils. The decision on whether or not to use reasonable force to support or restrain a child is down to the professional judgement of the staff concerned and should always depend on individual circumstances. Anytime physical intervention has been required, a full debrief and written record of the situation will be recorded on our online safeguarding system and shared with the pupil, parents and necessary staff for accuracy and checking.

When using reasonable force involving children with SEN or disabilities, or with medical conditions, staff should consider the risks carefully, recognising the additional vulnerability of these groups. A risk assessment or support plan may need to be put in place if one is not already.

Consideration needs to be given to the school's duties under the Equality Act 2010 with respect of reasonable adjustments.

### **Different Types of Touch**

There are four different types of touch and physical contact that may be used, these are:

1. Casual / informal / incidental touch- Staff use touch with pupils as part of a normal relationship, for example comforting a child, giving reassurance and congratulating. This might include putting an arm out to guide a child, taking a child by the hand if the child offers it to them, patting on the back or putting an arm around the shoulders if they are seeking reassurance. The benefit of this action is often proactive and can prevent a situation from escalating.

2. General reparative touch- This is used by staff working with children who are having difficulties with their emotions. Healthy emotional development requires safe touch as a means of calming, soothing and containing distress for a frightened, angry or sad child. Touch used to regulate a child's emotions triggers the release of the calming chemical oxytocin in the body. Reparative touch may include stroking a back or gentle pressure on a child's shoulders. If this is what they identify works for them, it will be noted in either their OPP or their 5 point scale of support.

3. Contact/interactive- Contact play is used by staff adopting a role similar to a parent in a healthy child-parent relationship. This will only take place when the child has developed a trusting relationship with the adult and when they feel completely comfortable and at ease with this type of contact. Contact play may include an adult chasing and catching the child or an adult and child playing a game of building towers with their hands. This sort of play releases the following chemicals in the brain:

- Opioids – to calm and soothe and give comfort;
- Dopamine – to focus, be alert and concentrate;
- BDNF (Brain Derived Neurotrophic Factor) – a brain 'fertiliser' that encourages growth.

4. Positive handling including use of physical intervention (calming a dysregulated child)- Legal framework and national guidance refers to the 'use of reasonable force' with the intention of protecting pupils and limiting damage to property. National guidance states that reasonable force may be used in the school to:

- Support a pupil who has lost emotional self-control until the situation is diffused.
- Limit the amount of harm that the pupil involved can do to themselves or others.
- Demonstrate to pupils that they are within a safe environment in which adults can contain pupils' anger and other erratic emotions.
- Protect all pupils against any form of physical intervention which is unnecessary, inappropriate, excessive or harmful.

We interpret this in our school through the use of 'positive handling'- the positive application of reasonable force to protect and calm a dysregulated child.

Positive handling will be used only as a measure of last resort and applied using a calm and measured approach.

The relevant considerations which must be taken into account:

- The degree of force must be proportionate to the circumstances and incident, and seriousness of the event (or the consequences it is intended to prevent).
- It should always be the minimum needed to achieve the desired result.
- Use of force is only reasonable if particular circumstances warrant it, otherwise it is unlawful; it therefore follows that it should not be used for situations that can be resolved without it, or for trivial misdemeanours. All use must be necessary.
- Positive handling must not be used to make a child comply with instructions unless it is of a safety concern as listed with the key points in paragraph 1.
- A child who is in a state of dysregulation and has no mechanism for self calming will be given a safe space to help re-regulate. Staff will employ the safest and gentlest means of holding a child, which is entirely designed to enable the child to feel safe and soothed, bringing them down from an uncontrollable state of hyperarousal.

During any incident of physical holding intervention, staff must seek as far as possible to:

- lower the child's level of anxiety during the restraint by continually offering verbal reassurance and avoiding generating fear of injury in the child;
- cause the minimum level of restriction of movement of limbs consistent with the danger of injury (so, for example, will not restrict the movement of the child's legs when they are on the ground unless in an enclosed space where flailing legs are likely to be injured);
- ensure at least one other member of staff is present.

### **Steps to take before positive handling**

If the school is aware that a pupil is likely to need support, it should plan in advance how to respond. Proactive and not-reactive practice and support is encouraged.

This will be done using the school Individual Behaviour Plans, One Page Profiles or 5 point scales. Consideration should be given to:

- managing the pupil. Use reactive strategies to de-escalate an event.
- involving parents so that they are fully aware of how the school may have to react.
- briefing staff, ensuring that everyone knows what action should be taken.
- ensuring that additional support can be summoned if appropriate.

- the need to take specific advice about the safest way to hold pupils with specific health needs (particularly SEND) .

Prevention strategies and calming measures which will be employed and the following action should be taken, as much as possible, before a restraint is used;

- conversation, distraction, coaxing skills, gentle persuasion or redirection to other activities (e.g. touching the child's arm and leading him/her away from danger, gently stroking the child's shoulder).

- encouraging the pupil to help him/herself feel more secure by wrapping a blanket tightly around him/herself or holding on tightly to a large cushion or stuffed toy.

- put distance between the child and others - move others to a safer place.

- calmly remove anything that could be used as a weapon, including hot drinks, objects, furniture.

- to prevent a child continuing to pose harm in a dangerous situation, advise others to leave but 2 staff will remain with the child where possible.

- keep talking calmly to the child, explain what is happening and why, how it can stop, and what will happen next.

- use first aid procedures in the event of injury or physical distress when safe to do so.

- adults in charge should take a calm, measured approach to a situation, and never give the impression that they have lost their temper, or are acting out of anger, frustration, or to punish a pupil. As a school we recognise that all behaviour is a form of communication and it is not personal. If a member of staff's response has become emotionally charged then a "change of face" strategy should be initiated either by themselves or another member of staff in attendance.

Next review: Autumn 2026