LEDA
EDUCATION SUPPORT CENTRE
EVERY CHILD, EVERY OPPORTUNITY

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TOUCH POLICY



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Rationale:

Touch is essential to provide sensitive and good quality education and care for the students whom we support. Used in context, and with empathy, touch supports the development of the students we educate and care for daily. This policy clarifies the reasons and conditions for touch. This school-based policy is consistent with the Student Behaviour Policy 2023, Student Health Policy 2023, Protective Education practices, National Quality Standards & Early Years Learning Framework. Staff often have concerns and fears about the use of touch for various reasons. This document identifies professional boundaries for all who work with students at Leda ESC and how they are to be maintained and documented.

Purposes:

Touch is important and may be used routinely for any of the following:
•Communication
•Educational reasons
•Emotional regulation
•Medical care
•Personal care and hygiene support
•Play
•Protection/Safety
•Therapy

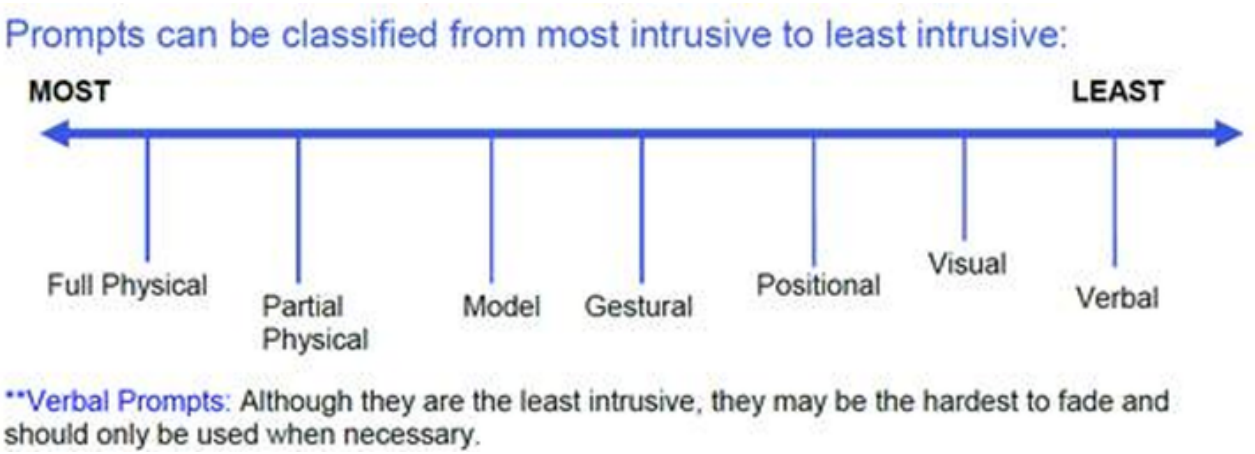
Communication

Appropriate touch can be used to reinforce other communication (e.g., hand on shoulder when speaking) or to function as the main form of communication itself. In addition, touch can be used to respond nonverbally or, to the student's own use of physical contact for communication and to make social connections. This is particularly likely to occur during daily greetings (hand-shakes, high fives etc.).

Educational reasons

Appropriate touch can be used to direct children in educational tasks and essential skills, including such things as hand-over-hand support or as a support or guidance, for example, during transitions between activities, supporting hand washing/hygiene/use of utensils and applicances and during swimming or P.E. sessions.

Prompts are used to support the education outcomes of students. Below is the hierarchy of prompting used in the school context. At all times the focus to use and reduce prompting to the least intrusive.



Emotional Regulation

Appropriate touch can be used to give reassurance and to communicate security and comfort. In the early years this may look like a child being comforted by a staff member through a hug, it does not look like picking a child up or children sitting on staff members laps, whereas in the senior years this may look like a 'sideways hug'.

Emotional regulation can also be facilitated using deep pressure, squeezes, massage etc. limiting touch to the area from the shoulder to the hand, the head and below the knee to the feet, when indicated through sensory profiling.

Medical Care

Touch is needed to apply first aid in situations where students are injured and when identified, to provide personal care to students e.g., toileting, dressing/undressing, and mealtime management as well as support with personal hygiene routines.

Physical Support

Touch may be necessary to provide physical support for mobility and positioning to students who have physical disabilities (e.g., transfers in and out of wheelchairs). Also, to guide students as required between places, rooms, or activities using Team Teach guides and prompts or securing students for safe transportation when they cannot do this themselves.

Play

Play activities naturally include touch. People of any age who are at early levels of development are likely to be quite tactile and physical.

Protection

To protect students and staff from danger by physically intervening and managing challenging behaviours including the use of Team Teach physical interventions/restraint, while following the recognised guidelines and policies of the school. These are only to be used as a last resort and when they are, be in the best interest of the student and be reasonable, proportionate, and necessary. It is preferable that staff applying any positive handling are those who have training in Team Teach techniques, however, we recognise that this is not always possible in certain circumstances. Following the use of physical interventions/restraint, Use of Physical Intervention Form and the incident must be documented on Compass.

Therapy

Such touch may include programs from therapists delivered by our staff, or the therapist themselves which involve massage, sensory stimulation and physiotherapy.

Guidelines:

•Staff need to be clear and open about why they are using touch and be able to explain their practice.
•The needs of the student are paramount when determining the use of touch in their learning and care programmes. Where possible, students need to be aware of the difference between professional and personal touch. Staff must model and, if possible, teach protective practices in their use of touch.
•There must be clarity and transparency in issues of physical intervention. A description and rationale for physical intervention and the details of it (Consent Form for Physical Intervention) will be documented and included in the student's Positive Behaviour Support Plan or Escalation Profile, in collaboration with parents and other relevant stakeholders.
•Students of any age can want and need physical support/touch. When considering the issue of age-appropriateness; it is important to remember that the developmental age, emotional and communication needs of the individual are far more relevant than actual age.
•As far as possible, the student involved should consent to any touch given and staff should be sensitive to any verbal and non-verbal communication that might indicate that they don't want to be touched.
•Staff should be sensitive to any changes in the student's behaviour such as over-excitement or negative reactions that might indicate the need to reduce or withdraw touch; particularly during play.

Conclusion

At Leda ESC touch is necessary as part of the development, emotional wellbeing, care, education, and quality of life for the students we support. This policy outlines when this may be needed and gives staff the direction and assurity for this to occur positively and productively, while still protecting and providing for the students in our care.