

Mackay District Special School

Touch Policy

Rationale:

Touch is essential in order to provide sensitive and good quality care for the children and young people we support at Mackay District Special School. Used in context, and with empathy, touch supports the development, emotional well-being, care, education and quality of life of the people supported at Mackay District Special School.

This policy outlines when this may be needed and gives staff the direction and security for this to occur positively and productively, while still protecting the people in our care.

Belief Statement:

Everyone has the right to feel safe at school.

At Mackay District Special School there are times when school staff need to touch and handle students in teaching/learning experiences; to assist with mobility, health/hygiene and self-care; to provide emotional support and to intervene in dangerous situations.

At times students will be appropriately touching other students in play, in assisting with mobility, in greeting each other and in teaching/learning experiences.

Purposes:

Touch is important and may be used routinely for any of the following reasons:

1. For **communication**: to reinforce communication (e.g. hand on shoulder when speaking) or to function as the main form of communication in itself, such as to respond non-verbally or to respond to another person's own use of physical contact for communication and to make social connections. This is particularly likely to occur during intensive interaction (see appendix) or day to day greetings (hand-shakes, hugs etc.).
2. For **educational reasons**: as part of the process of establishing the fundamentals of communication (see appendix) for students at early communication levels, and to direct children in educational tasks and essential skills. (e.g. hand over hand assistance)

As support or guidance, for example, during transitions between activities and during swimming or P.E. sessions.

3. To **play**: play activities naturally include touch. Students of any age who are at early levels of development are likely to be quite tactile and physical.
4. For **therapy**:(e.g. massage, sensory stimulation, physiotherapy, rebound therapy etc.) provided either by the therapist or by another member of staff carrying out a therapy programme or following therapy advice.
5. For **emotional reasons**: to communicate affection and warmth, to give reassurance and to communicate security and comfort. To enable the student to develop understanding of these positive emotions and the ability to communicate them.
6. For the **purposes of care**: touch is necessary in order to carry out personal care for many of the students we support at Mackay District Special School including: showering/washing/teeth cleaning/manicure; toileting/nappy changing; menstrual management; changing/dressing; medical/first aid and administration of medication (refer to medication authority).
7. To **give physical support and mobility assistance** in order for the students to function within the school and community. This assistance may take the form of directionally guiding through light touch e.g. elbow, shoulder, foot touch; assistance with motor planning e.g. physical movement of limbs by a staff member and/or whole body support e.g. swimming, physical education program, toileting, transfers to and from wheelchairs, loss of balance, bike riding and seizures.
8. To **protect** children and young people from danger by physically intervening and managing challenging behaviours including the use of restraint, while following the recognised guidelines and policies of Mackay District Special School (see Responsible Behaviour Plan 2014 and the individual's Behaviour Support Plans).

Guidelines for Management

- 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.
- The use of touch should be discussed openly and regularly between staff.
- Staff need to vocalise their intended action of touch to the student particularly during physical support, therapy and care assistance.
- As far as possible, the young person involved should consent to any touch given and staff should be sensitive to any verbal and non-verbal communication they give that might indicate that they don't want to be touched. It should always be considered by staff that for touch to provide positive experiences it should be consensual.
- Staff should be sensitive to any changes in the young person's behaviour (e.g. over-excitement or negative reactions) that might indicate the need to reduce or withdraw touch, particularly during play or intensive interaction.

- The students we support should be given opportunities to touch each other while interacting and playing as would happen naturally for any child or young person. Attention should always be given to ensure that both parties are happy with this.
- Staff should be sensitive to the danger of touch being misunderstood and triggering sexual arousal and must be alert to all feedback signals from the person they are working with so as to withdraw.
- Some students we support may occasionally inadvertently touch intimate parts of a member of staff's body when there is no sexual intent or understanding. The staff member should withdraw without giving significant negative feedback in this situation.
- As far as possible student privacy will be respected and staff/students will deal in a sensitive manner with personal management issues.
- Staff should wear personal protective equipment eg. Disposable gloves when toileting, showering, nappy changing, first aid administration where contact with body fluids is possible/likely.
- Two staff members are required to be present for assists during showering, toileting and nappy change unless parental consent has been provided, though it is recognised that some situations may arise where this staffing arrangement may not be possible.
- For staff and/or student health and safety, staff may need to restrict the movement of a student whilst engaged in some of these activities. This will be achieved by physically holding.

APPENDIX

From www.intensiveinteraction.co.uk

• *Intensive Interaction*

Who is Intensive Interaction for?

Intensive Interaction is designed to meet the learning needs of people who are still at early stages of communication development. At one extreme, this may be a person who is very 'difficult to reach', living a socially isolated life, perhaps having a range of self-stimulatory behaviours and not showing motivation to be with other people. Equally, the approach is for people who may be highly social in many ways and have many successful interaction activities with other people. Yet such a person may still need to develop further knowledge and ability in areas like: use and understanding of eye contacts and facial expressions, taking turns in exchanges of behaviour, developing and furthering vocalisations toward the threshold of speech. Indeed, some of the people for whom the approach would have meaning may be people who have some speech and language ability, but would still benefit from further learning and development in the area of the 'fundamentals of communication'.

• *Fundamentals of Communication*

The fundamentals of communication can be characterised as things like:

- Learning to give brief attention to another person.
- To share attention with another person.
- Learning to extend those attentions, learning to concentrate on another person.
- Developing shared attention into 'activities'.
- Taking turns in exchanges of behaviour.
- To have fun, to play.
- Using and understanding eye contacts.
- Using and understanding of facial expressions.
- Using and understanding of non-verbal communication such as gesture and body language.
- Learning use and understanding of physical contacts.
- Learning use and understanding of vocalisations, having your vocalisations become more varied and extensive, then gradually more precise and meaningful.