

# DevonPathways



## **‘Positive Handling’: Safe Touch, Safe Guiding and Safe Holding – Procedures and Policy**

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## Overview

In this document, '**Positive Handling**' is taken to include the use of **Safe Touch, Safe Guiding and Safe Holding**.

The use of Positive Handling includes the use of Safe Touch and are defined as:

**Safe touch** is appropriate if a child or young person:

- where its therapeutic use has been agreed because it addresses an identified developmental need on the part of the child or young person.
- Where Safe Touch is to be used it must be done with the full knowledge and consent of parents/carers/guardians by supervised staff in carefully monitored situations.
- Where Safe touch does not help the student and regulate emotions it may be necessary to safe guide or Safe hold to help contain their emotional state and keep themselves, other or property safe.

**Safe Guiding** is appropriate if a child or young person is:

- Able to follow instructions and be guided away from a place or people being led by a physical touch in an appropriate place such as the arm or elbow
- At risk of hurting himself/herself or others, (or is likely to hurt himself /herself and/or others)
- damaging property,

**Safe Holding** is appropriate if a child or young person is:

- hurting himself/herself or others, (or is likely to hurt himself /herself and/or others) or
- damaging property,
- incensed and out of control, so that all other attempts to engage him or her have failed.

**Safe Holding should only be used by staff members who have completed a recognized restrictive physical intervention course such as Mapa, Team Teach or NFPS in an environment where support can be provided by colleagues. The exception being when the immediate risk of harm to self, others, or property. DevonPathways predominantly work 1-2-1 with young people and safe holding (restraining) is not considered a safe option for staff. Staff may use professional judgement to keep the young person, themselves, others and property safe. Emergency services will be called at the earliest opportunity if safe holding is considered to be the only option.**

## Aim

Positive handling: the use of containment, safe touch, guiding and/or safe holding provides key opportunities for emotional learning. A child or young person who cannot regulate their emotions can be a danger to themselves and others. This in turn makes learning and the development of skills very difficult. Research shows us that fear-based disciplinary systems result in, at best, short-term retention of facts but create mid and long-term difficulties with concentration, memory, and retention of learning.

Safe Touch differs from Safe holding in that the staff can recognize early signals of mounting charge or distress and move in to intervene with the child or young person quickly. They stay in close contact with the young person until they have calmed down. The positive touch is used to calm, soothe, attune, and validate the young person's experience.

In this way, the children and young people learn through their own lived experience that there are ways they can keep themselves safe that do not include threats of punishment, coercion, bribery and aggression are available to keep themselves safe.

Conscious, informed use of safe touch can be transformative for the young people in DevonPathways' care.

This policy will focus on safe touch to enable/support a young person who is at risk of dysregulation. It is intended to reduce the risk of dysregulation and potential harm to the young person.

DevonPathways staff work predominantly 1-2-1 and safe holding is considered not to be an option in most cases. DevonPathways mentors develop positive, professional relationships with their mentees, so the young person feels safe, listened to, and have other options than dysregulation.

## Context

Our policy on Safe Handling has been developed in the context of Child Protection Procedures and Policies. Safe touch is a positive contribution to brain development, emotional regulation, mental health, and the development of pro-social skills.

### To whom does this policy apply?

- All staff and children working within DevonPathways.

### Why have a policy on touch?

To protect children and staff from allegations under Child Protection procedures, some provisions and LEAs have adopted 'No Touch' policies. However, DevonPathways is adopting an informed, evidence-based decision to allow safe touch in special cases as a developmentally appropriate intervention that will aid healthy growth and learning.

Children learn who they are and how the world is in relationship. The quality of the child's relationships with significant adults is key to their healthy development and emotional health and wellbeing.

Safe touch is used to calm, soothe, and regulate a child's emotions and is a needed developmental experience. Safe touch is one of the keyways of regulating children's emotions.

Other means of calming, soothing and containing children's strong emotions include:

- Slowing one's pace
- Lowering the voice
- Breathing more deeply
- Initially matching the pitch and volume of the child's emotional display (shout, cry etc.) and then regulating it down
- Talking slowly firmly and quietly in an unhurried unflustered way
- Providing clear predictable consistently held boundaries

**The absence of safe touch experiences can be detrimental and sometimes actively harmful.**

The developmentally appropriate (and therapeutic) use of safe touch is defined by situations **in which abstinence would actually be inhumane, unkind and potentially psychologically or neurobiologically damaging.**

## Appropriate and Inappropriate touch

Our policy rests on the belief that every member of staff needs to appreciate the difference between appropriate and inappropriate touch. They must show themselves to be highly aware of both the damaging and unnecessary uses of touch in an educational context.

- Touch is not to be used as an ill-thought out or impulsive act of futile reassurance / gratification or as a block to referral for psychological assessment.

### Safe touch

To ensure touch is only used appropriately the following guidelines are followed:

- No adult should use touch when alone with a child or young person unless there is a genuine need and should be reported to their line manager immediately.
- Use brief, gentle contact on open clothed parts of the body: hands, arms, shoulders, head, hair, shoes.
- Parents/Carers/Guardians should be informed of the DevonPathways policy around Touch.
- Parents/Carers/Guardians wherever possible should be involved in the DevonPathways Assessments and Action Plans and be regularly updated as to their child's progress through the program.
- Staff members should agree to the use of safe touch in discussion with their line manager, parents/carers and referring body and its use recorded and monitored.

### Unsafe touch

- At no point and under no circumstances should staff members use touch to satisfy their own need for physical contact or reassurance.
- No unsafe touch: All staff will be aware to be fully cognizant of touch that is invasive, or which could be confusing, traumatizing or experienced as eroticizing in any way whatsoever.
- Should any such touch be used it would be deemed as a serious breach warranting the highest level of disciplinary action.

## Step-by-step guidance

ID badges should be always worn when working with Young People.

### Positive Touch and Positive Guiding

Best practice (i.e., with thought and consideration given to develop the child's thinking) is when the adults have prepared/agreed the child for the touch/guided and it has been rehearsed with them. This rehearsal will be recorded in session reports and line manager, parents/carers informed. Referring bodies will be informed through session reports.

For example: The following script could be built up over a few conversations:

*“When you get really upset/ hurt/ angry/ misrepresented/ criticized it is awful for you.*

*I see you get more and more tense/ jittery and you start to get hot/look as if you want to get away.*

*When this happens, I am going to keep you safe. This is how I am going to do it .....*

*I am going to / touch your shoe/ put my hand on your back until I feel that you are calm.*

1. The child may not be able to manage some or all of this. This whole sequence may happen over an extended period.
2. All adults coming into contact with the child must be aware of the plan going forward. Clear communication is key.
3. Every instance that the child/young person shows signs that they are beginning to dysregulate or that they are unsafe, the adults' response needs to be quick and consistent.
4. Once the young person is beginning to calm, the adult can turn their attention to attuning and validating the child's inner experience. This contributes positively to reshaping the neural pathways in the young person's brain and to developing new emotional regulatory techniques in the child.
5. When the child/young person has calmed teach/offer alternative ways of behaving.
6. The next conversation may start “I wonder what we could do next time” (wondering aloud rather than asking a question).

### Positive Holding

If the Young person show heightened signs of dysregulation the mentor will have an agreed course of action that may well be to finish the session and return the young person home. If this is not possible and the young person starts to exhibit behaviours that could harm themselves, others, or property, Devonpathways mentors will inform the emergency services and ask for immediate assistance.

- Ensure planning for the session has addressed any needs indicated in the Risk Assessment
- Monitor Young person for signs heightened emotions, if indications that young person is becoming heightened/ dysregulation communicate options clearly. Listen to the young person.
- If alternative options do not work communicate with line manager and inform them of the situation.
- As a last resort inform the young person that the session will finish, and they will be taken home.
- If the young person refuses all options and is placing themselves/others or property at risk Call 999 and request immediate support.
- Inform the YP that the emergency services have been requested.
- Update your line manager at all possible opportunities.
- The line manager will liaise with the referring body where possible and in a timely fashion.
- Parents/carers and referring bodies will be informed at the earliest opportunity.
- A review of the provision will take place with the referring body and appropriate measures will be put in place if the provision is to continue.

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## **Follow up process.**

- Devonpathways staff will record all cases of positive handling in the in the session reports and inform their Line manager at the earliest opportunity by phone and email in addition to the session report.
- The line manager will inform the referring body and agree a process for informing parents/carers at the end of the session, or before, if the mentor feels in their professional judgement, it is necessary as outlined in this policy.
- If referring bodies are unavailable and agreed with the DevonPathways line manager, DevonPathways staff will inform parents/carers of the events that took place on drop off. If parents and carers are unavailable, then a follow up phone conversation will take place later that day.

## **Monitoring arrangements**

This policy will be reviewed every year by DevonPathways Senior Leadership Team





