



# Gentle Touch Policy

**(IN REGARDS TO PERFORMING ARTS)**

STAGES THEATRE ARTS recognises that, within performing arts (dance, drama, singing and stagecraft), there are times when appropriate, minimal, and safe physical contact may be helpful to support learning, demonstrate technique, prevent injury, or maintain safety. We are committed to ensuring that all touch is professional, proportionate, and in the child's best interests, and that children and young people feel safe, respected, and in control at all times.

This policy should be read alongside our Safeguarding/Child Protection Policy, Code of Conduct, Health & Safety Policy, and Intimate Care (if applicable). Any touch that causes concern will be treated as a safeguarding matter.

Each member of staff, including volunteers and visiting artists/practitioners, follows this policy and is responsible for:

- Maintaining a safe and respectful learning environment.
- Using teaching methods that minimise physical contact wherever possible.
- Seeking consent and checking understanding before any necessary touch.
- Being sensitive to individual needs, cultural considerations and personal boundaries.
- Recording and reporting any concerns, disclosures, or incidents in line with safeguarding procedures.

Any member of staff who disregards these expectations will be subject to disciplinary procedures.

## **Responsibilities Of The Registered Person**

The designated safeguarding lead is responsible for ensuring that:

- Staff understand professional boundaries and expectations regarding physical contact.
- Staff receive safeguarding training (including safer working practice).
- This policy is reviewed regularly and communicated to staff, parents/carers and students as appropriate.
- Any concerns or allegations related to physical contact are responded to promptly and appropriately in line with safeguarding procedures.

## **Responsibilities Of The Manager**

The Club's manager is responsible for ensuring that at each session:

- Staff deployment supports safe supervision and good practice (including avoiding unnecessary 1:1 situations).

- The teaching environment supports learning without needing physical prompting (e.g., clear demonstrations, adequate spacing, use of mirrors (if available)/markers).
- Parents/carers and students know how to raise concerns or provide feedback.

### **What Is “Gentle Touch”?**

For the purposes of this policy, “gentle touch” means **brief, minimal, appropriate physical contact** that is:

- Necessary for teaching or safety.
- Explained beforehand.
- With the child/young person’s consent.
- In an open, observable environment.
- Never secretive, coercive, or for the adult’s benefit.

### **Where Touch May Be Appropriate In Performing Arts**

Where it is necessary and consent is given, gentle touch may include:

- Guiding a child’s arm/hand position to demonstrate safe alignment.
- Lightly indicating shoulder placement or posture (e.g., “lift here”) using the back of the hand.
- Supporting balance or safe landing to prevent injury.
- Assisting with safe spacing during movement work (e.g., gently steering away from collision).
- Helping with props/costume safety where a child cannot safely adjust something themselves (e.g., securing a loose costume piece) – preferably asking the child to do it first, with staff guidance.

Touch should be avoided where verbal coaching, visual demonstration, mirroring, props, floor markers, or peer modelling can achieve the same outcome.

### **Where Touch Is Not Acceptable**

Physical contact is not acceptable where it is:

- Unnecessary, prolonged, or frequent without clear reason.
- Involving areas that could be considered intimate (chest, buttocks, groin), or any touch that could reasonably be misinterpreted.
- Used to control behaviour through physical force (except where immediate safety requires intervention).
- Used in a way that is secretive, in private, or not explained.
- A response to an adult’s frustration, anger, or impatience.

STAGES THEATRE ARTS does not permit staff to engage in horseplay, tickling, play-fighting, or “banter touch” with children and young people.

## Consent And Communication

Before any necessary touch, staff will:

- Explain what they want to do and why (e.g., "I'm going to lightly guide your elbow so your wrist stays safe.")
- Ask for permission in an age-appropriate way (e.g., "Is it okay if I show you with a gentle touch?")
- Respect the child's response. If the child says **no**, staff will offer an alternative approach.
- Check in during and after (e.g., "Was that okay?")

Children and young people will be reminded regularly:

- They can say **no** to touch at any time.
- They can ask for a different method (demonstration, verbal cues, use of props).
- They can speak to a trusted adult if anything makes them uncomfortable.

## Safe Practice Guidelines For Staff

To support safe professional practice, staff will:

- Prefer "show and tell" methods: demonstrate first, then coach verbally.
- Use touch only when essential and keep it brief.
- Keep hands visible and work in open spaces (not behind closed doors).
- Avoid being alone with a child. If 1:1 support is needed, ensure it is observable and in line with safeguarding guidance.
- Consider the child's age, understanding, needs, and any known sensitivities.
- Record and share relevant information (e.g., a child who prefers no touch) with the team appropriately and sensitively.

## Children With SEND, Injury Or Additional Needs

Some children may require additional physical support for inclusion and safety.

In these cases:

- Staff will follow the child's plan/parent guidance where available.
- Touch will be discussed with parents/carers as appropriate and kept consistent.
- The child's dignity and choice will remain central at all times.

Any physical support used must be the least intrusive option and only for as long as necessary.

## Changing, Toileting And Intimate Care

Staff do not provide intimate care unless it is part of STAGES THEATRE ARTS's agreed procedures with a parent/carer and a consent form has been signed. A separate **Intimate Care Policy** is in place and

followed. Staff should not be in changing areas unless required for safeguarding/safety and in line with venue arrangements and STAGES THEATRE ARTS procedures.

### **Managing Distress, First Aid And Comfort**

STAGES THEATRE ARTS understands that children, particularly younger children, may become upset and seek reassurance.

Staff may:

- Offer comfort through appropriate, brief reassurance, such as a side-on support, offering a tissue, or asking if they would like to sit near a staff member, if possible a second member of staff should also be present in the space.
- Use alternatives first (verbal reassurance, breathing/grounding, offering water, contacting parent/carer where appropriate).

Any first aid will be provided in line with STAGES THEATRE ARTS procedures and recorded as required.

### **Peer-To-Peer Touch (Choreography / Drama Work)**

Performing arts sometimes involve partner work. Staff will:

- Teach explicit boundaries and respectful behaviour.
- Use clear rules (no surprise touch, ask first, stop immediately if asked).
- Adapt work if any participant is uncomfortable.
- Supervise closely and intervene early if boundaries are not respected.

### **Concerns, Allegations Or Incidents**

If a child reports discomfort or concern about touch, or if a staff member observes inappropriate contact:

- The member of staff will respond calmly, listen, and reassure the child.
- The concern will be reported immediately to the Designated Safeguarding Lead/manager.
- The incident will be recorded in line with safeguarding procedures (and the Accident/Incident Log if relevant).
- Parents/carers will be informed where appropriate and in line with safeguarding guidance.
- Any allegations against staff will be managed under the safeguarding/allegations procedure.

STAGES THEATRE ARTS will always take concerns seriously, even if the intention was to help.

### **Training And Review**

STAGES THEATRE ARTS ensures staff:

- Receive safeguarding training and guidance on safer working practice.
- Understand professional boundaries and how to seek consent effectively.
- Review this policy annually (or sooner if guidance changes or following an incident).

**RELATED POLICIES**

Safeguarding, Code of Conduct, Health & Safety, Intimate Care, Administering Medication

This policy was adopted by:

<p>This policy was adopted by:</p> <p>STAGES THEATRE ARTS</p>	<p>Date:</p> <p>1<sup>st</sup> March 2026</p>
<p>To be reviewed:</p> <p>1<sup>st</sup> March 2027</p>	<p>Signed:</p> <p><i>BC Vincent</i></p>