Meadow Pathways Wellbeing and Education Cornwall (MPWEC)



Safe Touch Policy
Education other than at School (EOTAS)

Responsibility to update: Zoe Waitz and Michelle Pascoe

Applies to: All staff, contractors, volunteers and visiting professionals working with children and young people (CYP) engaged in Meadow Pathways EOTAS packages (including tuition in homes, community venues and online).

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Introduction

Meadow Pathways is committed to providing warm, relational, trauma-informed and sensory-aware support to children and young people (CYP). This policy sets out our approach to physical touch and contact with CYP, so that touch is only ever used to support a child's safety, dignity, wellbeing and sense of connection, and is never experienced by a child as rejecting, punitive or restrictive. This policy reflects Keeping Children Safe in Education (KCSIE) 2026, Working Together to Safeguard Children 2026, and DfE guidance on the use of reasonable force, and should be read alongside the Safeguarding and Child Protection Policy, Behaviour Policy and SEND & Inclusion Policy.

2. Legal and Policy Context

- Human Rights Act 1998 and Equality Act 2010: every child's dignity is respected, and reasonable adjustments are made for disabled and neurodivergent CYP in how touch, contact and physical support are provided.
- DfE guidance on the use of reasonable force: sets out the legal position that any person in charge of children may use reasonable force to prevent injury, an offence, or serious damage to property. Meadow Pathways applies this guidance as best practice as an EOTAS provider, even though it is written primarily for schools.
- Keeping Children Safe in Education (KCSIE) 2026 and Working Together to Safeguard Children 2026: set expectations for safe, professional physical contact between staff and CYP, and for recognising when physical contact raises a safeguarding concern.
- Training position: Meadow Pathways staff do not currently hold accredited training in any recognised physical intervention or restraint programme (for example Team Teach or an equivalent). This policy is written on that basis and will be reviewed if this changes (see Section 7).

3. Definitions

Positive or comforting touch

Low-level, welcomed touch that supports connection and co-regulation, such as a high-five, fist bump, or a hand on the shoulder if invited. Always consensual and always guided by the individual child's own preferences (see Section 9).

Guiding touch

Light, momentary touch used only to help a child move safely, such as a light touch on the arm to guide them away from a hazard or towards a doorway. It is not restrictive and ends the moment the child can continue independently.

Restrictive physical intervention or restraint

Touch used to restrict a child's movement against their will, using a recognised technique. Meadow Pathways staff are not trained in this and it is not part of routine practice (see Section 7).

Reasonable force

The lawful use of force that is proportionate, necessary and reasonable in the specific circumstances, to prevent a child from causing injury to themselves or others, committing an offence, or causing serious damage to property. This is a general legal position rather than a technique, and does not depend on specific training, but at Meadow Pathways it is used only as an absolute last resort (see Section 8).

4. Principles

- Every child has the right to feel safe, respected, and never rejected.
- Touch is only ever used with the child's welfare, dignity and consent (where possible) at the centre.
- Prevention through relationship, regulation and environment always comes before any physical response.

- Staff will never use touch to punish, humiliate or coerce a child.
- Where touch is declined or limited for safeguarding or legal reasons, staff explain this warmly and in an age-appropriate way, so the child does not experience it as personal rejection.
- Each child's own preferences, sensory profile, and family or cultural wishes around touch are recorded and respected.

5. Positive, Relational Touch and Avoiding Rejection

- Staff greet and respond to CYP warmly; where a child seeks or welcomes low-level contact (for example a high-five, fist bump or side hug), staff respond naturally and in an age-appropriate way, guided by the relevant information recorded in the child's Child Passport (Section 9).
- Where a member of staff needs to decline physical contact, such as a hug, for safeguarding, professional boundary or personal comfort reasons, they do so warmly and offer an alternative (for example a high-five, verbal warmth, or a favourite object or ritual), so the child does not experience the moment as rejection.
- Staff are trained to recognise that inconsistent or withdrawn physical responses can be experienced as rejection by children with early relational trauma, and to respond with extra warmth and explanation in these moments.
- Reflection on how touch and connection are experienced by each child forms part of team discussion and supervision.

6. Meeting Sensory Needs

- Each child's sensory profile (from an EHCP, school information, parent/carer insight or practitioner observation) is used to plan sessions, including known sensory triggers, preferences and regulation strategies.
- Environments are adapted to reduce sensory overload wherever practicable, including lighting, noise, seating and transitions.
- Sensory tools and strategies are made available according to each child's Child Passport, including weighted items, ear defenders, fidget or movement tools, chewable items, movement breaks and access to a quiet space.
- Staff are trained to recognise early signs of sensory overload or dysregulation, so that proactive sensory regulation reduces the likelihood of a situation ever escalating to the point where physical intervention might be considered.
- Sensory needs are reviewed alongside behaviour and safeguarding reviews, in line with the SEND & Inclusion Policy.

7. Current Position on Restraint and Physical Intervention Training

- Meadow Pathways staff do not currently hold training in any recognised restrictive physical intervention or restraint programme.
- Restrictive physical intervention or restraint is not part of routine practice at Meadow Pathways and must not be attempted by any member of staff who is not trained in a recognised technique.
- Where a child's assessed needs indicate that planned physical intervention may sometimes be required, Meadow Pathways will only accept or continue that placement once accredited

training has been commissioned for the relevant staff, and an individual Behaviour Support Plan and risk assessment are agreed with the commissioning school/LA and family.

- This position will be reviewed if and when Meadow Pathways staff undertake accredited restraint training, and this policy will be updated accordingly.

8. When Physical Intervention May Be Necessary (Reasonable Force as a Last Resort)

- The law allows any person in charge of children to use reasonable force to prevent a child from causing injury to themselves or others, committing an offence, or causing serious damage to property. This is a general legal position, not a technique, and does not depend on specific training.
- Because Meadow Pathways staff are not trained in restraint techniques, physical intervention is used only as an absolute last resort, when there is no safer alternative, and is limited to the minimum non-restrictive contact necessary to avert immediate harm, for example guiding a child away from danger or briefly blocking access to a hazard. Staff must never restrain, hold down, or forcibly move a child.
- Wherever possible, staff will instead remove other children from risk, remove themselves and call for help, use de-escalation and co-regulation strategies, and contact emergency services where there is a serious risk to life.
- Any use of force, however minor, is reported and recorded (Section 10) and reviewed to reduce the likelihood of recurrence, including whether the placement remains appropriate without accredited restraint training in place.

9. Child Passports

Relevant information is recorded in the child's existing Child Passport, alongside their other individual information, so that all staff working with the child can access it in one place.

- Information added to a child's Child Passport includes, where relevant: the child's preferences and boundaries around touch; known sensory triggers and preferred regulation strategies; agreed responses to distress or dysregulation; and any relevant EHCP or health information.
- The Child Passport is completed and kept up to date with the child where possible, family/carers and the commissioning school, and is shared with all staff working with the child.
- The Child Passport is reviewed at least termly, or sooner if circumstances change.

10. Recording, Reporting and Notification

- Any physical intervention, including minimal guiding touch used to avert harm, is recorded on the incident log the same day, describing what happened, why, what alternatives were tried, and the outcome.
- Parents/carers and the commissioning school are informed on the same day.
- The Designated Safeguarding Lead (DSL) reviews all recorded incidents, identifies patterns, and considers whether additional training, staffing, environmental changes, or a change to the placement is needed.
- Where an incident may constitute a safeguarding concern, the Safeguarding and Child Protection Policy is followed in addition to this policy.

11. Post-Incident Support and Debrief

- The child is supported to feel safe, regulated and reassured, including reassurance that they are not rejected or in trouble.
- A restorative conversation takes place with the child once they are regulated, in a way that is developmentally and sensorially appropriate.
- Staff involved are offered a debrief and support, in line with the Staff Conduct Policy and supervision arrangements.

12. Monitoring and Review

- This policy, and all recorded incidents involving touch or physical intervention, are reviewed at least termly by the DSL and Directors.
- This policy is reviewed annually or sooner following a serious incident, safeguarding learning, or a change in guidance or training provision.

13. Related Policies

This policy should be read alongside:

- Safeguarding and Child Protection Policy
- Behaviour Policy
- SEND & Inclusion Policy
- Anti-Bullying Policy
- Health & Safety Policy
- Staff Conduct Policy
- Lone Working Policy

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