



Positive Touch Policy for Supporting Learners

Latest Review: Sep. 2025

Next Review: Sep. 2026

1. Introduction and Scope

It is the aim of Oaks Rise that all learners feel safe and respected at all times. This policy aims to ensure that all physical contact with learners is safe, respectful, purposeful, and in the best interest of the child. It recognises that our learners at Oaks Rise may have unique sensory preferences, communication styles, and needs, and seeks to promote positive relationships while safeguarding their wellbeing.

This policy is applicable to all Oaks Rise employees and learners in regard to appropriate physical contact between staff and learners.

Oaks Rise's policy on physical intervention and restraint for learners who pose a significant risk to themselves or others can be found in our Staff Code of Conduct and in our Community Guidelines and is not covered in this policy.

2. Core Principles

At Oaks Rise, we recognise that physical contact between staff and learners can be positive and, at times, may be a necessity. Physical contact should be used to provide comfort, care and/or reassurance to our learners. It should not be used to assert authority over a learner. This policy is centred around four core principles:

- **Respect and Dignity** – Every learner has the right to personal space and bodily autonomy. Touch should always be respectful, non-intrusive, and age-appropriate.
- **Consent and Communication** – Whenever possible, staff should seek verbal or non-verbal consent before initiating touch.
- **Individual Needs** – Learners' sensory profiles, communication methods, and personal preferences should guide the use of touch.
- **Safety First** – Touch should only be used in ways that maintain emotional and physical safety for all involved.

3. When Positive Touch May Be Appropriate

There are instances where positive touch may be appropriate, although it is always important for the employee to judge each situation individually. Some examples of where physical touch may be appropriate are:



- **Comfort and Reassurance:** e.g., offering a hand to hold, a light touch on the shoulder, or a side hug (only if welcomed by the learner).
- **Celebration and Encouragement:** e.g., high fives, fist bumps, gentle pats on the back.
- **Practical Support:** e.g., guiding a learner's hand in a learning task, assisting with clothing adjustments if the learner requests or needs help.
- **Safety and Protection:** e.g., guiding a learner away from danger in a calm and supportive manner.

4. Best Practice Guidelines for Employees

Any form of physical touch that a reasonable person would judge to be a conscious, self-aware, reasonable and justifiable act is acceptable. Employees should always consider the following when using physical touch:

- **Know the Learner:** Be aware of each learner's sensory sensitivities, cultural background, and individual support plan.
- **Ask First:** Use clear language or visual cues to request permission before initiating touch.
- **Observe Cues:** Respect body language or verbal cues that demonstrate a learner does not want to be touched.
- **Be Mindful of Context:** Use touch in appropriate settings and avoid anything that could be misinterpreted. Touch should never be secretive.
- **Model Boundaries:** Teach and model healthy boundaries for both staff and peers. Give learners advice and/or guidance on situations where physical touch is appropriate.

If an employee feels it would be inappropriate to respond to a learner seeking physical contact, the reasons for denying this should be explained to the learner and the learner should be comforted verbally as necessary.

5. Keeping our Learners Safe

There may be instances where physical touch is considered a necessity to ensure the safety of our learners. For example, a staff member may need to guide a learner away from a potentially dangerous or harmful situation either inside or outside the setting. Any incidents of this nature should be recorded and explained to the learner and staff should inform parents / carers.

Policy and procedures around physical intervention and restraint for learners who pose a significant risk to themselves or others is set out in the Oaks Rise Staff Code of Conduct and Community Guidelines.

6. Recording and Reporting

Any physical contact beyond normal everyday interactions (e.g., incidents requiring physical intervention) must be recorded. Staff should inform parents/carers about significant instances of physical contact when appropriate.



8. Complaints

If an employee feels at any time that their physical touch may have been misinterpreted or could potentially lead to a complaint from a learner, they should bring this to the attention of their line manager as soon as possible so that the matter can be fully recorded and the manager can assist with any debrief with the learner's parents as may be necessary.

Should a learner bring to the attention of any staff member an act of physical touch from an adult that they felt to be inappropriate, this should be dealt with in line with the Oaks Rise Allegations of Abuse Against Staff and Low Level Concerns Policy.