PROVIDING LOVE WITHIN CARE (APPROPRIATE TOUCH) POLICY

DATE CREATED	26/02/2025	**DATE OF NEXT REVIEW**	26/02/2026
POLICY OWNER(S)	Deputy Head of Service Registered Manager		
DESIGNATION	Director of Children's Health & Care		

Purpose of policy	To provide guidance and clarification around how we provide love within Residential Childcare to ensure that staff can safely and appropriately demonstrate affection, acceptance and reassurance to the children they support.
Intended audience	All Children's Home Staff
Links to other policies	Disciplinary Policy & Procedure Speaking Out Policy (Whistleblowing) Safeguarding & Child Protection Policy Safer Recruitment Policy Children's Home Regulations 2015 including the Quality Standards Behaviour Management Policy Restraint reduction Policy

1.0 Introduction

The Guide to the Children's Home Regulations 2015 including the Quality Standards states; ***'Children in residential child care should be loved, happy, healthy, safe from harm and able to develop, thrive and fulfil their potential.'***

The term 'touch' is used throughout this policy and refers to appropriate physical contact used by staff and carers to provide affection and reassurance to children in their care. Such contact should be guided by careful consideration of planning, consent, location and potential safeguarding concerns, including allegations.

'Touch' may also be used in the form of Physical intervention to prevent children causing harm to themselves, others or damage to property. Guidance is provided in alternative policy *(Restraint Reduction Policy)* with regards to this.

Within our Children's Homes, loving the children we care for enables us to provide reassurance, care and comfort. However, it is acknowledged that 'touch' can be a sensitive issue for those working with children. As a result, children living within care often miss out on their fundamental human right and need to experience love and affectionate reassurance.

This policy empowers staff and carers to provide a loving and supportive environment for the children in our care, ensuring that appropriate physical touch is used with confidence and in a way that prioritises both affection and safeguarding.

2.0 Appropriate Touch

Touch can be an essential part of nurturing relationships. Touch in safe forms such as a high-five or a cuddle, can provide children with reassurance, enable self-regulation and demonstrate care. When used appropriately, touch can be a powerful tool for nurturing a child's well-being and fostering positive relationships. Therefore, maintaining the right balance is essential to ensure that touch remains a source of comfort and connection.

For children within care, their previous experiences may shape their perceptions of touch in complex ways. It is therefore important to recognise that the appropriateness of physical contact varies from child to child—what feels safe and reassuring for one may not be the same for another. However, avoiding all physical contact to minimise risk can be extremely damaging to a child in itself.

With this in mind, we must be aware of how we deliver appropriate touch and/or respond to children requesting love or touch. By forming this culture correctly, we can create the foundation for a setting that balances the need for protection with establishing a positive, caring and loving environment.

3.0 Building Love and Appropriate Touch in to Care

Love is non-discriminatory; every child needs to be loved no matter where they live. It is crucial that rather than reduce the love, we reduce the risk. In order to do this, we must consider the following points;

Care Planning – it is important that information is gathered prior to a child's placement around their background or past experiences that may have an impact on how they interpret or respond to physical touch. How a child shows love and affection should be written in their Placement Plan alongside their preference for how they are shown love and affection. Understanding the possible meaning of touch in this context can help to identify risk and protect both the child and staff member.

Consent – all physical touch must be with a child's consent. Ideally, on all occasions, touch should be initiated by the child. There may be situations or events where you may feel that a child would benefit from touch such as, a cuddle during a medical appointment, and in these circumstances it is ok to ask the child if they would like this comfort or reassurance. Only where the child gives their consent should this be provided. For children who are non-verbal or unable to express consent in traditional ways, staff should be attentive to their body language, facial expressions, and other non-verbal cues. Signs of openness—such as leaning in, reaching out, or relaxed posture—can indicate willingness, while withdrawal or tension may suggest discomfort. By being responsive to these cues, staff can ensure that physical touch remains a source of comfort and security for each child.

Location – any appropriate touch should take place in an open setting where its context of this can be observed by others. This helps build confidence for both the child and staff, reinforcing that appropriate touch can occur safely within a social space. Where you may be supporting a child on a 1:1 basis within a room, the door should remain open unless doing so would compromise the dignity of the child.

Allegations – children and/or visitors may sometimes misinterpret contact or make allegations for various reasons. To minimize this risk, it is important that all of the above guidelines are carefully followed when offering love and affection to the children we care for. While any allegation will be taken seriously and addressed in line with our internal protocols, staff can feel reassured that adherence to this policy serves as a protective factor. As an organization that believes in *Love in Care*, we fully support staff who demonstrate appropriate, thoughtful, and policy-aligned physical affection, recognizing its vital role in a child's well-being and emotional security.

4.0 The Culture and Boundaries of Love & Appropriate Touch

Love and appropriate touch should be seen as a positive and safe way of communicating affection, reassurance and acceptance within the home. Staff and children should be encouraged to use touch positively and safely however, it is also important to set and maintain boundaries within the home for both staff and children.

Where there are particular boundaries for an individual child in relation to physical touch, this should be clearly set out in their personal Placement Plan.

The following points should be taken in to consideration to ensure a positive culture of love and touch within the home;

- The child's personal likes and dislikes of the adult supporting them
- The background / past experiences of the child
- The culture, ethnicity, race or beliefs of the child
- The part of the body – it is generally considered appropriate to touch a child on their hands, arms, shoulders. It may be appropriate to touch a child's back, ears or stroke their hair or knee's however, only if the chid indicates this is acceptable. Any other areas of the body would be unacceptable.
- No part of the body should be touched if it were likely to generate sexualised feelings on the part of the adult or the child
- No touch should take place that appears patronising or intrusive
- The context in which touch takes place is a decisive factor in determining its appropriateness

- Staff should use touch with confidence and verbalise their affection or reassurance at the same time e.g. touching a child's arm and saying 'well done', or reciprocating a child's cuddle and saying 'everything's going to be ok'.
- Where a child indicates that touch is unwelcome, staff must listen to this and apologise if necessary
- Touch of an equally positive and safe nature between colleagues can demonstrate positive role models for children and show that touch can used in a non-abusive way
- All parties must be appropriately dressed
- Talk about 'touch', what is acceptable and what is not, set boundaries and expectations
- Be mindful of your body position
- Touch should only be in response to the child's needs and not related to the staff's needs
- Avoid any physical contact that is or could be construed as sexual, abusive or offensive
- Allow the child to determine the degree of physical contact

5.0 What we know and what we need

- ✓ We know that others can feel uncomfortable about having a loving approach to children for fear of allegations or actual abuse
- ✓ We know that because of these concerns children living in residential childcare miss out on the human need to be and feel loved
- ✓ We know that rather than reduce the love, we need to reduce the risks
- ✓ We know that children who feel loved, safe and cared for are more likely to achieve better outcomes

- ➢ We need to work in partnership with all those involved in the child's life to ensure that they understand the need for the child to feel loved within the home and what this means
- ➢ We need to show love and affection to the children we care for in a safe and positive way
- ➢ We need to adhere to Child Protection and Safeguarding Policies to ensure love and appropriate touch is delivered safely.