

Communication – ‘Do Touch’ Policy

1. Purpose

The purpose of this policy is to define appropriate communication (including use of appropriate touch)

This policy aims to ensure that Purple Patch Arts’ participants, staff and volunteers understand the importance of different ways of communication (including touch) and how it is facilitated, to identify and reduce the potential risks that may arise through communicating through touch in our work and to advise parents, support workers and guardians of participants, of our approach towards communicating through touch.

2. Principles

Touch is a way of connecting with others to exchange information and build relationships. This forms the basis of all communication and is essential in the way that we work with people who have complex needs.

Touch can contribute to a multi-sensory approach and supports participants to make sense of their environment. It is supportive and comforting and can help develop trust and build relationships between participant and facilitator. Touch offers meaningful communication to participants and prevents periods of isolation and loneliness.

There are, however, risks associated with touch, including the possibility of exploitation and abuse. Purple Patch Arts has a legal and moral responsibility to effectively manage the risks associated with individual members of staff and participants.

The policy applies to all staff and volunteers who work for Purple Patch Arts.

3. Introduction

There is much research which supports the theory that using physical contact with others helps development. Field (2001) showed that touch deprivation is likely to result in growth delay, and a failure to thrive.

In her book, ‘A Natural History of The Senses’ (1995), Diane Ackerman describes touch as being *"as essential as sunlight... In the absence of touching and being touched, people of all ages can sicken and grow touch-starved."*

Valuing People Now (2009) explicitly states that for people with complex needs, where social inclusion is concerned:

"addressing the issues for people with complex needs is really about embedding the principles of personalisation within all aspects of planning, commissioning and delivery of support services. It is also about recognising that the very particular

support needs of an individual will mean very individualised support packages, including systems for facilitating meaningful two-way communication.”

Page 38 of the document is then completely given over to an exposition of Intensive Interaction, with some historical background, comments on the strategies involved, and a brief passage on the possible beneficial outcomes. It goes on to state that people with learning disabilities should be enabled and supported to *‘develop and use appropriate communication systems where people have little or no verbal communication’* (2009, p.39).

We consider that many people with a learning disability also benefit from the additional social interaction that comes with tactile communication and would not reserve this form of communication only for the non-verbal.

We have adapted guidelines from Dave Hewett’s article ‘Do Touch: physical contact and people who have severe, profound and multiple learning difficulties’ (2007). The following policy and guidelines are designed to protect both participants and the staff team.

4. Appropriate Touch

Members of staff may routinely touch participants in order to:

- Reinforce other communication, e.g. hand on shoulder while speaking
- Give physical support and guidance
- Give reassurance – communicate security and comfort
- Act to give protection in potentially dangerous or hazardous situations
- Play, interact
- Respond non-verbally
- Direct or physically prompt
- Give physical cues for participation or understanding
- Aid protection in hazardous situations
- Give therapy e.g. massage, physiotherapy
- Function as the main form of communication
- Respond to participants
- Respond to participants’ use of physical contact for communication and making social connections
- Reward and affirm
- Give participants the opportunity of choice to lead the communication
- Communicate affection, warmth, a sense of mutuality and enable participants to learn understanding of these things and the ability to communicate them
- Deliberately, and most sensitively, teach some participants who do not want or like touch, the enjoyment and benefit of physical contact.
- Give graphic experience of the tempo of life and physical activity enjoyed by another person – e.g. member of staff communicates calm and stillness through physical contact.

Members of staff may NOT touch participants in order to:

- Exploit or coerce the participant
- Satisfy the staff's needs at the expense of the participant
- Change the behaviour of participants with physical force
- Have sexual contact with participants
- Punish or reprimand a participant, or react in anger
- Force affection

Personal Care may only be given by the participants own support worker/care and not a member of Purple Patch Arts staff team

Any staff member who witnesses any inappropriate touch towards participants must intervene where they feel they can, without causing alarm to the participant, and report the incident as soon as possible to the Programmes Manager.

Participants who appropriately touch other participants can do so only if it is clear that both parties are consenting.

If it is clear that one participant does not want to be touched by anybody or specific people including other participants, then the participant touching a person who does not like it needs to be sensitively informed.

If a participant continues to touch another participant who doesn't want to be touched, a specific risk assessment will need to be completed. This may include measures like splitting the participants up, stopping a participant attending if not respecting others' requests or increasing support levels.

If two participants are having a relationship, then they need to know that acting appropriately while in session is essential. For example, while participating in an activity, participants will be asked to not continue to hold hands unless it is part of the activity. However, they may if they wish hold hands during a break or lunch.

5. Potential Hazards

All staff must be aware of these potential hazards:

With participants who are at or beyond puberty, members of staff must operate maximum sensitivity to physical contact being misunderstood or misconstrued and triggering sexual arousal. Members of staff should use maximum tuning-in and sensitivity to all feedback signals from the participant.

Positive Behaviour Support plans should be consulted to ensure touch does not constitute a trigger for the participant, or that touching others is not an early warning sign of a behaviour that challenges.

As far as possible, staff must give maximum regard to the participant's right to accept and withdraw from physical contact.

Participants may sometimes touch intimate areas of a member of staff's body when there is no sexual intent or understanding. It is legitimate and advisable for the member of staff to withdraw from or cease to touch, but not advisable to give significant negative feedback at that moment – feedback may be reinforcing.

All staff must:

- Ensure they have read the policy and any supporting information
- Ensure they have read the individual risk assessments and Positive Behaviour Support plans for each person
- Ensure they review the risk assessment on a case by case basis and inform the Programmes Manager or Projects Manager of any shortcomings in arrangements.
- Report any incidents to enable systems to be reviewed and revised.
- Fill out a serious incident forms if necessary

6. Risk Assessment

Before members of staff communicate through touch with any participant, they will be provided with an Access Needs form and Positive Behaviour Support plan, where applicable, for each individual which highlights the participant's response to touch and the risks associated with that.

7. Guidelines

Know why you do it - Be knowledgeable on the purposes of using physical contact by discussion, thought and suggested reading etc on this subject.

Have consent from the person - Be aware that different people will communicate their consent, or lack of consent, in different ways, and only make physical contact if you are sure the other person is consenting. Respect the person's right to withdraw from physical contact and touch if they so wish.

Be prepared to discuss and explain your practices - First and foremost by being knowledgeable as above.

Document and have it acknowledged in participant's access needs and/or Positive Behaviour Support plans - If the use of physical contact is fulfilling the participant's needs then state this in the documentation drawn up to support work with that participant.

Use of physical contact should be discussed openly and regularly - There should be no sense of furtiveness or 'hidden curriculum'.

Do not do anything that makes you feel uncomfortable - Use your intuition about a situation. Get to know the participants well and read the signals early. If you are not happy or comfortable with a situation back away from it gently.

Have others present where possible - The most basic safeguard for staff and participants is to have other staff in the room when physical contact is likely to be taking place.

Ensure we don't just functionally touch - Many participants are touched regularly for personal care, feeding and movement but often these touches are purely functional. Staff should ensure even functional touches are done sensitively and warmly and also ensure these participants receive some meaningful interpersonal touch every day.

8. Bibliography

ACKERMAN, D. (1991) *A Natural History of the Senses*, Vintage Books

ESCALONA ET AL, (2001) Improvements in the behaviour of children with Autism, *Journal of Autism and Developmental Disorders*, 31, 513-516

FIELD, T. (2001) *Touch*, Cambridge

HEWETT, D. (2007) Do touch: physical contact and people who have severe, profound and multiple learning difficulties, *Support for Learning*, vol 22, no 3, 116-123

9. Review

This policy will be reviewed annually.