

METHODIST COLLEGE BELFAST

Safe Handling Policy

In Methodist College both pupils and staff are valued and respected as individuals. This policy is intended to assist in providing an environment where the safety and welfare of pupils and staff are assured, and where there is confidence among staff about the standards of professional behaviour to which they should conform. All those who work in the College are in a position of special trust. This document provides guidance for staff about the circumstances in which they might use safe handling techniques to deal with a pupil, and how safe handling should be applied. The policy helps create a learning environment in which young people and adults feel safe from harm and are assured physical intervention will not be used inappropriately or excessively. The College has a Personal Development Programme which helps pupils to manage conflict and strong feelings, and the College actively promotes positive behaviour management strategies, thus reducing the need for the use of any form of physical intervention, except in exceptional circumstances

1. Definition of Safe Handling

The Education (NI) Order 1998 (Part 11 Article 4 (1)) states:

'A member of the staff of a grant-aided school may use, in relation to any pupil at the school, such force as is reasonable in the circumstances for the purpose of preventing the pupil from doing (or continuing to do) any of the following, namely:

- a. committing any offence;*
- b. causing personal injury to, or damage to the property of, any person (including the pupil himself); or*
- c. engaging in any behaviour prejudicial to the maintenance of good order and discipline at the school or among any of its pupils, whether that behaviour occurs during a teaching session or otherwise.'*

Based on this legal framework, the working definition of safe handling is the minimum physical intervention necessary to prevent a pupil from physically harming himself/herself or others or seriously damaging property or seriously breaching school discipline, but used in a manner which attempts to preserve the dignity of all concerned.

2. Preventative Strategies

- (i) Methods of defusing and de-escalating confrontation or aggression and dealing with inappropriate behaviour(s) are detailed in Appendix 1 and in the College's Positive Behaviour Policy. Safe handling is not used in non-urgent situations or as a form of discipline or as a substitute for good behaviour management.

- (ii) Risk Assessment is one of the preventative strategies used to minimise the risk of an incident escalating unnecessarily and it is carried out where a pupil is known to exhibit disturbing or distressing behaviour. Risk Assessment is considered only for those pupils where there is a foreseeable risk and it enables the school to plan risk management and train accordingly. The risk management plan then informs the pupil's Individual Education Plan (IEP) which is disseminated to appropriate staff. The Risk Assessment is reviewed after a major incident and at least termly.

3. When to use Safe Handling

- (i) The Board of Governors, in the belief that the best interests of the child must be paramount, recognises that there may be occasions when physical contact with a pupil may not be avoidable and supports a member of staff who behaves in a reasonable and appropriate manner in pursuit of what could be deemed at the time to be in the best interests of the pupil.
- (ii) The decision to use safe handling depends on the circumstances of the case and staff take the following into consideration:
- whether it is reasonable to use safe handling;
 - the degree of physical intervention that could reasonably be employed, given the age, sex, physical strength, size, understanding, medical conditions and any special educational needs of the pupil.

The use of safe handling can be regarded as reasonable only if the circumstances of the particular incident warrant it. Therefore, physical intervention is not used to prevent a pupil from committing a trivial misdemeanour, or in a situation that clearly could be resolved without physical intervention. A list of strategies for de-escalating situations is provided in Appendix 1.

The degree of physical intervention employed is in proportion to the circumstances of the incident and the seriousness of the behaviour or the consequences it is intended to prevent. Any physical intervention used is always the minimum needed to defuse the situation and every reasonable effort is made to avoid injury to the pupil and staff.

Safe handling is used only in exceptional circumstances, as a last resort, and when all other reasonable steps, where appropriate, have been taken to deal with the situation. Safe handling may, however, be used by a member of staff in self-defence or where a pupil has become an imminent danger to himself/herself, to another pupil, to another member of staff or volunteer, to a member of the public, or may cause significant damage to property (for example, when a building is likely to go on fire because of a pupil's actions).

Examples that fall into the above categories are:

- a pupil attacks a member of staff, or another pupil;
- pupils are fighting;

- a pupil is causing, or at risk of causing, injury or damage by accident, by rough play, or by misuse of dangerous materials, substances or objects;
 - a pupil absconds from a class or tries to leave school (Note: this only applies if a pupil could be at risk if not kept in the classroom or at school);
 - a pupil is behaving in a way that is compromising good order and discipline;
 - a pupil persistently refuses to obey an order to leave a classroom;
 - a pupil appears to be unable to exercise self-control of emotions and whose behaviour is presenting a threat to himself/herself or others.
- (iii) A member of staff who judges that the use of safe handling is necessary has due regard for his or her own safety and as far as possible does not use safe handling until another responsible adult is present to support, observe and call for assistance. A member of staff does not intervene in an incident without help if there is a risk that he/she may be injured or may endanger his/her life. Staff must not put themselves in personal danger merely to safeguard property. Intervention Guidelines are provided in Appendix 2.

There may be circumstances when a member of staff may have to decide between making an intervention by placing himself/herself in a dangerous situation or standing back and thereby allowing colleagues or pupils to face a potential danger. There will always be an element of personal judgment in decisions taken in situations where there is the possibility of someone being injured. However, it is reasonable to expect a member of staff to engage in some risk where there is evidence of danger to others and intervention has a good chance of being effective.

4. By Whom and Where Safe Handling can be used

The Board of Governors and Principal recognise the role every member of staff has in safeguarding pupils, so all staff are authorised to use safe handling if necessary.

Safe handling is used only when the pupil is on school premises or is off school premises but under the lawful control of the member of staff e.g. a field trip or an authorised out of school activity, such as a sporting event or educational trip.

Suitably vetted volunteers normally work only under the direction and supervision of a member of staff and do not normally assume sole responsibility for the safety and welfare of pupils. When a situation arises where the use of safe handling is needed, the volunteer should alert the member of staff in charge and defers to his/her judgement. In some circumstances, e.g. where a member of staff may not be readily available to deal with the incident and significant harm may occur if action is not taken, the Board of Governors would judge it reasonable for a volunteer to use safe handling.

5. Procedure for Use of Safe Handling

The use of safe handling involves a calm and measured approach at all times, utilising measures appropriate to the particular pupil and in accordance with College policies. Staff use the minimum physical intervention necessary to achieve the desired results. If possible a clear oral warning is given to the pupil that physical intervention will be used if the inappropriate behaviour continues. The procedures outlined in Appendix 2 are helpful.

6. Forms of Safe Handling (Reasonable, Proportionate, Necessary)

Physical intervention involves the minimum amount of force necessary to resolve the immediate situation and calm the pupil. The form of safe handling which staff use depends on the individual circumstances. They might include:

- separating pupils who are fighting, or who are about to fight;
- blocking a pupil's path;
- holding (keeping fingers together, not splayed);
- guiding;
- restraining;
- breakaway techniques (e.g. when a member of staff is grabbed by a pupil);
- leading a pupil by the arm;
- shepherding a pupil away by placing hands on the backs of elbows;
- using more restrictive holds (in extreme circumstances)

7. Limits on the Use of Physical Intervention

The law strictly prohibits the use of physical intervention which constitutes corporal punishment. The use of physical intervention as a punishment or intentionally to cause pain, injury or humiliation contravenes our Child Protection Policy, Code of Conduct for Staff and Positive Behaviour Policy. Staff avoid physical intervention that might reasonably be expected to cause injury. The following list is not exhaustive but provides examples of what might not be appropriate:

- grabbing;
- holding around the neck;
- any hold that might restrict breathing;
- kicking, slapping or punching or using any implement;
- forcing limbs against joints;
- tripping;
- holding or pulling by the hair;
- holding the pupil face down on the ground.

Staff avoid touching or holding a pupil in any way that might be considered indecent.

8. Action to be taken following the use of Safe Handling

- (i) Immediately after the use of safe handling the member(s) of staff concerned:
 - Ensures the welfare of the pupil concerned. He/she verbally checks if the pupil needs medical attention.
 - Calls for assistance if necessary.
 - Reports the incident immediately to the Principal (or the Senior Vice Principal in his absence) and follows any advice provided.
 - Makes a contemporaneous detailed written record of the incident. The report is given to the Principal and the member of staff also keeps a copy of the report. Any injuries are recorded on the College's "Accident Report Form".
- (ii) Staff complete the "Record on The Use of Safe Handling" form (Appendix 3).
- (iii) The Principal (or the Senior Vice Principal in his absence) ensures that the pupil's view is recorded, in a manner appropriate to the pupil, as soon as possible, preferably on the same day.
- (iv) Appropriate follow-up action is taken, which may include providing medical support, pastoral support, providing respite for those involved, contacting external agencies for advice/support and reporting to external authorities. Disciplinary action is taken when appropriate.

9. Contacting Parents/Guardians

- (i) The Principal (or the Senior Vice Principal in his absence) ensures that the parents/guardians of the pupil are made aware of the situation as soon as possible and the incident is explained to them. The contact is recorded on the "Record of The Use of Safe Handling" form (Appendix 3).
- (ii) Any complaint from a parent/guardian is dealt with under Parental Contact with the School about Concerns or Problems (Complaints Policy).

10. Record Keeping

A file containing details of all such incidents is kept in the Principal's office. At least annually the Chairman of the Board of Governors and the Principal review the entries in the file. Records of incidents are kept until the date of the twenty-first birthday of the pupil or in the event of the pupils being over eighteen when they leave school the record is kept for three years after the leaving date. Confidentiality and the young person's right to privacy are assured.

11. Training

The Vice Principal (Pastoral) ensures that staff are fully informed of the policy relating to the use of safe handling, procedures and practices relating to behaviour management and Child Protection Policy on an annual basis and consults with the Principal, at least annually, to review any relevant training needs. The College liaises with the BELB Behaviour Support Team for advice and practical support on behavioural issues.

12. Monitoring and Review of the Policy

The Vice-Principal (Pastoral) monitors the implementation of the policy and carries out a review of it after each incident of safe handling to ensure it is fit for purpose. He/she also conducts an annual review of the policy which involves representatives from the pupils, parents and staff. The outcome of the review is discussed by the Senior Leadership Team before being presented to the Education Committee and then the Board of Governors for consideration.

Chairman of Board of Governors _____

Date: _____

Appendix 1

STRATEGIES TO DE-ESCALATE SITUATIONS

The College actively promotes positive management strategies, thus reducing the need for the use of any form of physical intervention, except in emergency situations. All staff are aware of strategies and techniques for dealing with difficult situations and steps which they can take to defuse and de-escalate a situation. The strategies used are influenced by the age of the pupil and the context in which they are applied, and may include the following some of the following approaches.

1. Move calmly and confidently.
2. Make simple, clear statements. Avoid unnecessary use of language.*
3. Redirect and use implied compliance technique.
4. Use the pupil's name, but avoid too many "you" statements.
5. Use low, slow, steady, assertive voice. (Don't raise intonation.)
6. Recognise the feelings of the pupil.
7. Ignore secondary behaviours (e.g. tutting, swearing), which can be dealt with at another time.
8. Use open body language e.g. open palms, unfolded arms.
9. Allow the pupil personal space.
10. Give basic choices (e.g. "Stay here quietly" or "Move to Interview Room".)
11. Allow silences and pauses.
12. If necessary, summon help before the problem escalates.
13. If possible, remove any others from the immediate vicinity, apart from those who could provide assistance.
14. Ensure surrounding environment is safe.

* Don't say - Calm down
- Everything is going to be fine (i.e. no false promises)

Do say - We will sit down and see if we can work out a way forward
- I am here to listen
- Talk and I will listen

Appendix 2

INTERVENTION GUIDELINES

A calm and measured approach to a situation is needed and staff should never give the impression that they have lost their temper or are acting out of anger or frustration when handling a problem.

1. Tell the pupil to stop the inappropriate behaviour.
2. State clearly the desired behaviour.
3. Tell the pupil that physical intervention will take place if inappropriate behaviour continues (and then intervene quickly).
4. Repeatedly reassure the pupil and tell him/her that physical contact will stop as soon as he/she is ready to behave appropriately.
5. If possible, summon another adult.
6. Continue to communicate with the pupil throughout the incident in simple, clear statements. (Do not get involved in debates i.e. avoid unnecessary language).
7. Ensure the environment is safe.
8. Once the pupil stops the inappropriate behaviour, ensure constant supervision by two members of staff during the cooling down period.

Except in exceptional circumstances, staff should have another member of staff present before using physical intervention. There are situations where staff should not intervene without help. Assistance should be sought when dealing, for example, with:

- an older pupil;
- a physically large pupil;
- more than one pupil;
- when the teacher believes that he/she may be at risk of injury.

In those circumstances where the member of staff has decided that it is not appropriate to restrain the pupil without help, he/she should:

- remove other pupils who might be at risk;
- summon assistance from colleagues;
- where necessary, contact the PSNI;
- inform the pupil that help will be arriving;
- continue to attempt to defuse the situation orally, and try to prevent the incident from escalating.

Appendix 3

METHODIST COLLEGE BELFAST

RECORD OF THE USE OF SAFE HANDLING

SECTION A: *To be completed by a member of staff who used physical intervention*

Date of Incident: _____

Time of Incident: _____

Pupil's Name: _____

Tutor Group: _____

Name of staff completing form: _____

Staff involved in safe handling: _____

Designation: _____

Designation: _____

Designation: _____

Adult witness(es) to incident:

Pupil witness(es) to incident:

EVENTS LEADING UP TO THE INCIDENT

1. Where did the incident start? _____

2. What was happening at the time? _____

3. Describe the pupil's behaviour. _____

4. Describe the steps taken to de-escalate the situation before using physical intervention.

THE INCIDENT

Where did the incident occur? _____

What behaviour was the child presenting that warranted physical intervention?
(Please tick appropriate box)

At risk of injury to self or others *At risk of significant damage to property*

Compromising good order and discipline *At risk of committing a criminal offence*

What do you believe would have happened if there had been no physical intervention?

Describe the type of physical intervention used.

How long did the physical intervention last?

Was anybody injured? **YES/NO** If yes, please give details (and any treatment required).

Name of member of staff who verbally checked pupil for injury after the physical intervention

Actions taken following the incident

SECTION B: To be completed by Vice Principal (Pastoral) or Head of Pastoral Care

POST INCIDENT MANAGEMENT		
Parent/guardian informed by:	Direct contact <input type="checkbox"/>	Telephone <input type="checkbox"/> Letter <input type="checkbox"/>
Who informed the parent/guardian? _____		
Outline the parent/guardian's response _____		

School nurse informed: YES/NO	Accident Report Form completed: YES/NO	
Child Protection issue: YES/NO	SENCO informed:	YES/NO
Measures taken following the incident e.g. respite for pupil(s), support for teacher(s), pastoral programme, disciplinary action, risk assessment.		

Implications for Future Planning	
Has physical intervention been used with the pupil previously?	YES/NO
Does the pupil have an individual behaviour programme/education plan?	YES/NO
Do changes need to be made to any of the following? <i>(Please tick appropriate box)</i>	
The environment e.g. organisation, curriculum <input type="checkbox"/>	Targets for teaching new skills <input type="checkbox"/>
Reinforcement strategies <input type="checkbox"/>	Defusing and calming strategies <input type="checkbox"/>
Other <input type="checkbox"/>	Please specify _____
Do other agencies need to be involved in the future?	YES/NO
If yes, please specify who and with what aim. _____	

Section B completed by _____ Designation _____ Date _____

Principal's signature _____ Date _____

A copy should be sent to the Chairperson of the Board of Governors

Appendix 4

RISK ASSESSMENT AND RISK MANAGEMENT

These involve the process of identifying hazards, determining their predisposing, precipitating and perpetuating factors and developing strategies to either reduce the likelihood of their future occurrence, minimise the impact if they should occur or reduce the severity of an event in the least intrusive manner. An acceptable level of safety for others should be maintained. Risk management is not elimination of risk.

A small number of pupils may exhibit disturbed or distressing behaviour which may require some form of physical intervention by staff. To minimise the risk of incidents escalating unnecessarily the College carries out a risk assessment from two perspectives:

- environmental risk assessment;
- individual risk assessment.

Environmental Risk Assessment

- Identify situations or locations where there is increased risk of incidents happening
- Analyse past incidents to identify medium to high risk locations
- Consult individual pupil
- Consult staff and other pupils, if appropriate
- Decide the appropriate type and level of supervision
- The Principal makes recommendations to Board of Governors on type and level of supervision to minimise risk
- Implement plan
- Review plan

Individual Risk Assessment

When the College is aware that a pupil is likely to behave in a disruptive way that may require the use of safe handling, the school plans its response by:

- consulting the pupil, as appropriate;
- consulting the parents about specific action the school may need to take;
- briefing staff about what action they should be taking;
- providing training if necessary;
- drawing up a plan to manage the pupil – e.g. reactive strategies to de-escalate a conflict;
- ensuring that additional support can be summoned wherever possible;
- implementing plan;
- reviewing plan.

Risk reduction includes:

- proactive measures to support the pupil effectively and prevent difficulties emerging;
- early interventions to help the pupil in difficult situations and avert problems;
- planned measures to manage the pupil and others safely, when difficulties arise.

Appendix 5

This policy and our procedures have been formulated with due consideration to the following legislation:

Health and Safety at Work Act (NI) Order 1978;
United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child: International 1989 Articles 12, 16 and 19;
(UK 1991)
Children (NI) Order 1995
Education (NI) Order 1998 Articles 3 and 4
Human Rights Act 1998: Articles 3 and 5 of the European Convention on Human Rights;
Education and Libraries (NI) Order 2003 Articles 17, 18 and 19

This policy and our procedures have been developed in line with guidance from:

The Department of Education NI Circular 1999/9;
Pastoral Care in Schools: Child Protection: Code of Conduct for Staff 1999/10 paragraphs 69 to 72;
Pastoral Care in Schools: Promoting Positive Behaviour 2001;
The Department of Education NI “Towards a Model Policy in Schools on the Use of Reasonable Force” August 2002;
The Department of Education Circular 2003/13: Welfare and Protection of Pupils.
Regional Policy Framework on the Use of Reasonable Force/Safe Handling

Appendix 6

Links with Other Policies

This policy should be read in conjunction with the College's

Anti-Bullying Policy

Positive Behaviour Policy

Child Protection Policy

Code of Conduct for Pupils

Code of Conduct for Staff

Health and Safety Policy

Pastoral Care Policy

Parental Contact with the School about Concerns or Problems (Complaints Policy)

Special Educational Needs Policy