Physical Contact between Adults and Children Policy - Federation

Updating Policy Procedure

When a policy is due for review it will be emailed to the reviewer who will revise and highlight those updates and return the policy in full with the highlighted updates back to the Administrator.

When a policy reviewer becomes aware of ***any updates*** they will ask the Administrator to email the policy to them and follow the above procedure.

A policy is a statement of intent and the guidelines we follow, that is adopted by the Fortuna and Athena Federation's Governing Body.

Policy Reviewed by:	Andy Smallcombe - Joint Policy
Updated on:	January 2025
Date to be reviewed:	January 2026
Date ratified at FGM:	24/2/2025

The children referred to The Fortuna and Athena School have experienced unsettled and even traumatic events in their childhood. For some their interactions with adults have been uncertain, inconsistent, and possibly destructive and harmful.

When the children arrive at The Fortuna and Athena Schools, they might demonstrate their unwillingness to trust adults. They test the adults' intentions towards them through a variety of behaviours, including hostility and extreme non-compliance.

The cornerstone of our work is the relationships we build with individual children. The guiding influence for all our interactions is our duty of care to safeguarding the well-being of the child.

As the children begin to establish positive relationships with the adults, they begin to trust and attach to them, gradually able to rely on the care, comfort and support they provide. It follows that the children will demonstrate physical affection and this needs to be reciprocated.

Physical contact between adults and children is a sensitive and complex issue particularly within organisations identified as providing care and education for vulnerable children.

As professional carers, our duty is to always act in the interest of the children, putting them first, as a well-intentioned and responsible parent would seek to do. Our response to physical contact can be viewed in the context of a responsible parent.

Remember some children who have experienced inappropriate advances from adults may try to test out responses from their carers. Others may engage unknowingly in inappropriate language and actions or attempt to recreate unsafe situations they have known previously.

It is important to be open and direct in explaining to children the inappropriateness of some of their actions.

In order to balance the needs of the children for appropriate physical contact and child protection it is necessary to adhere to guidelines with regard to physical contact between adults/children.

Self-care needs:

The staff at the Fortuna and Athena Federation recognise that as a result of the developmental needs of some of the pupils, there may be times when pupils need support with basic self-care. For example, if they soil themselves or need help with changing, after PE.

Staff at the Fortuna and Athena Federation, support and foster pupil's independence in all aspects of their development, to support and prepare them for their later life.

In the instance of soiling, pupils would be encouraged to clean themselves up. School keeps clean clothes that can be used, if needed. If support or guidance was needed, a member of staff would ask for another member of staff to witness, as guidance was given. Basic self-care needs are discussed at interview so agreed levels of support would be agreed with parent or carer, at that time. If there was an incident where a pupil was unable to clean themselves or needed to take a shower, the school will contact parents/carers to seek advice and permission as to whether they are happy for staff to support. This, as with any element of the pupil's school life is communicated openly and transparently, working in partnership with home.

Guidelines:

- All children to understand that there are no secrets and a child can never be asked to keep a secret.
- Physical contact occurs openly and is witnessed.
- Physical contact is shared space and is on view.
- With the nurturing ethos; staff will respond to a child's need for a hug or reassuring hand on the shoulder or arm.
- If a child jumps up to be cuddled, place the child sideways on the hip – not face to face.
- If a child sits on lap – make sure the child is sideways on – with legs together and the adult's arm around their shoulder.
- If a child tries to sit inappropriately – openly and explicitly explain to them how we manage these situations – i.e.: "I don't feel comfortable, let's sit you this way, that's it – this is how we can sit and chat". This is safe for everyone.

This is not an exhaustive list and if staff are unsure regarding any situation of physical contact with a child, they should speak to the Senior Management Team.

For us to refuse to respond to a child's natural need to receive a cuddle, a hug or comforting arm from an adult would be to further damage the fragile esteem of our children.

A sensible, safe balance has to be achieved between physical contact and child protection in order to ensure complete safety.