



GUIDLINES TO PHYSICAL CONTACT WITH CHILDREN

Children's needs and abilities vary with age and development. Younger children are particularly vulnerable and require greater levels of supervision and support. Some older children might need additional support because they have a disability or an illness, because their life experiences have had an impact on their development or because they are vulnerable to sexual abuse and exploitation.

These guidelines are a reflection on what Ballarat Steiner School and Kindergarten believe are acceptable levels of physical contact with children. They are guidelines and each teacher must consider the diversity of children's needs as described above.

Physical touch is part of a child's experience of the world, how they experience and interact with the world, and how they learn to understand the world and how they feel comfort and support from those around them. Healthy touch always needs to be supportive, nurturing and appropriate.

At the Ballarat Steiner School and Kindergarten, we acknowledge the necessity for physical touch for a healthy experience for the children in both the kindergarten and the school, and acknowledge the need for this to be of a healthy and clear professional nature always.

Healthy and appropriate touch can be seen both in the intention of the giver and in the experience of the receiver. Physical touch must always be respectful to the individual, giving personal space and not overstepping. It must be appropriate with clear professional boundaries. Only if a student is in immediate danger, or is putting others in immediate danger, is the teacher to swiftly intervene and possibly move/remove a student physically.

The interaction of the teacher with the students can differ for a teacher the students know well, to casual relief teachers and visitors, who the student does not know well. Teachers who do not know the students well are encouraged to find non-physical ways of encouraging students and interacting with students, and for a teacher who know the students well, certain touch is acceptable and outlined below.

Acceptable touching guidelines

- Make physical contact with students in a way that makes them comfortable, e .g. shaking hands, a congratulatory pat on the back, or with very young students by gently guiding them or holding their hand for reassurance or encouragement.
- When students, particularly very young children, are hurt and seek comfort it is appropriate to provide reassurance by putting an arm around.
- Teachers to be alert to cues from students about how comfortable they are in your proximity and respect individual needs for personal space. If you make physical contact with students in

class demonstrations, such as sport, drama, or music lessons, explain the activity involved and what you will do.

- Be especially sensitive when interacting with students who may have poor 'boundaries' for appropriate behaviour after being traumatised by physical, emotional or sexual abuse, because they may misinterpret your actions.
- Develop a non-confrontational behaviour management style.
- When acting as a student's mentor, develop a relationship with clear professional boundaries that cannot be misinterpreted as a personal, rather than a professional.
- Be aware of cultural norms that may influence the interpretation of your behaviour towards students.