

Appendix 1 – Guidelines for Physical Interactions

Background

Physical contact is an important part of the interactions staff have with young children in the early childhood setting. It is particularly important that infants, toddlers and young children are in a warm and nurturing environment where they feel safe and cared for by staff.

Although KU takes child protection issues seriously, we do not want situations to occur where staff feel they cannot provide physical and emotional comfort to a child when required. There will also be situations where staff are required to work with individual children and may need to guide or direct their behaviour, and this may involve physical contact with children.

KU does not have a 'no touch' approach to staff interacting with children, however staff do need to be aware of appropriate ways to communicate and interact physically with the children in their care.

Given the very high volume of interactions that occur on a daily basis between children and their educators and carers, the possibility of inappropriate professional behaviour occurring, or for misunderstandings to form, is higher than in some other employment settings.

This is particularly the case when managing young children with challenging or non-compliant behaviour where that behaviour is causing disruption to others, or there is a risk of harm to the child, other children, or adults in the immediate environment. Below are some guidelines to assist staff with these events as they occur.

Remember, how you respond to a child will escalate or de-escalate the situation.

Guidelines

1. Moving the non-compliant child from A to B

Do	Do not
<p>Quietly prepare children for anticipated changes to routine.</p> <p>Use visuals/gesture/key word signing for a CALD child or a child with a communication disorder.</p> <p>Present a 'warm face'.</p>	<p>Come from behind the child without warning.</p>
<p>Give a verbal direction in a 'kind and firm' voice, e.g. 'Soon it will be time to come inside. You have a few minutes left to finish what you are doing'.</p>	<p>Give choices when there is an expectation of compliance, e.g.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Would you like to come inside now? • Would you like to finish what you are doing?
<p>Walk beside the child with a gentle hand on their back or around their elbow to guide them.</p>	<p>Pull a child up from a seated position to standing. Pull or grab a child by the hand, wrist, arm, or leg.</p>
<p>Offer your hand for the child to hold. The child is in control of the grip; your grip is responsive but loose, so if the child suddenly stops you do not pull, thus avoiding injury.</p>	<p>Push, pull or grab a child by the hand/wrist/arm/shoulders when they stop or show resistance.</p>
<p>Turn the request into a game, e.g. blow bubbles for the child to follow, make a train and each child join making up an additional carriage, etc.</p>	<p>Issue harsh or abrupt commands.</p> <p>Present an 'angry face' or use an 'angry voice'.</p> <p>Use belittling comments that humiliate or embarrass, e.g. tell the child they will go to a younger group until they can 'act their age'.</p>
<p>Call another staff member to assist if you are upset or frustrated with the child.</p>	<p>Deal with this situation if you are upset, frustrated, or angry with the child.</p>
<p>Provide visual supervision for a child who will not come inside/outside.</p>	<p>Chase or continually follow a child who will not come inside/outside.</p>
<p>Welcome the child back when they come to you.</p> <p>Help them to organise their feelings by naming and clarifying these feelings, e.g. 'You sound angry', or 'You seem sad'.</p>	<p>Comment about a child's non-compliant behaviour at this point. Teaching a child other ways to behave will happen later, when they are calm.</p>
<p>Assist them to settle at the next activity.</p>	<p>Leave them to find a new activity without support.</p>
<p>Talk about what happened once they are settled and explore/teach other ways of behaving. De-escalate first, and then teach.</p>	<p>Attempt to teach them another way of behaving while they are still upset or non-compliant.</p>

2. Group times

Do	Do not
Provide opportunities for children to be together in large and small groups throughout the day, if and when appropriate.	Expect all children to join in large and small group times every day or every time they occur.
Provide various teaching/learning experiences, both intentional and spontaneous, throughout the day to develop literacy, numeracy and other skills as age and stage appropriate.	Use 'school readiness' as a reason for expecting all children to join in group times, irrespective of their ability to sit, focus and gain from this experience.
<p>Provide support and guidance for children to attend and join in large and small groups such as:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Allow the child to sit at the front, back or on the edge of a group. • Provide a mat or carpet piece to show their 'own space'. • Use visuals to support behavioural expectations. • Have a supportive adult sitting beside the child. • Provide a gentle hand on the child's torso or elbow to redirect attention back to the group. 	Hold or restrain a child who is struggling, resistant or non-compliant during large or small group times.
Provide an acceptable alternate experience to engage the child when they do not want to join in large or small groups, e.g. give the child two choices, both of which are acceptable, such as 'You can sit quietly with the group here, or you can sit quietly here and draw.'	Belittle, humiliate, embarrass, punish, or use an angry voice with a child who is misbehaving or resistant to joining large or small group times.

3. Meal times

Do	Do not
Allow for progressive meal times in small groups when possible, in response to individual children's needs and hunger.	Always have large group meal times.
Have adults sitting at tables with children at meal times. Assist children to open packaged food if needed.	Have meal times where all adults are busy in tasks such as serving, cleaning up or other housekeeping duties, and there is no adult seated with the children.
Encourage good humour, quiet conversation, and pro-social behaviours (age/stage appropriate).	Stand over tables and issue directives to children about how to eat.
Encourage children to stay at the table to eat and drink.	Allow children to walk around the room with food or drink.
Place a gentle hand on the shoulder or arm to refocus the child on the meal.	Use any physical restraint to hold a child in their chair or on your lap if they have finished eating and want to leave the table.
Have another area where children can move to quietly while waiting for other children to finish. Ensure an adult is ready to receive them and settle them in to the next activity.	Have long waiting times at the table, or require children to line up either before, during or after they have eaten.
Notice individual children and give positive support to encourage desirable behaviours that are culturally appropriate. Name the positive things a child is doing.	Enter into battles with a child over food or show impatience with slow or fussy eaters.
Encourage children to try different foods, whether it is food provided by the centre or brought from home. Once the child has indicated they have eaten enough, quietly remove any uneaten food from the child. If they have brought their own food from home, encourage the child to place it back in their lunchbox and take it home so that their parent/s can see how much they have consumed.	Deny a child a drink or other food if they have not finished the first course. Embarrass or berate a child whose parent has sent food from home that is deemed to be 'unhealthy'. This needs to be discussed with the child's parent rather than with the child.

4. Toileting and nappy change times

Do	Do not
Respond to all children's needs to toilet or have their nappy changed promptly.	Wait for scheduled toileting or nappy change times to respond.
Use stairs or a hydraulic lift table to minimise the need for lifting. Seek the support of other staff if the child is resistant.	Restrain a struggling child.
Engage with and talk to the child about what you are doing. This helps to develop children's feelings of comfort, trust and autonomy.	Rush through these times by 'going through the motions'. Allocate one staff member to do all nappies at a designated time of the day irrespective to the child's needs.
Support toilet training in a sensitive way that responds to the individual needs of the child, in consultation with families.	Embarrass or humiliate a child who has a toileting 'accident', or threaten to put them in a nappy if they are in the process of toilet training.
Remind and encourage children to wash their hands after nappy change and toileting. Reinforce this through songs, visuals, and modelling.	Forcefully make a child wash their hands.
Teach children about good hygiene and toileting practises. Assist in cleaning up toileting accidents in a non-critical way.	Reprimand or make shame-provoking remarks and statements indicating frustration or disapproval.

5. Sleep/rest time

Do	Do not
Provide all children with opportunities to rest or sleep in accordance with their needs and in consultation with their family.	Require all children to lie down and rest or sleep each day.
Provide a choice between rest/sleep and quiet activities each day.	Hold or restrain a child on a bed or mat in order to rest or sleep.
Sit with a child to assist them to settle.	Provide heavy, forceful or prolonged 'patting' of children so they will sleep.
Provide a gentle hand on their back if required.	Stroke or pat a child anywhere except on the back and especially not below the waist.

6. Providing comfort

Do	Do not
Consider whose needs you are meeting when providing physical comfort to a child.	Expect or indicate to a child that they should provide physical comfort to an adult, e.g. 'I need a hug'.
Provide comfort as indicated by the child, within sight and sound of another staff member.	Withdraw a child to a room or area to provide comfort out of sight and sound of other staff.
Accept a kiss from a child on the cheek, if spontaneous and initiated by the child in view of other adults/parents, e.g. on departure.	Request that a child kiss you.
Provide a gentle hug in return.	Kiss a child in return.
Turn your head to the side to ensure that you receive the kiss on your cheek.	Allow a child to kiss you on the mouth.
Model respectful physical interactions when engaging with children in play. Calmly re-direct play with children who seek out boisterous physical contact with staff into more meaningful and supportive activities.	Tickle a child or overly excite children to interact with staff in full-bodied physical play.
Pick up, cradle and provide comfort to a baby who is crying.	Ignore a baby who is crying
Squat/sit down next to a child who is crying or upset, and put your arm around them gently to provide comfort as needed by the child, in sight and sound of another staff member.	Ask a child to give you a hug because you are upset or sad.
Allow a child who is crying to sit on your lap. Place your arm around them to provide comfort as required in sight and sound of another staff member.	Pick up and carry a child who is crying (WH&S).
Stand with a child at a gate or window if they are upset when a parent/caregiver leaves. Place a gentle arm around them for comfort.	Carry a crying or struggling child away when a parent/caregiver leaves.
Assist them to settle into play after the parent has left. Stay with them until they are calm and engaged in play.	Allow them to cry on their own without support.

7. Children's sexual behaviour

Do	Do not
Be understanding of children's curiosity about their bodies and other children's bodies and bodily functions and calmly intervene or redirect a child's behaviour.	Humiliate or belittle a child who is engaging in various forms of sexual play. Imply or communicate that the child is bad or naughty because of an action or word.
Practice calm reactions when responding to children's expressions of sexuality.	
Act promptly to stop certain behaviours that are inappropriate and seek advice if behaviour is of concern.	
Teach children about respectful interactions with other children.	
Communicate respectfully with families in private about sensitive issues related to children's sexual behaviour.	Discuss children's sexual behaviour with other families.
If in doubt that the child's sexual behaviour is not based on a natural curiosity, report the possibility of child abuse.	Avoid raising concerns or seeking appropriate professional advice.

8. Specific physical therapies

At times educators might be asked by families or by therapists employed by the family to administer specific physical therapies such as 'brushing' or 'deep pressure' to a child while attending the service. KU cannot support this request as our staff are not trained as therapists, and hence are unable to monitor the type and amount of pressure required. Also, services do not have the ratios required to administer 1:1 therapies to children whilst they are in our care.

We do, however, work with therapists and families to include activities and experiences in small groups or free play that may provide some of the benefits that the individual therapies are targeting. Please ask the child's therapist for sensory or movement activities that are suitable for inclusion into the daily routine for all children.

Do	Do not
Incorporate activities that enhance vestibular, proprioceptive or tactile development into the everyday program and routine. For example include, jumping, stomping, or movement that gives heavy impact to muscles and joints in a playful way during free play, transitions or groups times, and games, e.g. digging, wheel-barrowing, etc.	Withdraw a child to an area of the room or outside the room to administer 1:1 physical therapies, e.g. brushing or deep pressure therapy.
In KU services, consult your Education Support Manager for advice and suggestions.	

Warm, respectful physical interactions, when carried out with the child's best interests and welfare in mind, and in sight and sound of other staff, are a necessary part of the daily care and education of young children.