



PATRON
HM THE QUEEN



Oxford

Age Appropriate Interaction Guidelines

Policy Reviewed: 7th August 2018

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Next Review Date: 8th August 2019

Raised awareness

These guidelines are aimed at raising the awareness of staff of the messages being given to our young people with ASD or those perceived by them. Messages, both verbal and non-verbal, should be clear, unambiguous and consistent.

This is a challenge to members of staff: the staff team should work together to support each other in best practice. Where poor practice is observed this should be raised with your line manager or the Designated Safeguarding Lead.

Sometimes, learners will display child-like behaviour which may not be wholly appropriate when considering the age of the young person. Control your own response. Be aware of different types of touch and their purpose.

Questions to ask yourself

- Can I clearly justify what I am saying and how I am saying it?
- Could my tone of voice be construed as patronising, overly directive or abusive?
- Do I need to physically interact with the learner at this point?
- Is this how I would respond to any young person of the same age?

Touch / Physical interaction

All forms of touch should be clearly justifiable. Always cue a person in to impending touch. Always use proper names for body parts. It is essential that everyone applies the same basic rules to all learners to prevent confusion.

Personal care

Some of our learners may require assistance with their personal care. Where this is the case, information will be contained in the individual's care plan. The staff member undertaking personal care must always inform the person of what is happening. This is designed to relieve any potential embarrassment. Staff should be confident in what they are doing. No comments about the person, however light-hearted, should be made at this vulnerable time.

When engaging in personal care, best practice is for two staff members to be attending the learner. Where this is not possible, inform a colleague of what you are doing.

Allow the learner time to do as much for themselves as possible.

Do not talk about learners bodily functions "over their head" or in front of other people. Always include the learner in the hand over of information or do it privately.

Play

Several of our learners enjoy rough play with a member of staff. This should always be within a clear context and a specific area. The aim should be fun, not competition. Other adults should be around and be free to comment on what is happening, i.e. in a monitoring role ensuring that any interaction is acceptable.

Aim to make physical contact side to side. Face-to-face interaction should ideally be at arms length. If learners initiate close body contact redirect it swiftly and positively.

Do not at any time carry learners or give piggy backs.

Massage of head, hands or feet

This may be part of a learner's individual programme and must be delivered by appropriately trained staff. The context in which it is to be used must be clearly stated in writing.

Comfort

At times there will be a need to comfort or reassure young people. A nurturing environment is particularly important for our youngest learners.

It is acceptable to sit or stand next to a young person and put an arm round their shoulder.

Physical intervention

Any individual programme which requires a physical response must be written up and approved by the Head of School. At the discussion stage the effect of such a programme on other learners (i.e. mixed messages) must also be considered.

Displays of sexualised behaviour

Be aware that some of our young people have deficits in social understanding and that this part of their development will be incomplete but that their hormonal drives and sexual development may be consistent with their chronological age.

Many learners have difficulty in understanding and expressing their own sexuality. Displays of sexualised behaviour may be expected but should not be positively responded to. It is important that staff get over the message that individual learners are valued but no sexual approach should be accepted. Clear, consistent responses are essential.

Be aware of what is going on around you and redirect any inappropriate interaction in a proactive manner, i.e. give the learner something else to do rather than say "No". Model appropriate behaviour.

In the event of a sexual approach from a learner control your own response: do not appear shocked.

Each learner has a right to private time on his/her own. Always knock and pause before entering a young person's bedroom. Personal beliefs should not impinge on attitudes towards learners.

It is intended that these guidelines are as clear and unambiguous as possible. Please report any difficulties in using them to your line manager.

Sarah Sherwood

07.08.2018