

Physical Touch Policy

I want to clarify my position on physical touch so that parents are absolutely clear about what physical touch may occur in the playroom.



Physical touch is a natural part of human contact. It can be reassuring, comforting, express pleasure and celebrate success. However, children are very vulnerable, some will have experienced physical and sexual abuse, and all need protection from inappropriate physical contact.

Appropriate physical touch depends on the age of the child and the situation.

General rules of thumb:

- Appropriate physical touch initiated by a child will be reciprocated
- Appropriate touch consists of, but is not limited to, high fives, fist bumps, holding hands, hugs.
 - Examples include:
 - A child leads me across the room to another toy by taking my hand
 - A young child trips on a toy box and comes to sit in my lap for a reassuring cuddle
 - I rest my hand on the shoulder of an older child who is upset
 - Me and a child high five after they achieve something
 - A child wants to hug me goodbye at the end of a session

Rejecting appropriate physical touch can be very confusing for a child and make them feel like they have done something wrong. I believe it is healthy and helpful to model appropriate touch, especially for children who have experienced inappropriate touch by others.

Inappropriate physical touch

General rules of thumb:

- Inappropriate physical touch consists of, but is not limited to, touching of genitals and breasts, both above or underneath clothing, simulating sexual movements, touching a child without their permission or for extended and unnecessary periods of time.
 - Examples include:
 - A child sits on my lap but begins to gyrate
 - A child attempts to touch my breasts/genitals or pulls my hand onto theirs
 - I encourage a child to sit on my lap without reason (such as them being upset)
 - I continue trying to hug a child after they have let go

What will I do if a child initiates inappropriate physical touch?

- I will set a limit with the child, stating clearly the behaviour that is inappropriate and redirecting it:
 - For example, "The private parts of our bodies are not for touching by others. You can give me a hug".
- I will email parents to let them know and describe exactly what happened.
- I will inform my clinical supervisor and make a written report.

Because I work alone with a child and we are both vulnerable to accusations, I ask permission for play therapy sessions to be recorded, as a protection for me and the child. I hope this reassures parents that I behave in a manner that I am happy to have recorded, and if there were ever any cause for concern, recordings could be shared with my clinical supervisor for verification.