

Early Childhood Guidelines: Teacher-Student Contact

Duty of Care

In the education context, Duty of Care is a common concept that refers to the responsibility of staff to provide children with an adequate level of protection against harm. It is usually expressed as a duty to take reasonable care to protect children from all reasonably foreseeable risk of injury. In their relationships with children, educational staff are required to ensure that the physical and emotional wellbeing of children is safeguarded, and that their own behavior is guided by this duty of care both within and beyond the education setting.

Professional and Role Boundaries

Professional and role boundaries are parameters that describe limits of a relationship where one person entrusts their welfare and safety to a professional and often in circumstances where a power imbalance might exist. Education professionals rely on the fostering of positive relationships between adults and children. Learning settings are places where all staff can have significant influence in the lives of children because the relationship involves regular contact over relatively long periods of time. It is extremely important that educational staff understand how to foster positive relationships in ways that do not compromise the welfare of children in an education setting and in a personal capacity. All staff must follow the standards as outlined in the *Charter for the Protection of Children and Young People and Diocesan Safe Environment Regulations*.

Guidelines for Appropriate Contact

At times, educational staff will be required to use appropriate physical contact to support a child who is hurt or needs assistance or encouragement.

Examples of appropriate physical contact include:

- Assisting a child who is hurt (i.e. administering first aid)
- Comforting a child who is experiencing grief, loss, or distress using non-intrusive contact or gestures
- Encouraging or congratulating a child on a job well done using non-intrusive contact or gestures
- Assisting with personal care needs of a child with special needs (an individual plan for children with identified needs must be documented)

Examples of practices that support appropriate physical contact include:

- Seek a child's permission to make physical contact; keeping in mind that a highly distressed child may be incapable of expressing their wishes
- Use verbal and/or visual directions rather than physical contact prior to non-intrusive contact (i.e. ask a child to move in a particular way, rather than physically place the child)
- Provide appropriate strategies and techniques to build a child's ability to independently identify and care for social-emotional needs to minimize non-intrusive contact (i.e. transitions, circle time, centers, rest time)
- Respect and respond to signs that a child or young person is uncomfortable with physical contact
- Avoid being with a child in a one-to-one, out of sight situation, and refrain from physical contact with a child in such a situation (i.e. teacher buddy system)
- Formalize plans for responding to critical toileting situations and other challenging behaviors to ensure they are understood by staff and parents