

Maintaining Personal Space with Students

This document outlines guidelines and key documents for maintaining personal space with students to ensure safety for both students and staff. The **role of consent** is essential in maintaining safe and respectful relationships within schools. Being respectful of someone's personal space is a **social skill** and often needs to be taught explicitly, including teaching respect for personal boundaries and **consent education** at all ages K-12.

It is recommended that School Teams:

- Familiarize themselves with [Non-Violent Crisis Intervention](#)
- Collaboratively develop personalized [Student Support Plans](#)
- Seek [District Collaborative Support](#) for students that demonstrate complex behaviours that may require support

Physical contact for all other purposes, including escorts to support a student to a safe place, is only appropriate as a last resort/ emergency situation. Offering time and space to any individual who is escalated is the most effective strategy.

Best Practices When Working with School-Aged Children:

- Touch should only occur with a student's permission. Do not presume that physical contact is acceptable. Non-speaking students can communicate consent through AAC, visuals and sign.
- Touch may include non-intrusive physical prompts (ie. pat on the upper arm, shaking hands, arm across shoulder while standing shoulder to shoulder and hip to hip).
- The reasons for touch should be explained and clarified beforehand.
- Touch needs to be governed by the student's age, ability and development level.
- The use of verbal direction and visuals is preferable to the use of touch.
- In some circumstances, young children may have expectations for hugs, cuddles, sitting on lap and/or handholding. In such situations, staff members will need to be sensitive and assist the student in developing a replacement behavior.
- Touch can occur when the provision of physical assistance is essential as outlined in a student's IEP (eg. mobility, personal care or sensory needs).

In an emergency situation where physical restraint is employed as a last resort, please refer to [Policy](#) and [Regulation](#) 6164.03 Physical Restraint Hold/Physical Interventions or Seclusion. Please refer to pages five and six of the [Regulation](#) and complete appropriate paperwork.