

Intimate Care policy

Introduction

The Board of Management of Saplings Goresbridge is committed to taking every precaution to protect students and staff from any form of abuse or harm. It is the aim of Saplings Goresbridge to ensure that our policies are in accordance with the ethos and values of Saplings as a patron body and in accordance with the Child Protection and D.E.S. Guidelines.

Staff involved with intimate care need to be sensitive to the student's needs. They also need to be aware that some adults may use intimate care as an opportunity to abuse students, and bear in mind that some care tasks or treatments could be open to possible misinterpretation. False allegations of sexual abuse are extremely rare but certain basic guidelines will safeguard both student and staff. Everyone is safer if expectations are clear and approaches are consistent as far as possible.

Vision and Aims

All the students we work with have the right to be safe and to be treated with dignity and respect. This policy is designed to safeguard both our pupils and staff and applies to all staff involved with the intimate care of students at Saplings Goresbridge. It aims to support best practice in intimate care.

Definition of Intimate Care

Intimate care is defined as care tasks of an intimate nature, associated with bodily functions, body products, medication and personal hygiene which need direct or indirect contact with or exposure of the child's body.

Induction programmes

The Board of Management will make every effort to ensure that all staff are trained and supported in the area of intimate care. All new staff will in future be given a copy of the intimate care policy and a member of the in school management team will discuss principles and practice in relation to intimate physical care.

The staff at Saplings Goresbridge are expected to familiarise themselves with the Intimate Care Policy and be aware of the standards expected of them. The Intimate Care Policy will be discussed with existing staff following review or ratification by the Board of Management during a whole staff meeting. This is essential to increase knowledge, enhance skills and promote good practice but also to provide a forum for staff to re-assess their own attitudes and values in this sensitive area. If a staff member cannot work within this policy for any reason, they should inform the Principal.

This policy is intended to work in conjunction with all other policies concerning child protection, including child protection itself, toileting, swimming etc.

Practice in Intimate Care

The staff will establish good working practices regarding wearing of protective clothing (e.g. gloves) and ensure safe practice in relation to procedures carried out. Where possible, events requiring intimate care assistance will be identified in advance. Should an emergency

arise where assistance is required (e.g. out of school activities) and where surroundings are not ideal, the principles of privacy and dignity will be respected.

All staff are expected to:

- ✓ Encourage the student to have a positive image of their own body.
- ✓ Get to know the students in their class and gain an appreciation of his/ her moods, likes/ dislikes and verbal and non-verbal communication.
- ✓ Have a knowledge and understanding of any religious or cultural sensitivity related to aspects on intimate care for the students in their class.
- ✓ Address the student by name so that she/ he is aware of being the focus of the activity.
- ✓ Use only actions, comments and remarks that are relevant to the circumstances.
- ✓ Explain what is happening in a straightforward and reassuring way. In this way the student is prepared for and can anticipate your assistance. Initially approach the student from the front, make eye contact and use their name.
- ✓ Be careful that in intimate care, the touch should be affirmative and supportive, not rough or insensitive.
- ✓ Use visual cues such as pointing to a sponge or pad, use a picture schedule or board or any other appropriate aid to signal intention to wash or change (where the student has very limited communication).
- ✓ Use discreet observation to see if a pad etc needs changing.
- ✓ Change or toilet students, one at a time. Ensure supplies of fresh clothes are to hand so that the student is not left unattended while items are found.
- ✓ All staff are given access to protective clothing, such as gloves and disposable aprons and ensure that they are used where necessary. A supply of these is kept in the bathrooms to ensure a child is not left unattended when being changed.
- ✓ Special care should be taken when disposing of soiled materials.
- ✓ Check in advance where possible that suitable facilities exist for intimate care procedures when on school trips etc. Procedures for same to be discussed with staff for community outings.
- ✓ Never carry out an intimate care procedure unless the staff member knows how to carry it out correctly. If in doubt, staff will seek help or advice before commencing.
- ✓ Do not allow a student assist another student with his/ her intimate care needs.

The Board of Management will provide facilities which afford privacy and modesty and provide sufficient space, heating and ventilation to ensure the student's safety and comfort.

Consent

Intimate care procedures, no matter how frequently they occur, are personal in nature. It is therefore important that individuals are encouraged to give consent and this will differ according to each student. For some it will be by the use of language (verbal or non-verbal) while for others it may be by means of physical expression or behaviour. Staff should familiarise themselves with how individuals convey this consent. Staff must at all times respond with understanding. It is important to consult with parents/ guardians to gain valuable guidance in relation to the personal care needs of the student.

Staff

Each staff member will:

- ✓ Carry out intimate care procedures/ practices in a dignified and respectful manner allowing the student as much privacy as possible.
- ✓ Respect each student's independence and involve the student in the planning and delivery of their own care.
- ✓ Ensure that details regarding intimate care be kept private between school nurse, teacher and staff member concerned with intimate care at all times.

The student's preference regarding individual staff to be involved in an intimate care procedure will be respected where staffing and resources permit. As a reasonable precaution and in keeping with best practice, when toileting a child, staff members must **discreetly** make their intention and purpose known to another staff member in the building. Before commencing a procedure involving intimate care, staff should ensure that there is another member of staff available to assist. This must be balanced by the need for privacy for the individuals concerned.

Where possible, the door should be left slightly open being mindful of the dignity of the child at all times. For the safety and consideration of all pupils and staff, no staff member should ever be in the bathroom on their own with a child.

With consideration for the privacy and personal safety skills of the children, substitute staff will not as a rule have primary responsibility for needs related to intimate care.

Reporting

If during the intimate care of a student:

- You accidentally hurt the student.
- The student seems unusually sore, tender or bruised in any area of the body.
- The student appears to misunderstand or misinterpret what is said or done.
- The student has a very emotional reaction without apparent cause.

Staff must report any such incident **immediately** to the Principal. Any of these might later become a cause for concern if not reported.

In the event that any staff member has reason to be concerned of possibility of abuse, the Principal (Designated Liaison Person) will refer to the [Child Safeguarding Statement](#) and Children First Guidelines.

Touch/Massage

Massage by staff will be undertaken with the express permission of the Principal and parent/ guardian. When using massage, staff must recognise the student's vulnerability. Approaching a person through touch in this way will be done within a relationship of trust built up gradually with staff who know the student well and who can sensitively interpret and respond to the student's reactions. Massage must be discontinued at the first indication of the student's wishes to do so.

Sexual Aspects of Intimate Care

As part of normal development, interest in one's own body and other people's bodies may be evident. People with autism or learning disabilities develop the same feelings and needs as others, though understanding and expressing these may be difficult.

If the student shows signs of becoming sexually aroused during an intimate care procedure, staff must report this matter to the class teacher, who will then inform the Principal. In such a case, individual guidelines will be drawn up by the relevant personnel.

As a general guideline, physical contact will not be undertaken while someone is sexually aroused.

Inappropriate Sexualised Behaviours

As detailed above, personal behaviours, such as touching private body parts, are a fact of life – learning when and in what places it is appropriate to touch private body parts can be more challenging for young people with autism or learning disabilities.

If a student is displaying inappropriate sexualised behaviours, and no child protection issues are raised or noted, the pupil will be redirected to an appropriate task or activity. In all instances of inappropriate sexualised behaviours this should be **discreetly** brought to the class teacher's attention as soon as possible. If the inappropriate behaviour continues, an intervention programme, aimed at decreasing the behaviour, will be devised involving the parents, Class Teacher, Behaviour Analyst, SNAs and multi-disciplinary support staff (where relevant). No child will ever be reprimanded for inappropriate sexual behaviour.

It is preferable to develop a proactive rather than reactive approach to managing behaviours. Any behaviour intervention will be reviewed frequently by the change, to multi-disciplinary school team and in consultation with parents. Saplings Goresbridge recognises that some parents may find it difficult to discuss their son or daughter's sexualised behaviours in a public forum and may prefer to conduct such conversations over the telephone or in a meeting with only two staff members present.

Saplings Goresbridge recognises that a sudden increase in sexualised behaviours may, very occasionally, be the result of sexual abuse and as such, we will monitor, record and report any significant changes in sexual behaviour in accordance with [Child Safeguarding Guidelines](#).

Menstruation

Menstruation is a normal physical function but the student may often require extra reassurance and guidance. The student may require instruction, visual or verbal prompts, or assistance to cope with the practical aspects of menstruation. Such assistance should always be provided by female staff. Internal sanitary protection must not be used except in situations where the person can independently attend to their own menstrual needs.

Policy Review

It is fully acknowledged by all parties that this intimate care policy will be reviewed from time to time to ensure that it is kept up to date and that it retains its relevance. Ongoing

evaluation and new approaches to education as well as Department guidelines may require this document to be modified.

 **Ratification and Communication**

This **Intimate Care Policy** was reviewed by the Board of Management of Saplings Special School Goresbridge at its meeting held on **28th April 2025** and will be communicated to all stakeholders by means of agreed minutes.

Signed:..... (*Principal*)

Signed:..... (*Chairperson*)

Date:.....