

## **SUPPORT/ACTION PLAN**

(Submitted by Janet Stauffer)

I am creating this support plan with the intent to address the matter of the appropriate and inappropriate touch that is occurring within the hallways at the middle school where I am a 7<sup>th</sup> grade teacher. An action plan that focuses on bullying is currently in use within the classrooms of my middle school. The support plan for touch could be embedded within the presentational components and time allotted for the anti-bullying program.

Currently in our school, various forms of physical touch between students are being observed by the teaching staff, including myself. These forms of touch are occurring most often as the students visit their lockers and pass between classes. It is difficult to identify which forms of touch are appropriate for the school environment. Obvious forms of inappropriate physical touch are not what I hope to address in this support plan. The types of touch in this support plan are those that fall into a gray area. These are types of touch that can be and are interpreted differently by the diverse individuals of all ages that are present within our educational setting.

In order to develop this behavior plan, however, the observable physical touching that is in question needs to be identified. What does it look like? Where and when does it occur? What students are involved with this touching? Are any interventions to curtail or discourage the touching being communicated? Are these interventions effective?

Once the touching behaviors are clearly described, then a process can ensue to create the methods for a positive approach for addressing the issue of appropriate and inappropriate touch. It is important that the values of all of the individuals that participate in the development of this support plan and those affected by this plan are received with sensitivity and understanding.

*Beliefs: Every family, culture and religion has its own beliefs about every kind of touch.*

Prior to beginning the steps of this action plan, a committee needs to be assembled. The individuals that will be part of the planning phase are important and should be a varied group of individuals. This committee should include an individual familiar with this action plan, a member of the school administration, several teachers from different grade levels and subject areas, a guidance counselor, parent volunteers and a heterogeneous group of students. One of these group members should serve as a secretary and take notes, gather paperwork and compile the information gleaned from the planning phase. The planning phase should allot enough time to thoughtfully work through the action plan steps that follow:

## **Steps of the Action Plan:**

### Identification of the Behaviors of Concern

Together, the action planning committee will brainstorm a list of the types of physical touching that have been observed within our school.

### Description of Behaviors

The committee members will clarify what each touching behavior looks like. These descriptions need to be specific, so as not to confuse one kind of touch with another.

Upon completion of the touch descriptions, the committee members would then attempt to classify the forms of touch into 5 different areas.

## **5 Categories of Touch**

Nurturing Touch – a comforting touch, mostly for the sake of the one being touched

Examples: a pat on the back, brushing someone's hair or holding someone who is crying person

Affectionate Touch – more equally balanced between two people. This touch shows affection caring and joy.

Examples: brief hugs, brief kisses, holding hands, a high-five

Sexual Touch – may last longer, be softer, involve sexual parts of the body

Examples: longer hugs or kisses, sexual intercourse, massage

Violent Touch – touch that physically hurts someone; shows anger or power

Examples: slapping or shoving someone; pulling hair; spanking a child

Exploitive Touch – mostly for the sake of the one doing the touching. One person may feel tricked, teased, pushed, threatened or forced into touching.

Examples: child sexual abuse, being teased into touch by your friends, being pinched on a private part, being touched roughly when you expect gentleness and being forced into sexual touch by someone you go out with.

Now it will be the committee member's job to identify what categories of touch they feel are acceptable in the school environment. In order to do this, each committee member will be asked to personally reflect on their personal beliefs by listing the reasons they feel that people touch other people. As a follow-up, the committee members will then compare reasons for touch with kinds of touch and again evaluate what is appropriate for

the school environment.

It is my personal assumption that the committee will decide that the Nurturing and Affectionate types of touch will be the acceptable forms of touch for the school setting. At this point, additional examples of touch for the 5 categories can be added, for purposes of more clearly identifying what is affectionate and nurturing touch as opposed to sexual, violent or exploitive touch.

#### Behavioral Interventions

The committee members will need to discuss and brainstorm for strategies that can be utilized in order to discourage inappropriate touching. These strategies may include distancing certain students or altering the environment.

Committee members will also need to brainstorm for more acceptable forms of touch that can replace the inappropriate ones.

#### Positive Reinforcement

The committee will now discuss positive ways to reward students who follow directives and utilize replacement touching that is appropriate. A possible positive reinforcement could be simple verbal recognition from teaching staff. This verbal recognition could be accompanied by an invitation to be part of the school-wide touch awareness component that will be put into place upon the conclusion of this action plan.

When the action plan is completed, the information generated by the committee should be compiled into an easy to read and refer to booklet that can be disseminated to the faculty.

#### Documentation

When the action plan to address inappropriate touching is in effect, some form of documentation should be utilized. This documentation should record the occurrences of touch, the type of touch, location/setting, the intervention(s) utilized and the outcome of the interventions.

#### Follow-up to the Action Plan (with the middle school students)

Upon completion of the Action Plan and the accompanying booklet, it would be an appropriate time to incorporate the contents of the Action Plan into the existing anti-bullying program in my middle school.

When the students meet for their bi-weekly class meetings, each step of the action plan to address inappropriate touching should be discussed as a group. Prior to initiating this action plan, those individuals that were part of the planning phase, need to fully understand the contents and commit to spending time within the class meetings to carry out the steps of the action plan for appropriate touch. \*Student volunteers need to be solicited to record all of the discussion responses and the subsequent lists that are developed.

Topics or discussion starters for the bi-weekly meetings/group discussions should include:

1. List all of the ways that people touch
  - can touch be a good thing? Why?
2. Decide what forms of touch are healthy and what forms of touch are damaging
  - Why is touch so hard to figure out?
  - Is all touch sexual?
  - What types are not sexual?
  - What kinds of touch are never OK?
3. Discuss the human hunger for touch
  - Do you need to ask before touch?
  - How can you meet your touch needs constructively?
  - Is age a part of distinguishing the types of touch?
4. Define the Five Basic Kinds of Touch (Nurturing, Affectionate, Sexual, Violent and Exploitive)
5. List examples of what each of these forms of touch look like.
6. Chose the forms of touch that are appropriate for the school environment.
7. Again, list examples and non-examples of acceptable forms of touch for the school environment.
8. Compile a list of replacement forms of touch for those forms that are unacceptable in the school environment.
9. Develop an Agreement Plan that states the individual rights of every type of students. Pertaining to touch, what human rights do students have? What human rights do students never have?
10. Give examples of the types of in-school scenarios where students should have rights to certain kinds of touch. Give examples of the types of in-school scenarios where students should never have the right to touch.

FINALLY:

This time, compile an easy to read and easy to refer to student version of a booklet that summarizes all of the information that was gleaned from the class meetings with the student body. Make these booklets available for student, parent and faculty reference (in the classrooms, administrative offices, etc.)

Assure that the student body has been exposed to this information understands it and is aware that it will be adhered to.

Review and revise the information as needed.

*My personal reflections:*

*I believe that an action plan like this is overdue in my school. I think that it would arouse some very interesting and enlightening conversations among the adults that formulate the plan and among the students who carry it through. Most likely it will ruffle some feathers even before the planning would start! Just this week there was a difference of opinion about whether a boy should be disciplined for giving another boy a “purple nerple”, more commonly known as a “tit twister”. Even though it is hard to reach a comfortable consensus, whether or not this warrants disciplinary action should be ironed out. The students are hungry for some guidelines for touch. An action plan needs to be carried through and the guidelines followed as closely as any other disciplinary or behavioral guidelines within the educational environment of our school building.*

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