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Restraining Pupils – Use of Force

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Education Act 1996 forbids corporal punishment but allows teachers to use reasonable force to prevent a pupil from:

- Committing a criminal offence
- Injuring themselves or others
- Damaging property
- Acting in a way that is counter to maintaining good order and discipline at the school

When force is necessary, it must be used in ways that maintain the safety and dignity of all concerned.

Distinguish between:

- **Planned interventions** where staff employ prearranged strategies and methods that are based upon a risk assessment. There should be agreed in advance (and described in writing) by a multidisciplinary or school team working in consultation with the child and those with parental responsibility. The intervention should be implemented under the supervision of a member of staff who has undertaken appropriate training.
- **Emergency** or unplanned use of force which occurs in response to unforeseen events

Scale and nature of any physical intervention must be proportionate to both the behaviour of the individual to be controlled, and the nature of the harm they might cause.

Use of force is likely to be legally defensible when it is required to prevent:

- Self-harming
- Injury to other children, staff or teachers
- Damage to property
- An offence being committed
- Any behaviour prejudicial to the maintenance of good order and discipline

High risk:

- Use of clothing or belts to restrict movement
- Holding someone who is lying on the floor or forcing them onto the floor
- Any procedure which restricts breathing or impedes the airways
- Seclusion, where a child is forced to spend time alone in a room against their will
- Extending or flexing the joints or putting pressure on the joints
- Pressure on the neck, chest, abdomen or groin areas

Primary prevention:

- Ensuring staff are not left in vulnerable positions
- Helping children to avoid situations which are known to provoke violent or aggressive behaviour
- Positive Handling Plans
- Creating opportunities for children to engage in meaningful activities which include opportunities for choice and a sense of achievement (put the worksheet away!)
- Developing staff expertise
- Consulting children and those with parental responsibility about the ways in which they prefer to be managed

Secondary prevention or diffusion techniques:

- Distraction – phone call, urgent message etc
- Recognising the early stages of a behaviour sequence and intervening early
- Leading/inviting the child away to a quieter, less public space
- Removing the audience
- Listening/not reacting/waiting for the anger to subside
- Lowering the voice and softening vocal tones
- Softening your physical language
- Repeating a key word or phrase, 'Keep your hands down'
- De-personalising the confrontation, 'Try and get control of your anger' rather than, 'Get control of yourself!'
- Offering help rather than criticism, 'What do you need me to do', 'Do you need to be left alone?' 'Would you like to sit down?' 'Is there someone you need to speak to?'
- Asking questions or suggesting alternatives rather than giving advice or instructions