

## Male teachers and the way they relate physically to young children

In the current public consciousness about teachers generally, *any* such use of ‘touch’, or an affirming pat on the arm, or an arm around the shoulders ... needs collegial consideration. What is appropriate? What do we mean by *appropriate*? Normally we would not need to ask that question; common sense, professionalism, decency and emotional intelligence ought to be adequate. As teachers we have a significant duty-of-care role (for a third of a child’s waking day) and we stand as *noblesse oblige* in relation to children.

In ‘today’s climate’ some parents/carers will register concern about the normal, tactile behaviour of teachers – most particularly male teachers. While most early years teachers are female, there are many subject teachers who are male (and, of course, senior male staff).

It is unfortunate that when a male teacher ‘touches’ a child (in a normal, affirming way) that it may be seen – perhaps – as ‘ethically ambiguous’ in a way it would not be with a female teacher. Females (in all cultures) are traditionally seen as nurturing, caring, protective. Most male teachers – too – are (naturally) nurturing, caring, and protective, but in the ‘public context’ of education, and the care-giving aspect of a teacher’s role these days, the male teacher has to have a heightened consciousness regarding how they relate physically to young children.

- Touch on the upper arm (no arms around waist, or drawing a child closer with arm around the waist or neck; no sitting of child on the lap). One can image a parent seeing a child sitting on a male teacher’s lap as ‘significantly different’ from a child sitting on a female teacher’s lap.
- If a child is distressed, while any male teacher, we would hope, will give obvious verbal assurance – and calming – it will help to have a female teacher present to extend any ‘physical reassurance’.
- In any one-to-one chat with a child (p. 102f) (say an after-class chat, or a behaviour interview) – with a female child and male teacher – we would leave the classroom door open. In any *extended* one-to-one chat, or behaviour interview by a male teacher with a *female* child, it will help to have a female colleague present. She does not need to be ‘involved’ in the interview, necessarily, but it is helpful if she is *there*, abstractedly doing her work programme (whatever). It enables that ethical probity.

It seems annoyingly cautious (and I hope not professionally patronising to my male colleagues!) that I have spent a little time on this topic. It only takes a few unthinkably swinish, evil, men in our profession to cast a slur on all male teachers. (Bill)

## Behaviour Management with Young Children

There is television exposure (as there should be) each year, detailing the rare – but horrific – cases.

Children need positive, affirming, caring, morally strong, male role-models in their lives. Schooling forms a critically important part of a child's life and their development. It would be very sad if the right males self-exclude from our profession because of fear of any social taint simply because they are *male* teachers.