



Appropriate Touch

Activities to try at home for those on the Autistic Spectrum...



Contents

Appropriate Touch activities to do at home.....	3
Putting the above into practice when at home/school/or just out and about.....	4-5
Identifying and Listing People According to Groups.....	6-12
Introduction to the topic of touch.....	13-14
Teaching a child what to do if someone touches them in a way that's wrong.....	15
Teaching a child/young person how to manage the urge to touch inappropriately...	16
How to manage the need to touch oneself- teaching personal space.....	17
Proximity when touching/Accidental Touches.....	18

Appropriate Touch - activities to use at home

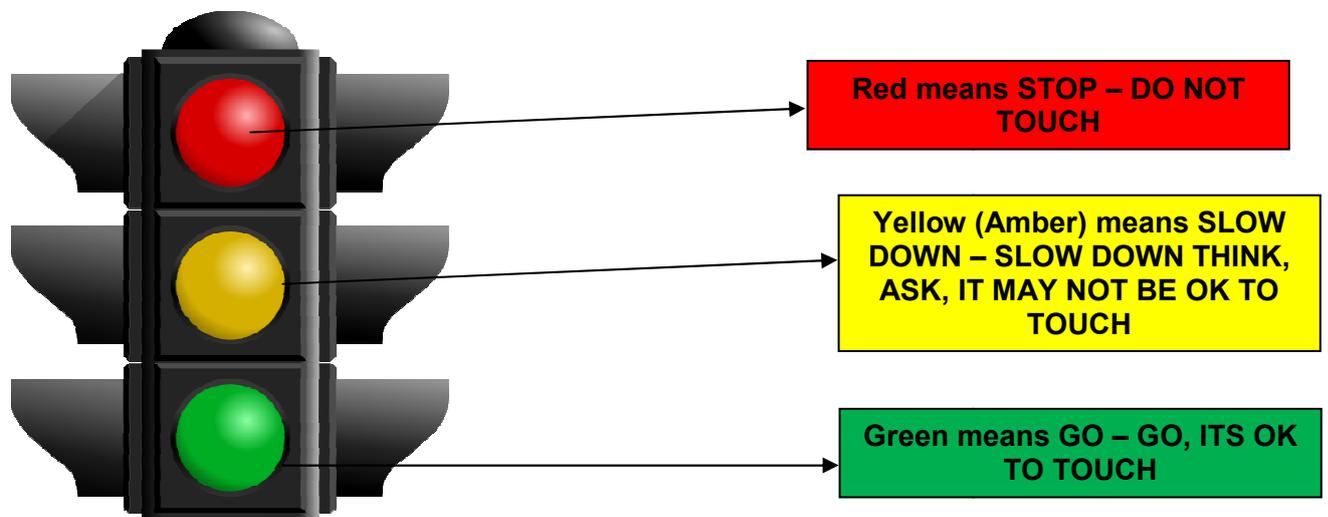
Touch is an important sensory process for any child, young person or adult with Autism. Touch can help identify objects, people, and environments without the need for effective communication. Touch can also be a sensory seeking activity which can be used to calm or soothe sensory overload. It is vital that children, young people and adults with Autism understand 'appropriate touch'.

Using the following resource we can help children and teens on the Autism Spectrum understand the complexities of physical interaction

(Resource used is Autism and Appropriate Touch by Abigail Werner James)

To begin to be able to explain 'appropriate touch' to those on the Autistic Spectrum it is vital we use visualisation to enhance the understanding of what is considered 'appropriate'.

- There are instances where it is definitely in-appropriate to use forms of touch – these are considered red
- There are instances where it could be in-appropriate to use forms of touch depending on the person, object, place, relationship and any other environmental factors – these are considered yellow/amber
- There are instances where it will always be appropriate to use forms of touch – these are considered green



Ask the team at ASD Helping Hands to create you a visual resource which can be placed on a keyring to help you reinforce these colours or create your own.

Putting the above into practice when at home/school/or just out and about

Once your child/young person can identify the correct colour with the correct action using some easy examples (see below) then we can start to develop these strategies further.

To check whether your child or young person is able to use the traffic light system try the following examples:-

- Boiling Kettle - red
- Front Door – could be amber/green/red
- TV Screen – could be amber/green
- Mum – could be amber/green
- Dad – could be amber/green
- Pet – could be amber/green/red
- Sibling – could be amber/green

Try thinking of your own to try out.

Try to encourage your child/young person to practice not touching and thinking/asking before touching i.e. using your red and amber/yellow cards

Next Steps

1. photocopy the cards from the next page
2. Colour and cut out the rectangles (you can do this activity with your child/young person)
3. Place or attach the coloured cards around the room, attempting to put green cards on areas that are OK for the child/young person to touch (such as something that belongs to them) red cards on things that are not OK for the child/young person to touch (such as ovens) and yellow/amber cards on items that the child/young person should discuss with someone before touching (such as a parent's bag)
4. Explain to your child/young person that if he or she sees a red card, he or she should not touch the item; that if he/she sees a yellow/amber card they should think and ask before touching; and that if he/she sees a green card, he or she may touch the item
5. Walk around the environment (home/school) with the child/young person pointing out coloured cards (if needed) and assist with processing how to handle each item with a colour.

This activity may assist the child/young person in better understanding appropriate touch when the body is being discussed.

Red Red Red Red Red

Yellow Yellow Yellow Yellow Yellow

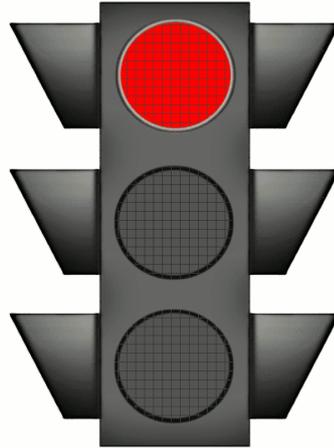
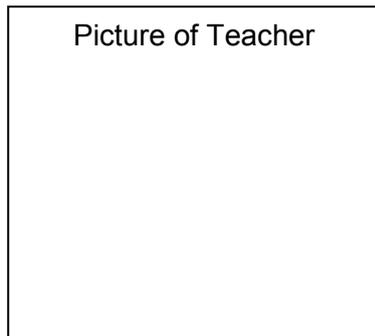
Green Green Green Green Green

Identifying and Listing People According to Groups

This activity is for a parent or guardian to assist with the child/young person in making lists of people with whom the child/young person comes into contact.

These lists can use words alone, or, to assist with the child/young person, can also include attached photos of the people listed.

You could also create a scrapbook for touch where you could have the following:



DO NOT TOUCH

This activity is important as it will help the child/young person understand those in each of these groups since appropriate touch differ greatly between people-groups.

Activity Instructions (2)

1. Photocopy the descriptions of different people-groups guidelines for parents or guardians to assist the child/young person in creating the lists as outlined
2. Photocopy the organising people into groups worksheet for each people group to assist in making these lists
3. Decide whether your child/young person's list should include photos (if possible) in addition to written words
4. After completing or obtaining completed copies of the child/young person's people-group worksheets, set them aside for later

N.B.

Numerous categories may be helpful for higher-functioning Autistic Children and young people, if you feel that your child or young person will not be able to comprehend this number of categories, you can adapt the material to have fewer categories

For example there could be a "close family" category for the mother, father, grandparents etc and then a "community members" category for everyone else with exceptions of those they come into contact from a health perspective like the ADHD nurse/Paediatrician/Occupational Therapist etc

This change would allow you to communicate that permissive touching such as hugging, kissing on the cheek is only allowed with Mum, Dad and grandparents and that for everyone else the child/young person should only shake hands/offer a high five.

This may also help the parent to be sure that the child/young person knows where to seek physical affective without accidentally touching someone in a way that is inappropriate. Most children and young people are sensory seekers therefore at particular times they will seek out touch. An example of this is with my partner where he will grab my arm and place the back of my hand against his cheek to soothe him and to assist with reduction of frustration levels and distractions from within the brain.

Activity 2 (Photocopies) – parent guide for completing lists

Doctors, Nurses, Medical People, First Aiders should include any doctor or nurse who the child/young person knows by name as well as the titles of generic positions or generic pictures of those in the medical field

Close family members and adult friends who are like family should include any trusted adult who plays a care-giving role or who the parent or guardian views as being emotionally nearly as close to a trustworthy parent (include step parents etc/partners/family friends) This list may range from including one parent or guardian, to including many people i.e. both parents, older siblings, cousins, grandparents, aunts, uncles, family friends. If a family is very physically affectionate with extended family members, there may be more people on the list. If a family is not as physically affectionate, there may be fewer people listed.

Younger children should include the names of young children – approximately four years old or younger with whom the child/young person comes into contact. The age of four is based on the idea that it is often after that age that most children can toilet with more independence. This is not to say that children beyond aged four suddenly require less physical touch – but rather that some of the physical interactions that were acceptable with babies and toddlers are no longer appropriate. This list may include siblings, cousins, neighbours, or children of family friends

Peers should include the names of children around the same age as the child with whom they interact with. This list may include class members from school, neighbours, after-school clubs, or outside school based clubs. This list may say “Kids from school” if names are not known/or even if known

Teachers should include the names of teachers or coaches with whom the child/young person interacts at school or after-school clubs, as well as helpers or other professionals who may help the child/young person at home, in the community, or at school i.e. teaching assistants

More distant family members and Adult Friends should include the names of family members and family friends with whom the child/young person’s relationship is similar to that of an acquaintance – friendly but not as emotionally close or trusted as a ‘close’ family member. This list may include grandparents, aunts, uncles, neighbours or other adult friends. Friends who are older than the child/young person should be included as well.

Community Members and Strangers should include the names or the job titles of those community members with whom the child/young person comes into contact. This list may include waitresses, postman/postwoman, people who work in shops, librarians, bus drivers etc. Include actual or generic pictures of community helpers, as well as pictures of people the child/young person does not know to represent strangers. While it may seem odd at first that community members with whom the child/young person may be familiar are in the same list as “strangers”. This is an opportunity to talk with the child/young people about how they are similar; just because one is accustomed to seeing the same smiling person deliver the mail every day does not mean that the postman is a friend. You can also discuss familiarity with seeing a person does not mean that the individual knows the person well.

Examples of Lists

Organising people into groups: Doctors, Nurses, Medical People, First Aiders

Organising people into groups: Close family members and Adult Friends who are like Family

Organising people into groups: Younger Children

Organising people into groups: Peers and Classmates

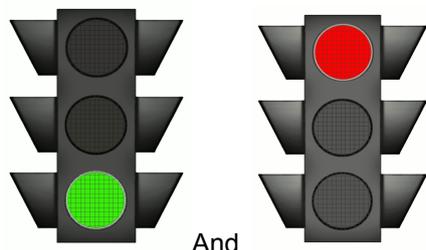
Organising people into groups: Teachers

Organising people into groups: More distant family members and Adult Friends

Organising people into groups: Community members and Strangers

Introduction to the topic of touch

Here we learn about different types of touch and look at the factors that influence touch. This activity can be adapted to be more or less thorough based on the child/young person understands of the concepts.



Here we will discuss Green and Red aspects of touch. Here we are communicating to the child/young person that touching other people and being touched by others are sometimes OK and sometimes not ok. There are certain variables that determine whether or not a touch is OK (green traffic light). Go through the following factors with your child/young person

- Who is the person
- Types of touch
- Where on your body
- Where on their bodies
- Setting/environment
- Length of time

Activity idea - Get a doll that is dressed and looks similar to an actual person

- Model of provide examples of the above i.e.
- ★ Say “who” is the person – ask the young person to name the person
- ★ Say “types of touch” – use the doll to demonstrate patting on the head, shaking hands, giving a high five etc
- ★ Say “where on your body” – ask the child/young person to demonstrate different areas of the body i.e. back/leg/head – could also use the rhyme head, shoulders, knees and toes
- ★ Say “where on their bodies” – demonstrate different areas of the body i.e. back/leg/head – could also use the rhyme head, shoulders, knees and toes
- ★ For Setting/environment – use laminated cards of different places i.e. home/school etc
- ★ For length of time – model counting to three while shaking the dolls hands

N.B. Ask the child/young person to give examples to check for understanding - Use the following common types of touch:

- ★ Handshake
- ★ Hug
- ★ Kiss
- ★ Tickle

Demonstrate the difference between “patting” and “petting”

Patting – is similar to tapping and an appropriate way to gain attention

Petting – is a term used for stroking an animal and would not be used to interact with other people

Some rules change with age, and some rules stay the same

It is important that children/young people understand that appropriate touch changes as we get older. For example babies need to be held and hugged frequently to help them feel safe, but as you grow up the rules about touching change.

Take for example tickling, tickling is often more appropriate for younger children and may be ok as long as the person carrying out the tickling is close to you such as a parent or boyfriend/girlfriend.

Talk about how the way mummy and daddy touch i.e. hug/kiss etc may not be appropriate for the child/young person to mimic however as they get older this may change.

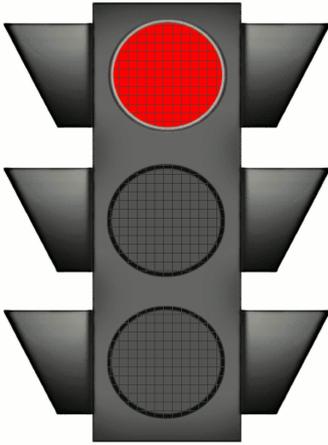
Communicate to the child/young person that it is OK for them to be not sure what the rules about touching are – it is in this case that it is more important to reinforce the yellow traffic light signal – ensuring that if they are unsure all they have to do is ask the person, or check with you their parents.

Rules about touch that always apply

- ★ The child/young person is in charge of his/her own body and should communicate 'stop' to anyone he/she does not want to touch him/her (use the red traffic light signal)
- ★ The child/young person does not have to engage in any type of touch if he/she does not feel comfortable
- ★ Hitting, biting or any kind of touch that is a result of frustration is not acceptable, unless the touch is to defend himself/herself

Rules about touch for those who are not in a dating relationship – these rules might need to be discussed at an age-appropriate time – use your judgement call on these rules

- ★ No one should expose a part of his/her body that underwear or bras cover in the child/young person presence for the purpose of showing the child/young person
- ★ No one should touch the child/young person with a part of the body that underwear or bras normally cover if the part is not covered by clothing
- ★ The child/young person should never deliberately expose a part of his/her body that underwear or bras cover and purposefully make that part of the body touch another person
- ★ Tongues should never be used to touch the child or young person in any area
- ★ The child/young person should never use his/her tongue to touch another person



Teaching your child what to do if someone touches them in a way that is wrong

Explain that sometimes a grown-up may say that the grown-up needs to be touching the child/young person to keep him/her safe or help – communicating the kinds of safety touches that may be appropriate for the child/young person based on his/her age and ability level.

For example

- You might need to hold a hand while crossing the road

Safety touches for helping are acceptable (green light)

The child/young person may experience a touch that is not for helping and is unacceptable. Stress that he/she is in charge of his/her own body and if they do not like the way another person is touching him/her, it is OK to say “STOP”

Activity

- **Model communicating “STOP” in a way that the child/young person with whom you are working feels comfortable**
- **Prompt the individual to practice communicating “STOP”**

Teach your child/young person the following warning signs that touch is wrong

- **The other person tells the child/young person not to tell anyone about the touch – that it’s a secret**
- **An adult states that the touch is unacceptable**
- **The touch makes the child/young person feel uncomfortable**

Explain that if the child/young person thinks a person has touched him/her in a way that is wrong he/she must go to someone trusted, like their parents or a teacher and tell that person. The adult will then decide if the other person was touching for a good reason or a bad reason. **We can facilitate this by creating ‘Appropriate Touch’ social stories and story boards.**

Teaching your child/young person how to manage the urge to touch inappropriately

Explain that sometimes the child/young person may feel an urge to touch another person in a way that is considered 'wrong'. This may be for comfort, for fun or for reasons he/she cannot identify.

Sometimes a child/young person may feel compelled to touch another person in the areas that a bra or underwear covers. He/she may have feelings that seem like something flying around or tickling the child/young person in the stomach or in the areas that the bra or underwear covers when the child/young person thinks about this.

It is important to convey to the child/young person that it is 'Normal' and 'OK' to have these feelings. DO NOT demonise these feelings or tell the child and young people that these are wrong.

If you feel it is appropriate you can discuss the following with the child/young person.

- Even though it may seem like the areas that the child/young person's bra and underwear are covering are urging the child/young person to touch others in a certain way, it is **NOT OK** for him/her to touch others in this way until he/she is older or in a romantic relationship with someone

Sometimes children and young people decide they have boyfriends and girlfriends this is ok. In this aspect it is ok to encourage hand holding and kissing on the cheek. You will often find that the child/young person actually thinks this is 'gross' anyway.

There have also been times where it has been reported that safeguarding concerns have been raised because children/young people have tried getting the attention of others by poking them in the thigh under the classroom tables.

It is vital therefore that children and young people understand the dangers that come with touching others.

Reasons why we should not touch others inappropriately

- The child or young person should respect others personal body space and requests not to touch in the same way that the child/individual would want others to respect his/her personal body space
- The child/young person may hurt someone else with an unacceptable touch
- The child/young person could get into serious trouble with parents, teachers or even police officers and face unpleasant consequences after attempting inappropriate touch

How to manage the need to touch oneself – teaching personal space

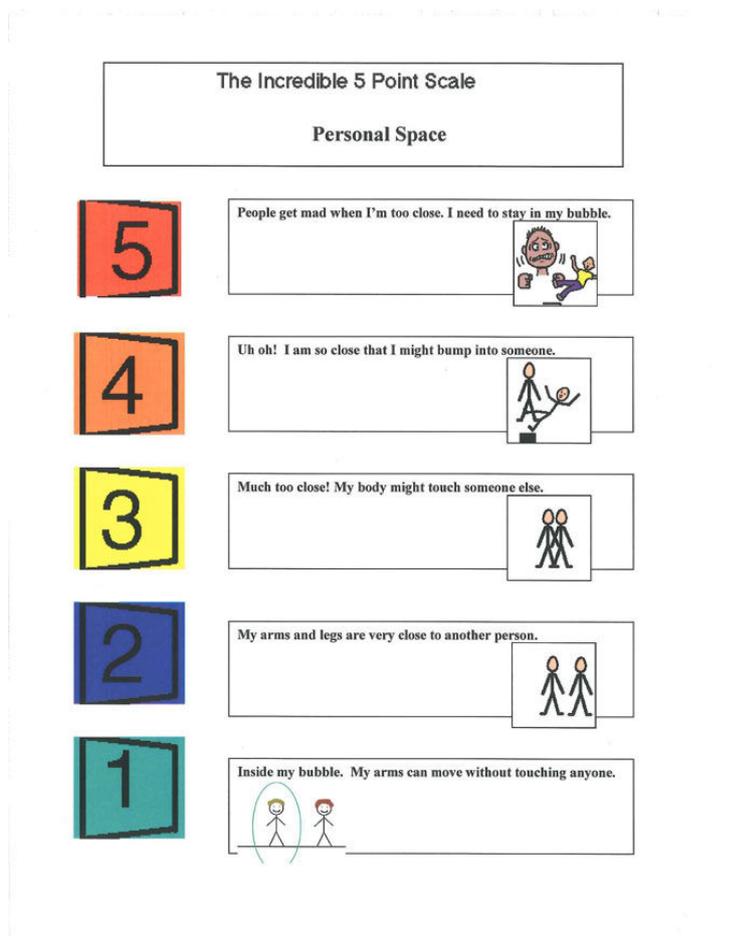
A scenario commonly reported is autistic 'male' children and young people will often touch their private parts whilst in public. This should not be demonised and should be ignored. It is a sensory seeking action and can cause a meltdown if tried to minimise.

Explain to the child/young person that sometimes they might feel an urge to touch their own body on the areas that bras and underwear cover. Acknowledge that he/she might like the way that it feels that they are allowed to touch his/her own body, because it belongs to them.

Guidelines for self-touch

- The child/young person can touch himself or herself in the areas that bras and underwear cover only when alone – i.e. introduce personal space possibly with the aid of a visual aid with the colour green for backing.

An example of a personal space 5 point scale



- The child/young person can touch himself/herself in the areas that bras and underwear cover only when in a private area with closed doors and closed windows, such as their own bedroom or in a bathroom at home
- If someone else is watching the child/young person they should not be touching his/her own body in the areas that bras/underwear cover i.e. if in public these areas shouldn't be touched

Proximity when not touching

Explain that in order for people to be comfortable interacting with others it is important to keep a certain amount of space between the child/young person and others. I.e. use of the bubble widget.

When sitting beside someone at school, on the sofa, at the cinema, or on the bus, one's body may be only inches away from the side of another person's body. When standing in a line or in a shop, the front of one's body may only be inches away from the back of another's. When facing the front of someone, most of time, if the child/young person can stretch out his/her hands and touch the front of the other person from where he/she is standing they are too close to the other person.

Activity

- Model holding out hands in front and prompt the child/young person to imitate
- Place a doll at the child/young person's fingertips and direct the child/young person to observe the distance
- Explain that the distance practiced with the doll is the minimal distance – that taking a step back after measuring an arm span between the child/young person and doll may be optimal

Communicate that there are times when someone may stand closer to the child/young person such as if a close family member is talking with the child/young person or if someone needs to maintain a low volume.

If the child/young person is talking to someone and the other person takes a step back, that means the other person needs more space

Explain that the child/young person should not step towards a person who backs away from him/her.

If unsure where to stand, it is always safer to keep more distance than the child/young person thinks is appropriate, and the other person will move closer if needed.

Accidental Touches

There may be times when someone may touch someone or be touched themselves by someone accidentally.

Explain there may be times when they may accidentally touch someone else in a way that is not OK (Red traffic light) or there may be times when they may be accidentally touched by someone else in a way that is not OK (Red traffic light)

Accidental touches may occur if the person trips, stumbles, or moves suddenly without thinking or looking. Apologising by saying "sorry" usually indicates that a person touched in a way that was accidental, and the child/young person does not need to report the incident to an adult. The child/young person can communicate that her/she is "sorry" to let a person know a touch was not intended.

Activity

- Model apologising in a way that the individual can use to indicate to another person that a touch was accidental, ranging from a simple "sorry" to a longer explanation for those who are capable
- Prompt the child/young person to imitate

Explain that if a person touches the child/young person in a way that is not acceptable numerous of times even if apologising afterwards it may not be accidental. For example, if the child/young person is standing in line, and their classmate behind them pushes them down, it is likely not to be accidental, even if they apologise – that apology may be sarcasm meaning the child/young person should tell someone like a teacher/parent.

Keep in touch

Find out more about how we can help you and your family, and how you can get involved with our work. Just fill in this form and post it back to us



Title
First Name
Surname
Address (line 1)
Address (line 2)
Address (line 3)
Town
Postcode
Telephone number
Mobile number
Email address

ASD Helping Hands would like to keep you informed about our services, upcoming news, events and fundraising activities. We will look after your data as set out in our privacy and data protection policy.

If you prefer not to receive information by post, please tick this box

If you prefer not to receive information by telephone, please tick this box

We'd like to keep in touch by email, if you are happy with this, please write your email address in the space provided above

What is the date of birth of the person you are contacting us about?

□□ / □□ / □□

Please return this form to:
Room 219 Breckland Business Centre
St Withburga Lane
Dereham
Norfolk
NR19 1FD

We would like to tailor our communication with you to ensure they are relevant to your interests.

What is your connection with autism?
(Please tick all that apply)

I am autistic

I am the parent/carer of someone on the Autistic Spectrum

Someone in my family is diagnosed with autism

I know someone who's autistic

I am a professional working in the field of autism

I have another connection with autism
Please Specify _____

I have no connection with Autism

“ASD Helping Hands will support all service users affected by an Autistic Spectrum Disorder (ASD) regardless of age or what stage of life they are at. We aim to offer guidance, practical advice and support whether you are personally affected or you are an associated family member, carer, friend or professional. We will actively champion the rights of all people affected by ASD’s and aim to make a positive difference to their lives while delivering a service that is accessible, reliable and trustworthy.”

The organisation is for all affected by the Autistic Spectrum, this covers a wide variety of difficulties. We believe that all families and individuals have the right to good quality information, support and guidance in order to promote empowerment to allow positive choices to be made, enabling access to the same opportunities as everybody.

Currently working across Norfolk and Suffolk

ASD Helping Hands

219 Breckland Business Centre
St Withburga Lane
Dereham
Norfolk
NR19 1FD

Autism Helpline: 01362 853018
Email: asdhelplinghands@gmail.com
Website: www.asdhelplinghands.org.uk

ASD Helping Hands is a voluntary organisation and relies on voluntary income to support its work, including the development of resources like this one for parents and carers

©ASD Helping Hands 2017