



Of Mennonite Church USA

BEST PRACTICES

Healthy Touch

Children need love. At times, affection can be appropriately expressed through physical touch that is in the view of others.

1. Appropriate touch should be a response to the child's need for comforting, encouragement, or affection. It should not be based on the adult's emotional need.
2. Volunteer workers or employees should not force affection on any child. Physical contact should always be with the child's consent. For example, the approved adult might ask, "May I give you a hug?" But don't move toward the child as you are asking the question.
3. Physical touch should generally be limited to side hugs and contact with the child's hand, shoulder, or upper back.
4. A child's verbal or nonverbal "no" should always be respected. If a child pulls away, even with another adult present, respect the child's wishes at all times.
5. When holding toddler or preschool-aged children on your lap, do not hold them up against your chest. If possible, have the child sit toward your knees so their buttocks are not in contact with your torso or sit sideways across your lap away from your torso.
6. Physical touch should be appropriate for the age of the child or youth. For example, while it is often appropriate to hold a toddler on your lap, it is inappropriate for a teenager to sit on the lap of an adult. For older youth, opt for a side hug, touching their hand, or other forms of affection that do not involve excessive body contact for extended periods of time.
7. At no time should a child or youth, even if fully clothed, be touched on or near the breasts, genitals, or buttocks.
8. If an approved adult or approved youth worker shows physical affection toward a child or youth, it must occur with another adult present. An "approved adult" is anyone over 18 years of age who has satisfied the requirements of the church's protection policy.
9. Anyone observing inappropriate touching or other questionable behavior by any individual toward a minor should immediately begin the process for reporting suspected abuse or neglect.

