

EDUCATOR RESOURCE—TOUCH IS COMPLICATED!

Ali

Ali, a new student, knows no one and sits alone in the cafeteria during lunchtime. In the hallway, a girl from math class recognizes Ali. She runs up to Ali saying, “Hi friend! Remember me?” and slaps Ali really hard on the back. The slap hurts and Ali winces in pain. The girl says, “Oh stop. I was just kidding around!”

What is the intention behind the touch? What is the outcome?

- The intention is unclear—it could be playful and friendly; it could also be a mean-spirited hazing/initiation touch.
- The outcome of the touch is hurtful and painful.

Is the touch appropriate? Why or why not?

- No, the touch is not appropriate.
- Because the outcome of the touch is painful/hurtful.
- Because the intention of the touch is unclear AND because the student’s response to Ali’s reaction does not recognize the outcome of the touch as painful.
- If this touch was about a kind of initiation into the school/ a hazing practice, make clear that these kinds of practices are not appropriate and often fall under definitions of bullying and/ or harassment (for more information, see your individual school policy).

Sasha

Sasha’s family makes grandparent visits every winter holiday. It’s usually fun but Sasha is dreading it this year. Last year, when Grandma gave all the grandchildren hugs, she ran her hand up and down Sasha’s back and said, “Oh Sasha, what are those straps under here? Are you wearing a bra? How wonderful!” Sasha didn’t answer and stayed quiet the whole visit.

What is the intention behind the touch? What is the outcome?

- The intention is unclear. It could have been the grandma’s intention to connect with Sasha around femininity and growing-up but it could also have been part of a larger pattern of non-consensual and inappropriate touch/comments on Sasha’s body. Without knowing more of the context, it is challenging to tell what the intention is.
- The outcome of the touch is feelings of discomfort, shame, and embarrassment.

Is the touch appropriate? Why or why not?

- The touch is inappropriate.
- Because the intention of the touch is unclear and the outcome of the touch is unwanted and uncomfortable and the grandmother is in a position of power in relationship to Sasha.

Jackee

Jackee and Jackee's siblings are all playing together when they start tickling each other. Jackee laughs so hard that it hurts and calls out, "Stop! Stop! Stop!" but the siblings continue. At some point, they all notice that Jackee is crying. They are stunned and horrified and stop the tickling. Jackee runs away, very upset. The siblings yell after Jackee, "What? But you were laughing the whole time!"

What is the intention behind the touch? What is the outcome?

- The intention is friendly, playful, and fun.
- The outcome is hurtful.

Is the touch appropriate? Why or why not?

- The touch was appropriate but it became inappropriate when Jackee stopped having fun, felt hurt, and tried to express that hurt.
- Context is important because as soon as the siblings realized that Jackee was not laughing, they had the appropriate response of stopping. The outcome however was that Jackie was hurt because she wanted to stop and was not being listened to.

Lou

Lou has a crush on Syd, a long-time friend. At the end of the school year, Lou gathers up the courage and says to Syd, "Hey, I really like you. I mean I *like-like* you." Syd is surprised, "Oh, I didn't know, Lou. I'm sorry... I don't feel the same way. You're one of my best friends and I don't want to ruin that." Lou nods, glad that they could still be friends while feeling more and more heartbroken. They hug—a full and wholehearted hug—and Lou starts to cry.

What is the intention behind the touch? What is the outcome?

- The intention is friendly, kind, compassionate, and loving.
- The outcome is sadness.

Is the touch appropriate? Why or why not?

- The touch was appropriate.
- Because it was consensual start to finish, being sad during or because of a wholehearted hug is not necessarily a bad or negative thing. In this context, it seems like a moment of intimacy and friendship between two people who love each other even though they may not have the same kind of romantic feelings for each other.

Shai

Shai is at a track meet sitting on the grass. A group of athletes from another school walk up and one of them says, “I just want to apologize to you ahead of time...because you’re going *down* today.” Everyone in the group laughs. Another one of the group says, “Here, give me a high five, loser!” and holds their hand up. The others laugh harder.

What is the intention behind the touch? What is the outcome?

- The intention is to make fun of someone and to be intimidating.
- The outcome is unclear because the touch does not actually happen but even without the actual touch, it could have made Shai feel like a loser and possibly lose confidence before the track meet.

Is the touch appropriate? Why or why not?

- The context surrounding the touch is inappropriate (making fun of someone to intimidate them).
- It is unclear whether the actual touch is appropriate or not because it is unclear whether or not the touch actually occurs. It is positive that the high-five is not forced upon Shai but in another sense, it is a demoralizing action.