

## Self-Harm Policy

"Self-harm is an expression of how someone is feeling, an expression of a very difficult emotional distress." Self-harm.co.uk

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## **1. Introduction**

Recent research indicates that up to one in ten young people in the UK engage in self-harming behaviours, and that this figure is higher amongst specific populations, including young people with special educational needs. School staff can play an important role in acknowledging self-harm and also in supporting students, peers and parents of students currently engaging in self-harm.

## **2. Scope**

This document describes the school's approach to self-harming in school during the school day. This policy is intended as guidance for all staff including non-teaching staff and governors.

## **3. Aims**

- To increase understanding and awareness of self-harm
- To alert staff to warning signs and risk factors
- To provide support to staff dealing with students who self-harm
- To provide support to students who self-harm and their peers and parents/carers

## **4. Definition of Self-Harm**

Self-harm is any behaviour where the intent is to deliberately cause harm to one's own body for example:

- Cutting, scratching, scraping or picking skin
- Swallowing inedible objects
- Taking an overdose of prescription or non-prescription drugs
- Swallowing hazardous materials or substances
- Burning or scalding
- Hair-pulling
- Banging or hitting the head or other parts of the body
- Scouring or scrubbing the body excessively

## **5. Risk Factors**

There are many reasons why young people engage in self-harming activity. The following risk factors, particularly in combination, may make a young person particularly vulnerable to self-harm:

### Individual Factors

- Depression/anxiety
- Poor communication skills
- Low self-esteem
- Poor problem-solving skills
- Hopelessness
- Impulsivity
- Drug or alcohol abuse

## Family Factors

- Unreasonable expectations
- Neglect or physical, sexual or emotional abuse
- Poor parental relationships and arguments
- Depression, self-harm or suicide in the family

## Social Factors

- Difficulty in making relationships/loneliness
- Being bullied or rejected by peers

Increasing pressure to perform at school and the need to be seen to be 'academically successful' is a growing issue especially for girls who are already under pressure to look a certain way. For young men the issue seems to be related to wider economic conditions.

School staff must be alert to copy-cat behaviour linked to incidents in school and/or outside the school including on social media sites.

Research survey conducted in 2014 found the main reasons for self-harming to be:

1. Bullying (25%)
2. Family relationships (17%)
3. Pressure to do well at school (14%)
4. Emotional abuse (11%)
5. Friendships (11%)

Contributors – see 14 below

## **6. Warning Signs**

School staff may become aware of warning signs which indicate a student is experiencing difficulties that may lead to thoughts of self-harm or suicide. These warning signs should always be taken seriously and staff observing any of these warning signs should seek further advice from one of the designated teachers for safeguarding children. Please do not talk to the student about your concerns, they must be passed onto the DSL who will inform appropriate medical and other staff on a 'need-to-know' basis.

Possible warning signs include:

- Changes in eating / sleeping habits (e.g. student may appear overly tired if not sleeping well)
- Increased isolation from friends or family, becoming socially withdrawn
- Changes in activity and mood e.g. more aggressive or introverted than usual
- Lowering of academic achievement including not wanting to take part in PE lessons
- Talking or joking about self-harm or suicide or taking opportunities through their work to write about/describe their feelings and actions
- Abusing drugs or alcohol
- Expressing feelings of failure, uselessness or loss of hope
- Changes in style of dress

## **7. Staff Roles in working with students who self-harm**

Students may choose to confide in a member of school staff if they are concerned about their own welfare, or that of a peer. School staff may experience a range of feelings in response to self-harm in a student such as anger, sadness, shock, disbelief, guilt, helplessness, disgust and rejection. However, in order to offer the best possible help to students it is important to try and maintain a supportive and open, **non-judgemental** attitude – a student who has chosen to discuss their concerns with a member of school staff is showing a considerable amount of courage and trust.

Students need to be made aware that it is not possible for staff to offer complete confidentiality. If you consider a student is at serious risk of harming themselves then confidentiality cannot be kept. It is important not to make promises of confidentiality that cannot be kept even if a student puts pressure on you to do so.

Any member of staff who is aware of a student engaging in or suspected to be at risk of engaging in self-harm should refer on to the DSL or their deputy who may already be aware. The DSL will inform the appropriate staff members.

Following the report, the DSL will decide on the appropriate course of action. This may include:

- Contacting parents/carers – the school will always try to include parents/carers
- Arranging professional assistance e.g. doctor, nurse, social services
- Arranging an appointment with a counsellor
- Immediately removing the student from lessons if their remaining in class is likely to cause further distress to themselves or their peers
- In the case of an acutely distressed student, the immediate safety of the student is paramount and an adult should remain with the student at all times
- If a student has self-harmed in school a first aider should be called for immediate help

Where it is clear that the young person is using a sharp object to self-harm during the school day, the DSL, with an assistant, will try to confiscate the object. This might include a search of the school bag and/or locker if the young person is not willing to give it up voluntarily. Once confiscated it should be given only to the parent/carer and not back to the young person. Knives and other weapons may be handed to the Police.

With regard to knives/blades the actions of staff will follow the school policy on Behaviour eg where there is “reasonable cause” to suspect that a pupil is carrying an implement designed or likely to be used to cause harm that a search of possessions, locker and outer clothing may be carried out – with or without consent using powers granted to the school under the Education Act 1996.

In extreme cases, where the school is concerned about the safety of the individual and/or others, if there is reason to suspect that a pupil may be concealing a weapon in their inner clothing or any intimate areas the school may contact the police to carry out an intimate search. Parents will be informed.

## **8. Further Considerations**

Any meetings with a student, their parents or their peers regarding self-harm should be recorded in writing including:

- Dates and times
- An action plan
- Concerns raised
- Details of anyone else who has been informed

This information should be stored in the student's child protection file (see point 10 below).

The school may decide after taking advice that a risk assessment is appropriate (see point 11 below). Within that risk assessment the decision will be taken to confiscate blades or items used to self-harm. It is also possible that the young person may have to be accompanied to the toilet to minimise the risk of further self-harm.

Where there is repeated self-harm the school will endeavour to arrange a referral to an educational/clinical psychologist either directly or through the family GP. The GP route is likely to be faster. Suggestions from psychologists will be taken into consideration when deciding how to manage students who self-harm in school, but actions taken by the staff will be determined by the risk assessment.

In circumstances where the self-harm is clearly visible to other students, the school may take the decision to remove the young person from mainstream classes (especially PE) if covering up is not possible.

It is important to encourage students to let you know if one of their group is in trouble, upset or showing signs of self-harming. Friends can worry about betraying confidences so they need to know that self-harm can be very dangerous and that by seeking help and advice for a friend they are taking responsible action and being a good friend. They should also be aware that their friend will be treated in a caring and supportive manner. The school will consider how e-Safety, PSHE, assembly and/or tutorial time could be used to inform students about the issue and how they could help support peers.

The peer group of a young person who self-harms may value the opportunity to talk to a member of staff either individually or in a small group. This person would normally be the DSL. In cases where the students(s) concerned request another member of staff, that member of staff should seek further advice on this by consulting one of the designated teachers for safeguarding children.

When a young person is self-harming it is important to be vigilant in case close contacts with the individual are also self-harming. Occasionally schools discover that a number of students in the same peer group are harming themselves.

At all times the safety and welfare of the young person must be of paramount importance. However, school staff, unless specially trained must seek guidance and listen to safeguarding advice from external partners.

The school will, for individual young people at risk of self-harm, allow flexible timetables, issue a 'Green card', provide safe areas and so on, to allow the individual to take greater responsibility for managing their own behaviour in school. The DSL may nominate an adult mentor in school to encourage the young person to feel safe and share confidences through a trust-based partnership.

The charity ChildLine says there has been an increase in the number of self-harming incidents linked to cyberbullying. They have seen a dramatic increase in people getting in touch about the problem. The profile of self-harming is made even more newsworthy when talk about their past.

### **9.0 Informing parents**

It would be normal practice to encourage the young person to talk to parents/carers first. School staff respect confidentiality but at all times will endeavour to involve parents. Where the young person refuses to inform parents, school staff will refer the matter on to The Multi-Agency Referral Unit (MARU) for guidance. Multi-Agency Advice Team Tel: 0300 1231 116

### **10.0 Record keeping**

Where a student has engaged in more than one incident of self-harm whilst at school, the DSL will keep an up-to-date pastoral chronology line to record incidents, actions taken and who has been informed. This is confidential to DSL and the SLT lead. Where agreed, the information will be shared with parents/carers and any other relevant professionals.

### **11.0. Risk assessment**

When a student self-harms in school the DSL will complete a risk assessment. The risk assessment will make clear how staff in school should manage individual young people whilst in school or on school trips. The school may not allow a student with a history of repeated self-harm to attend residential school trips.

## **12.0 Staff training**

Self-harm is a behavioural phenomenon more common than many people realise. This means it is important that school staff are trained to deal with incidents if and when they arise. The school will, annually, endeavour to identify appropriate training for selected staff.

## **13.0 Policy review**

This policy and any procedures employed when managing incidents of self-harm are to be reviewed annually to ensure they reflect best practice. This will be done as part of the Section 175 review.

## **14.0 Support for staff**

The governors are aware that dealing with such matters can be traumatic for staff especially where self-harm is seriously injurious. There is a duty of care to staff as well as the student. Therefore, the lead member of staff dealing with cases of self-harm, in most cases the DSL, will be supported by the Deputy DSL or other senior member of staff. When required, the school will arrange well-being debriefing sessions with an outside facilitator.

## **15.0 Related internet links**

1. [www.selfharm.co.uk](http://www.selfharm.co.uk)
2. [www.youngminds.org.uk](http://www.youngminds.org.uk)
3. [www.childline.org.uk](http://www.childline.org.uk)