



Clovelly House School Policy



Clovelly House School  
Stay safe, respect, achieve

# Self-Harm Policy

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## Self-Harm Policy



## 1. Introduction

This policy should be read in conjunction with the Clovelly House School policies on Safeguarding and Anti-bullying. The policy deals with self-harming or self-injury by children and young people.

## 2. Background information

According to LifeSigns, a guidance and support network, "Self-injury is a coping mechanism. An individual harms their physical self to deal with emotional pain, or to break feelings of numbness by arousing sensation".

Self-injury is any deliberate, non-suicidal behaviour that inflicts physical harm on your body and is aimed at relieving emotional distress. Physical pain is often easier to deal with than emotional pain, because it causes 'real' feelings. Injuries can prove to an individual that their emotional pain is real and valid. Self-injurious behaviour may calm or awaken a person. Yet self-injury only provides temporary relief, it does not deal with the underlying issues. Self-injury can become a natural response to the stresses of day-to-day life and can escalate in frequency and severity.

Self-injury can include, but is not limited to, cutting, burning, banging and bruising, non-suicidal overdosing and even deliberate bone-breaking.

Self-injury is often habitual, chronic and repetitive; self-injury tends to affect people for months and years. People who self-injure usually make a great effort to hide their injuries and scars, and are often uncomfortable about discussing their emotional inner or physical outer pain. It can be difficult for young people to seek help from the NHS or from those in positions of authority, perhaps due to the stigma attached with seeking help for mental health issues. Self-injury is usually private and personal, and it is often hidden from family and friends. People who do show their scars may do so as a reaction to the incredible secrecy, and one should not assume that they are inflicting their scars on others to seek attention, although attention may well be needed.

Self-harm is a wider definition that includes eating disorders, self-injury and drug/alcohol misuse.

Like any behaviour, self-injury may be used to attract attention, but this is not usually the focus of chronic, repetitive self-injury. If self-injury is being used in order to gain attention, one must look to find the reasons as to why someone is in such dire need of attention. It could be there is a problem at home, or issues of bullying, and they feel that no one is listening or hearing them.

Self-injury is not about seeking attention, a way of fitting in or a response to music, films or the emo or gothic culture. Prejudices and perceptions may lead people to believe they 'know' that self-injury is linked to certain demographic or background, but each person is unique and will have found self-injury by their own route, and rely on it at times of stress due to the release and relief it offers them."

## 3. Purpose

As part of the schools' core mission and values, and continued dedication to the health and happiness of the pupils, this policy provides a clear set of protocols for dealing with issues that may arise in connection with working with children and young people who self-harm. These include:

- \* recognising the warning signs that a pupils may be self-harming
- \* broaching the subject of self-harm with a pupil suspected of deliberately self-harming
- \* knowledge on how to react positively if a pupil comes to you wishing to discuss their self-harming
- \* a short-term action plan for the care and management of the pupil, including assessing the pupils' unique and individual needs
- \* a long-term action plan for the continued support, assistance and monitoring of the pupil
- \* guidance on how best to assist the pupil in building confidence, self-esteem and emotional well-being
- \* practical and emotional support for staff members who are dealing with a self-harming Pupil
- \* provision of clear and standard guidelines for all staff members in contact with the pupil
- \* implementation of a self-harm minimisation strategy to prevent the spreading of self-harm across the school
- \* education and training for all staff surrounding the issue of self-harm
- \* education and awareness campaigns for pupils.

## 4. Risk factors associated with Self-Harm

Self-harm is a coping mechanism and it is important to recognise and respond to the underlying reasons behind a person's self-harming. Risk factors include:



- Low self-esteem
- Perfectionism
- Mental health issues such as depression and anxiety
- The onset of more complicated mental illnesses such as schizophrenia, bi-polar disorder or a personality disorder
- Problems at home or school
- Physical, emotional and/or sexual abuse

It is important to recognise that none of these risk factors may appear to be present. Sometimes it is the outwardly happy high achieving pupil with a stable background who is suffering internally and hurting themselves in order to cope.

## **5. Warning signs that may be associated with Self-Harm**

There may be no warning signs of self-harming behaviours, but the following may indicate self-harming:

- Drug and/or alcohol misuse or risk-taking behaviour
- Negativity and lack of self-esteem
- Out of character behaviour
- Bullying other pupils
- A sudden change in social groups

## **6. Physical signs that self-harming may be occurring**

- Obvious cuts, scratches or burns that do not appear of an accidental nature
- Frequent 'accidents' that cause physical injury
- Regularly bandaged arms and/or wrists
- Reluctance to take part in activities that require a change of clothes
- Wearing long sleeves and trousers even during warm weather

## **7. Suicide**

Although self-harm is non-suicidal behaviour and is relied on as an attempt to cope and manage, it must be recognised that the emotional distress that leads to self-harm can also lead to suicidal thoughts and actions.

It is, therefore, important that all incidents of self-harming are taken seriously and that the underlying issues and emotional distress are thoroughly investigated and necessary emotional support given in order to minimise any greater risk. Any mention of suicidal intent must always be taken seriously and acted upon as a matter of urgency.

## **8. Roles and responsibilities**

### **Principal**

The Principal will:

- Appoint key staff members to be responsible for all incidents relating to self-harming
- Ensure that designated staff members receive full and appropriate training surrounding self-harming and are fully confident with the procedures to follow
- Provide practical and emotional support for key staff members dealing with self-harm
- Ensure that all education staff members are made aware of and understand the self-harm policy
- Provide pupils with open access to information about self-harm and details of who to go to for help and support
- Inform individual pupils about procedures to following cases of self-harming incidents
- Advise staff members how to cover self-injury across the curriculum
- Work in a multi-disciplinary way to share information and training regarding self-harm
- Ensure that there is a personalised approach to working with each pupil at risk of self-harm
- Be clear that inappropriate self-harming behaviours that affect other pupils in the schools will not be tolerated.



### **Education staff members**

All education staff members should:

- Review all duty of care documents and be aware of communication processes
- Make it known to pupils that you are available to listen
- Remain calm and non-judgemental at all times
- Avoid dismissing a pupil's reasons for distress as invalid
- Encourage pupils to be open and reassure them that they can get help if needed
- Endeavour to enable pupils to feel in control by asking what they would like to happen
- Do not make promises regarding confidentiality
- Encourage pupils to seek health and happiness in their daily lives
- Discuss and promote healthy coping mechanisms and suggest ways pupils can be empowered to make positive changes in their lives
- Provide access to information and resources regarding self-harm and its causes
- Provide and encourage access to exterior help and support where possible
- Monitor the reactions of other pupils who know about the self-harm
- Avoid asking the pupil to show you the scars or describe their self-harm
- Avoid asking the pupil to stop self-harming; this may be their only coping mechanism
- Report the matter to the safeguarding officers as soon as you become aware of the problem and inform the pupil that you are doing this

### **Designated key staff members**

- Ensure the implementation of standard policy, communicate with each other and report back to the Principal
- Maintain up-to-date records of pupils experiencing self-harm, incidents of self-harm and all other concerns surrounding the issue
- Communicate with the Principal on a regular basis and keep them informed of all incidents and developments
- Monitor the help, support and progress of the pupils in your care and maintain communication with them
- Ensure you are fully confident in your understanding of self-harm and seek additional information and training if necessary
- Contact other organisations and key services in your area and find out what help and support is available for young people who self-harm
- Liaise with the Principal and pupil to decide if any other staff members who have contact with the young person should be made aware of the underlying concerns
- Ensure all first aiders are well informed about self-harm
- Inform the pupil's parents/carers, if appropriate, and liaise with them as to how best manage the situation
- Be aware of the necessity for other professionals to be involved, such as social services and educational psychologists
- Report any mention of suicidal feelings to the safeguarding officers as soon as possible
- Take care of your own emotional well-being and seek support as and when necessary

### **Pupils**

- Ensure all wounds are cleaned, cared for properly and bandaged appropriately
- Do not display fresh or open wounds
- When talking to teachers or friends about your self-harm, focus on the emotional reasons behind your distress and not on the injury itself
- Avoid talking graphically about your injuries to other pupils or describing methods you use
- Never encourage anyone to try self-harming themselves
- When under emotional distress or feeling the urge to self-harm at school, talk to a staff member as soon as possible
- Discuss any additional support you feel you may need while you are going through emotional distress



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- Be aware that the staff members are there to help you. The more you talk to them the better able they will be to give you the support and help you need
- Try to have some fun every day
- If you are worried that a friend may be self-harming, talk to a staff member for help and guidance
- If you are concerned that a friend may be suicidal, then alert a staff member straight away.

### Parents/carers

- Understand and support the school self-harm policy
- Educate yourself regarding self-harm and discuss the subject with the child
- If your child is self-harming work closely with the school and take an active role in deciding the best course of action for your child
- Keep the school informed about any incidents outside of school that you feel they should know about
- Take care of yourself and seek any emotional support you may need in dealing with your child's self-harming.

### 9. Evaluation and monitoring

This policy will be monitored and evaluated on an on-going basis, but at least annually. Appropriate changes will be made to take into account changes in legislation and safeguarding as well as information gained in practice.

**See also:** Clovelly House School Safeguarding Policies and Procedures  
Clovelly House School 'Behaviour Management Policy'  
Clovelly House School 'Anti-bullying Policy and Procedures'  
DCSF Guidance on Bullying: 'Don't Suffer In Silence' (0064/200)  
'Safe to Learn: Embedding anti bullying work in school' (DCSF-00656-2007)  
'Safe from Bullying in Children's Homes' (2009)  
[www.lifesigns.org.uk](http://www.lifesigns.org.uk), 'Creating a School Self-Injury Policy'