



Spread your wings, learn new things, fly as high as you can.

Self-Harm Policy

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Recent research indicates that about 1 in 10 young people in the UK engage in self-harming behaviour and that this figure is higher amongst specific populations including young people with Special Educational Needs. School staff can play an important role in preventing self-harm and also in supporting pupils, peers and parents of pupils currently engaging in self-harm.

Aim

To ensure that staff are able to recognise and act swiftly and appropriately to all cases of pupil self-harm.

Objectives

- How to deal with students who self-harm and how to offer support in the short and long term.
- To offer support depending upon the individual needs of the student.
- To help students improve their self-esteem and emotional literacy.
- How to support teachers who come into contact with students who self-harm.
- How to prevent self-harm from spreading within the school.
- To have clear guidelines for staff
- Education about self-harm for students and staff.

What is Self-Harm?

Self-harm is when someone deliberately hurts or injures themselves.

- It is a continuum ranging from a behaviour which is part of a coping mechanism to behaviour which has strong suicidal intent
- It can be used to describe cutting, scratching, burning, taking overdoses, punching oneself, substance abuse, self-poisoning, unsafe sex etc.

Less obvious self-harm behaviours also include:

- controlled eating patterns – anorexia, bulimia, over-eating;
- indulging in risky behaviour / risky sexual behaviour destructive use of drugs or alcohol;
- an unhealthy lifestyle;
- getting into fights.

Why do younger children harm themselves?

- Greater levels of stress, unhappiness and insecurity among younger children.
- Conflicted and troubled family relationships.
- Family break-up, separation divorce or bereavement.
- Domestic conflict and violence.
- Domestic abuse and/or neglect.
- Self-harm among other family members.
- Unhappiness and anxiety.
- Belief that life is not worth living.
- Problems in relationships and attachments.
- Bullying.
- Few friends and difficulties with friendships.
- Isolation.
- Limited family support.

Links to Emotional Distress (including abuse)

Those who self-harm are usually suffering emotional or psychological distress and it is vital that all such distress is taken seriously to assist in alleviating that distress or to minimise the risk of increasing distress.

Any young person who suggests they are experiencing suicidal feelings must be taken extremely seriously and safeguarding procedures put in place immediately; a young person showing this level of distress must NOT be left unattended.

Emotional/Psychological Risk Factors Associated with Self-Harm can be:

- recent trauma e.g. death of a friend or relative, parental divorce
- negative thought patterns and low self-esteem
- bullying
- abuse – sexual, physical, emotional or through neglect
- sudden changes in behaviour and/or academic performance
- relationship difficulties (with family or friends)
- learning difficulties
- pressure to achieve (from teachers or parents)
- substance abuse (including tobacco, alcohol or drugs)
- issues around sexuality
- medical condition

Other risk factors

- inappropriate advice or encouragement from internet websites or chat-rooms
- experimentation, 'dares' or bravado, 'copycat behaviour'
- a history of abuse of self-harming in the family
- parental separation
- domestic abuse and/or substance misuse in the home
- media influence
- issues surrounding religious or cultural identity

How to identify signs of self-harming:

- Changes in clothing to cover parts of the body e.g. wearing long sleeve tops
- Reluctant to participate in previously enjoyed physical activities, especially those that involve wearing shorts or swimwear
- Changes in sleeping habits
- Changes in eating habits
- Changes in levels of activity or mood
- Isolating from friends and family

Strategies to respond to Self-Harm

- Non-judgemental and empathic approach.
- Respond calmly and with compassion to children who self-harm.
- Provide first aid for wound care.
- Appoint one or two fully trained staff members to take a lead in responding to all self-harm matters, including a member of the school pastoral team.
- Work collaboratively with families and external mental health support services.
- Provide support and self-care for school staff that have responded to or witnessed self-harm.

Roles and Responsibilities

Governing Board

- Define the policy and principles of managing self-harm.
- Have professional curiosity as to whether the policies and principles are being upheld in practice without getting into individual casework unless involved via the complaint process.
- Challenge school leaders regarding the effectiveness of support given to pupils.
- Deal with complaints under the formal complaints policy.

Headteacher / Deputy Headteacher

- Line manage and guide the policies and principles.
- Assess the quality of support given to pupils and ensure that change and improvement is responsive and cyclical.
- Ensure that staff dealing with things that will challenge their own emotions are given supportive supervision and opportunities to talk informally about how this is affecting them.

DSL

- Receive referrals and decide on an appropriate course of action and level of support.
- Manage who needs to know in order to support the student.
- Manage the referral process

School Staff and Teachers

If a child is self-harming, staff should not deal with it alone. Self-harming behaviours should be taken very seriously, so please follow school safeguarding procedures carefully. Some children will need extra help either through school pastoral/counselling support or through referral to community-based support.

- Keep accurate records of incidents of self-harm and concerns.
- Maintain confidentiality on a defined “need to know” basis.
- Liaise with local services about help available for young people who self-harm.
- Keep up-to-date information about self-harm, e.g. info leaflets from Young Minds.
- Liaise with the student’s teacher or Headteacher.
- Contact the parents at the appropriate time.
- Involve the student in this process.
- Inform the parent about the appropriate help and support that is available for their child.
- Monitor the student’s progress, e.g. school work, general presentation, following the incident.
- Know when to seek help to deal with their own feelings and distress.
- Report concerns on MyConcern so a team approach can be sought.
- Be honest about their own capacity to deal with self-harm issues if they have had personal or family issues with this.
- Assist in referral to MASH if the DSL judges that this is required.
- Challenge senior leaders if you believe that decision-making is wrong or not enough is being done to support a child. Seek escalation if necessary.

Students will be expected to:

- Not display open wounds/injuries. These must be dressed appropriately.
- Talk to the appropriate staff member if they are in emotional distress.
- Alert a teacher if they suspect a fellow pupil is at serious risk of harm to themselves, and know when confidentiality must be broken.

- Manage which other students they talk to about their issues (not all children have the capacity to understand or be helpful and it may put ideas into the heads of other children).

Parents will be encouraged to:

- Endorse the school's approach to dealing with self-harm and education/awareness raising.
- Work in partnership with the school with a shared plan for supporting their child.
- Ask for help with their own emotions.
- Seek professional help offered by the school and outside agencies.
- Use resources available through the school, or through recommended websites such as: mentalhealthmattersinschools.org.uk

APPENDIX 1

Further information is available from:

- ChildLine – provides a free national helpline for young people, free confidential advice on a range of problems: 0800 1111
- LifeSIGNS (Self Injury Guidance and Network Support) – An online, user-lead voluntary organisation to raise awareness about self-injury and provide information and support to people of all ages affected by self-injury.
- National Self-harm Network - UK charity offering support, advice and advocacy services to people affected by self harm directly or in a care role.
- YoungMinds – provides information and advice on child mental health issues and a Parents Helpline 0800 802 5544.
- NHS Direct – a helpline with health advice provided provided by NHS nurses: 0845 4647
- Samaritans – a telephone helpline and email service for anyone who is feeling upset, worried or suicidal: 0845 790 9090 email: jo@samaritans.org
- School nurses – Schools can also contact and consult with their designated school nurses to consider making a referral to CAMHS.
- First Response – provides support 24 hours a day, seven days a week to people of all ages: 01274 221181