



Self Harm Policy

Adoption Arrangements and Date

Review Body:	Headteacher	Adopted:	November 2017
Responsibility:	Deputy Head		
Policy Type:	Non-statutory		

1. Introduction

Self-harm is a symptom of an underlying mental or emotional distress. Young people who self-harm mainly do so because they find it helps relieve distressing feelings and helps them cope with problems in their lives. They are unable to find other ways of coping with problems and emotional distress in their lives.

Self-harm describes a wide range of things that people do to themselves in a deliberate and usually hidden way. In the vast majority of cases self-harm remains a secretive behaviour that can go on for a long time without being discovered.

Self-harm blights the lives of young people and seriously affects their relationships with families and friends. It is often habitual, chronic and repetitive and can affect a person for months and years. It presents a major challenge to all those in services and organisations that work with young people, from schools through to hospital accident and emergency departments.

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.

The rates of self-harm are much higher in people aged between 11 and 25 years. The average age of onset is 12 years old.

Schools have a substantial impact on the physical, psychological and social development of young people, given the amount of time a young person spends within compulsory education during their crucial developmental years.

For this reason school staff can play an important role in preventing 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-harm. 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
- To provide clear and standard guidelines for all staff in contact with the students

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. What self-injury is not

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 a 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.

6. Risk Factors

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

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

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

7. Warning Signs

School staff may become aware of the 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 the designated teachers for safeguarding children, Dr Karen Brookes, Mrs Nicola Santaana or Mrs Vicki Woosey.

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
- Talking or joking about self-harm or suicide
- Abusing drugs or alcohol
- Expressing feelings of failure, uselessness or loss of hope
- Changes in clothing that are 'out of Character'
- 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 physical exercise or other activities that require a change of clothes;
- Wearing long sleeves and trousers even during hot weather.

People who self-harm usually make a great effort to hide their injuries and scars.

8. Suicide

Although self-injury is non-suicidal behaviour and relied on as an attempt to cope and manage, it must be recognised that the emotional distress that leads to self-injury can also lead to suicidal thoughts and actions. It is therefore of utmost importance that all incidents of self-injury 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 should always be taken seriously and acted upon as a matter of urgency.**

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 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. Any member of staff wishing for further advice on this should consult one of the designated teachers, or the School Nurse.

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.

9. 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 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 may not be 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.

Be clear about what behaviour will not be tolerated and ensure all students are aware and understand the rules (for example, self-injuring in front of other students or threats to self-injure as part of bargaining or manipulation must be deemed unacceptable).

Review special permissions for pupils who self-injure, for example time out of the classroom during emotional distress and permission to wear long sleeves for sports.

Any member of staff who is aware of a student engaging in or suspected to be at risk of engaging in self-harm should consult one of the designated teachers for safeguarding children – Dr Karen Brookes or Vicki Woosey.

Following this report, a decision will be made on what the appropriate course of action will be. This may include:

- A risk assessment
- Contacting 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 the School Nurse should be called for immediate help**

10. 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.

The school will ensure that all designated staff receive full and appropriate training surrounding self-injury and are fully confident with the procedures to follow and will provide practical and emotional

support for key staff dealing with self-injury. All staff, including teaching assistants, lab technicians and other non-teaching staff will be made aware of, and understand, the self-injury policy.

Students Who Self Harm

- Will be provided with open access to information about self-injury and details of who to go to for help and support
- Will be encouraged to access exterior help and support where possible.
- Will be made aware of when it is essential for other professional bodies to be informed, such as social services or educational psychologists;
- Ensure all wounds are cared for properly and bandaged appropriately;
- Will be asked not display fresh or open wounds;
- When talking to teachers or friends about their self-injury, focus on the emotional reasons behind your distress and not on the self-injury itself
- Avoid talking graphically about your injuries to other pupils or describing the methods you use;
- Never encourage anyone to try self-injury themselves;
- When under emotional distress or feeling the urge to self-injure at school, talk to a teacher or staff member as soon as possible;
- Discuss any additional support you feel you may need while you are going through emotional distress;
- Be aware that the teachers and designated self-injury staff are there to help you. The more you can talk to them the better able they will be to give you the support and help you need;
- Endeavour to seek fun and laughter every day;
- If you are worried that a friend may be self-injuring then do talk to a teacher for support and guidance
- If you are concerned that a friend may be suicidal, or has mentioned suicide, then alert a teacher straight away.

Parents

- Understand and endorse the school's self-injury policy
- Educate yourself regarding self-injury and discuss the subject with your child;
- If your child is self-injuring, work closely with the school and take an active role in deciding the best course of action for your child;
- Keep the school informed of 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-injury.