



SELF HARM POLICY

Updated September 2019
Approved by the Principal

This policy refers to and should be read in conjunction with the following policies:

- Safeguarding and Child Protection Policy

1. Introduction

- 1.1 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 preventing self-harm and also in supporting students, peers and parents of students currently engaging in self-harm.

2. Scope

- 2.1 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. Please also refer to the Safeguarding and Child Protection Policy.

3. Aims

- 3.1 The aims of this policy are:
- 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

- 4.1 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

5.1 The following risk factors, particularly in combination, may make a young person particularly vulnerable to self-harm:

(a) Individual Factors:

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

(b) Family Factors

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

(c) Social Factors

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

6. Warning Signs

6.1 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 the designated safeguarding lead.

6.2 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 e.g. becoming a goth

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

7.1 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.

- 7.2 Students need to be made aware that it may not be possible for staff to offer complete confidentiality.
- 7.3 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 consult the designated safeguarding children lead or the deputy.
- 7.4 Following the report, the designated lead will decide on the appropriate course of action. This may include:
 - 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 a first aider should be called for immediate help**

8. Further Considerations

- 8.1 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.

- 8.2 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.
- 8.3 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 for safeguarding children.
- 8.4 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 have self-harmed.