



Self-Harm Policy

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

Definition

Self-harm is a coping mechanism for individuals who are attempting to manage challenging emotional states. It is any deliberate, non-suicidal behaviour, which causes physical pain or injury and is aimed at reducing the emotional pain and distress of the individual concerned.

Scope

In keeping with the school's values, vision and aims, this policy describes the school's approach to self-harm. This policy is intended as guidance for all staff including non-teaching staff and governors.

The Designated Child Protection Officer is the member of staff responsible for dealing with incidents of self-harm.

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

The following risk factors, particularly in combination, may make a child 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

6. Warning Signs

For some individuals there will not be any specific warning signs that they are engaging in or contemplating self-harming behaviours. **For others, school staff** may become aware of warning signs which indicate a pupil is experiencing difficulties that may lead to thoughts of self-harm. These warning signs should **always** be taken seriously and staff observing any of these warning signs should seek further advice from the school's Designated Child Protection Officer.

Possible warning signs include:

- Changes in eating / sleeping habits (e.g. student may appear overly tired if not sleeping well)
- Significant change in friendships / increased isolation from friends or family, becoming socially withdrawn
- Bullying of others
- Changes in activity and mood e.g. more aggressive or introverted than usual, lack of self-esteem, being overly negative
- Lowering of academic achievement
- Talking or joking about self-harm or suicide
- Risky behaviours, for example taking drugs or alcohol misuse
- Expressing feelings of failure, uselessness or loss of hope
- Regular bandaged wrists or arms
- Obvious cuts, burns or scratches (that don't look like accidents)
- A reluctance to participate in PE or change clothes
- Frequent accidents that cause physical injuries

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

Children 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 pupil such as anger, sadness, shock, disbelief, guilt, helplessness. However, in order to offer the best possible help to children it is important to try and maintain a supportive and open attitude – a child who has chosen to discuss their concerns with a member of school staff is showing a considerable amount of courage and trust. Children need to be made aware that it may not be possible for staff to offer complete confidentiality. **If you consider a pupil 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 pupil puts pressure on you to do so. Any member of staff who is aware of a child engaging in or suspected to be at risk of engaging in self-harm should consult the Designated Child Protection Officer.

Following the report, the Designated Child Protection Officer will decide on the appropriate course of action. This may include:

- Contacting parents / carers
- Arranging professional assistance e.g. doctor, nurse, social care
- Arranging an appointment with a counsellor
- Immediately removing the pupil 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 pupil, the immediate safety of the pupil is paramount and an adult should remain with the pupil at all times**
- **If a pupil has self-harmed in school, a first aider should be called for immediate help**

8. Further Considerations

Any meetings with a pupil, their parents or their peers regarding self-harm should be recorded in writing on the school's safeguarding log including:

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

This information should be stored in the pupil's child protection file.

It is important to encourage pupils 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 the Designated Child Protection Officer. When a child 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 children in the same class / peer group are harming themselves.

9. Conclusion

Although self-harm is not necessarily easy to stop, it can be done. Many people have come through it with the help and support of the people around them.

Equalities Impact Assessment (EIA)

This policy has been screened to ensure that we give 'due consideration' to equality of opportunity and has been agreed and formally approved by the appropriate reviewing and ratification Committee.

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