

Dawlish Federation of Special Schools

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SELF-HARM POLICY

1. 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 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

The overall aim is to ensure that staff are able to recognise and act swiftly and appropriately to all cases of self-harm.

- ❖ 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 – including eyelashes, eyebrows etc

- ❖ Banging or hitting the head or other parts of the body
- ❖ Scouring or scrubbing the body excessively
- ❖ Attempting to terminate an unwanted pregnancy

Less obvious self-harm also include:-

- ❖ Controlled eating patterns – anorexia, bulimia, over-eating
- ❖ Indulging in risky behaviours to include sexualised behaviour and destructive use of drugs and alcohol
- ❖ An unhealthy life style
- ❖ Getting into fights repeatedly

5. 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

Family Factors

- ❖ Unreasonable expectations
- ❖ Neglect or physical, sexual or emotional abuse
- ❖ Poor parental relationship 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

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 warning signs should seek further advice from one of the designated teachers for safeguarding children.

Possible Warning signs include

- ❖ Changes in eating/sleeping habits (e.g. student may appear overtly 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
- ❖ Visible signs of injury

7. Links to Emotional Distress (including abuse)

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

Any young person who suggests they are experiencing suicidal tendencies must be taken seriously and safeguarding procedures must be put in place immediately. The person must **not** be left alone at any time. Emotional and 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
- ❖ Inappropriate advice from the internet such as chat rooms
- ❖ Bullying
- ❖ Dares and bravado
- ❖ Abuse – sexual, physical, emotional or through neglect
- ❖ History of abuse or self-harming in the family
- ❖ Sudden changes in behaviour and/or academic performance
- ❖ Media influence
- ❖ Relationship difficulties (family or friends)
- ❖ Learning difficulties
- ❖ Religious or cultural identity
- ❖ Pressure to achieve (from teachers or parents)
- ❖ Substance abuse (including tobacco, alcohol or drugs)
- ❖ Issues around sexuality

8. 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.

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 or the designated Governor for safeguarding children.

Following the report, the designated teacher/governor 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 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**

9. 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

The information should be stored in the student's child protection file.

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 for safeguarding children.

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.

10. Advice to Parents

Parents should not feel isolated if they know or suspect that their child is at risk of or is actually self-harming. If parents have concerns they should contact the school for advice. They should also contact their GP or medical support such as A&E if the situation is life threatening or serious.

11. Monitoring and Review

This policy will be reviewed annually alongside the schools Safeguarding Policy.

12. Linked Policies

Safeguarding/Child Protection Policy
Medications Policy
Sexual Health & Awareness Policy
Anti-Bullying Policy

13. Useful Resources and Helplines

Childline – 24 hour helpline for children and young people
0800 1111 (free phone from landlines) or 0800 400 222 – text phone
www.childline.org.uk

Young Minds – national charity committed to improving the mental health of children and young people. Interactive website for advice and information.
www.youngminds.org.uk

Self-Harm Uk –Charity committed to supporting young people who self harm. Interactive website which is monitored.
www.selfharm.co.uk

Recover Your Life – Self-harm support community providing support and advice to those seeking to recover from self-harm.
www.recoveryourlife.com

National self-harm network – support for individuals who self-harm, friends and family.
0800 622 6000 (Thursday – Saturday 7 p.m. – 11 pm, Sunday 6:30 pm – 10:30 pm)

Substance Advice Services (SAS) – provides confidential advice and support to young people who are concerned about their alcohol or drug use.

01275 999 360

59-61 Oxford Street, Weston-Super-Mare, BS23 1 TR

Appendix

The flowchart overleaf provides guidance on assessment and possible courses of action for supporting children who are at risk of self-harm.