



NOTTINGHAM
FREE SCHOOL

NOTTINGHAM FREE SCHOOL - Self-Injury 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

- 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

Self-harm is usually conducted at times of anger, distress, fear, emotional worry, low mood or low self-esteem in order to manage negative feelings.

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 relationships and arguments
Depression, self-harm or suicide in the family
Being a young carer
Being currently or previously looked after child

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 any of these warning signs should seek further advice from one of the designated teachers for safeguarding children – Kay Gray, Jenny Brown, Jodie Harnan and Susan Seymour.

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

Secretive behaviour

Skipping PE

Lateness to or absence from school

7. 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 – Kay Prendergast-Gray, Janet Brashaw, Suzanne Wells and Dave Hooker. Following the report, the designated teacher 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

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.

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 & 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.

9. Responding to self-harm 'fads'

Schools are increasingly reporting low level self-harm 'fads' sweeping through the school. This can take many different forms including:

- Superficial cutting
- Superficial burning
- Scratching
- Aerosol burns

This form of self-harm is usually superficial and is a behavioural issue rather than a coping mechanism for individuals.

A zero tolerance policy should be implemented with the school behaviour ladder being consistently followed. The following rules should be enforced:

- Injuries must be covered
- Long sleeves in PE if necessary
- Self-Harm on school premises is punishable in accordance with the school's behaviour policy
- Self-harm incidents should be responded to dispassionately and practically

In addition to addressing the group, it is important to talk privately with each individual as a minority may turn to self-harm as a coping mechanism even once their friends have stopped. Individuals should also be followed up with some months later as any pupil who has self-harmed once is more likely than their peers to turn secretly to self-harming in the future as a means of coping with difficult situations.

10. Student Responsibility

- Ensure all wounds are cared for properly and bandaged appropriately;
- Do not display fresh or open wounds;
- When talking to teachers or friends about your 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.

11. Parent Responsibility

- 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.

Relationship to other policies

- Child Protection,
- Behaviour and Anti-Bullying Policies.

Evaluation and Monitoring

Date established by governing body: September 2014

Date for full implementation: October 2014

Date for Review: September 2016

Policies should be reviewed every regularly in line with current policies.