

Self-Harm Policy

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1. Introduction

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 girls and young people with special educational needs. Working in partnership with parents, we 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. 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 or who are at risk of doing so
- To provide support to students who self-harm and their peers and parents/carers
- Use a whole trust approach to increase understanding and awareness of self-harming behaviours and help all students improve their self-esteem and emotional literacy.

3. Definition of Self-Harm

Self-harm can be a coping mechanism and 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
- Episodes of alcohol/drug abuse or over/under-eating at times maybe acts of deliberate self-harm.
- Over-eating or under-eating
- Hanging
- Suffocation
- Purposefully running in front of cars or striking objects such as walls to cause harm to themselves

4. Risk Factors

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

Individual Factors:

- Low self-esteem
- Anxiety/depression
- Poor problem-solving/communication skills
- Recent trauma
- Hopelessness

- Impulsivity
- Drug/alcohol abuse and other risk taking behaviour
- Sudden changes in behaviour and academic performance.

Family Factors:

- Unreasonable expectations
- Neglect or physical, sexual or emotional abuse
- Poor parental relationships and arguments
- Drug or substance misuse in the family
- Domestic abuse
- Poor mental health, self-harm or suicide in the family.

Social Factors:

- Difficulty in making relationships/loneliness
- Being bullied or rejected by peers
- Friends who self-harm
- Cases of physical, sexual or emotional abuse from peers or others.

5. Reasons for Self-Harm

Self-harming may serve several different functions for a pupil. These may include:

- to manage extreme emotional upset
- to manage family relationships difficulties (the most common reason for young adolescents)
- to manage difficulties with peer relationships (the most common reason for older adolescents)
- to reduce tension
- to provide a feeling of physical pain to distract from emotional pain
- to express emotions such as hurt, anger or frustration
- a form of escape
- an effort to regain control over feelings or problems
- an attempt to punish themselves or others
- to elicit care from others
- to manage exam pressure
- to cope with difficult times of the year (e.g. anniversaries)
- to identify with a peer group (contagion effect)
- to deal with incidents of bullying or cyber-bullying
- self-harm can also be a suicide attempt

6. Warning Signs

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 Person or other DSLs, the academy SENCo, members of the pastoral senior team, members of the academy senior leadership team or linked Educational Psychologist.

Possible warning signs include:

- Inappropriate clothing for warm weather and/or pulling sleeves over hands
- 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
- Excessive or secretive use of the internet
- 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 appearance or clothing e.g. dark colours, dark makeup
- Giving away possessions

7. Suicide

Although Self-Harm 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 important that all incidents of Self-Harm are taken seriously and that the underlying issues and emotional distress are thoroughly investigated and necessary emotional support given in order to minimize any greater risk.

Any mention of suicidal intent should always be taken seriously and the trust policy for Child Protection should be followed immediately

8. Possible future problems stemming from Self-Harm and actions to help

It is important where possible to tackle self-harming behaviour early in order to avert potential future problems. These include:

- Depending on the method, self-harm can lead to serious physical damage, including permanent scarring, the medical effects of a dangerous overdose, etc.
- Self-harm may be linked to other problems, such as depression, anxiety, eating disorders or drug and alcohol use, for which specific treatment may be required
- Individuals who have self-harmed are at higher risk of suicide than other young people, although the risk is still low

All of us, no matter what our role with a pupil can help. Ways in which we can help include:

- Take talk of suicide very seriously
- Don't let self-harm become the focus of a relationship with a pupil
- Try to deal with self-harm in a matter-of-fact manner
- Let a pupil know that their emotions are real and important
- Remind them of their strengths and abilities
- Reassure them that you do not think they are a failure whatever their difficulties
- Explain to a pupil that you want to help but may not know the best thing to do, and try to come up with a solution together (e.g., working with parents to establish a visit to the GP)
- Watch for signs of bullying or abuse that may be triggering self-harm

Distraction activities

Replacing the cutting or other self-harm with other safer activities can be a positive way of coping with the tension. What works depends on the reasons behind the self-harm. Activities that involve the emotions intensely can be helpful.

Examples of distraction methods:

- Contacting a friend or family member
- Going for a walk/run or other forms of physical exercise
- Getting out of the house and going to a public place e.g. a cinema
- Reading a book
- Keeping a diary
- Looking after an animal
- Watching TV
- Listening to music

9. Staff Roles in working with students who Self-Harm**9.1 Principal**

- Designate one or more key staff to be responsible for all incidents relating to Self-Harm
- Ensure that designated staff receive appropriate training and supervision
- Ensure that all staff including teaching assistants and other non-teaching staff, are made aware of and understand the Self-Harm policy.
- Provide students with open access to information about Self-Harm and details of who to go to for help and support
- Where necessary, ensure a risk assessment is available and its recommendations put into place and is reviewed regularly
- Are clear about what behaviour will not be tolerated and ensure all students are aware and understand the academy rules (e.g. self-injuring in front of other students or threats to Self-Harm as part of bargaining or manipulation may be unacceptable)
- Have agreed that self-harm should be part of the curriculum which should be led by professionals.

9.2 All staff:

- Read this policy, review all duty of care documents and be aware of the communication process
- Do not make promises you can't keep regarding such things as confidentiality
- Avoid dismissing a pupil's reasons for Self-Harm as invalid
- Use the Hatton Academies Trust child protection referral procedures
- Make it known to students which adults in the academy are available to actively listen
- Remain calm and non-judgemental at all times
- Report the matter to designated members of staff as soon as you become aware of the problem and inform the student that you will be doing so.

9.3 Designated members of staff

- Ensure implementation of the policy, communicate with each other and report back to the Principal
- Refer to the Young Minds Guide for Professionals when responding to Self-Harm. The link can be found [here](#)
- Refer to the Ask Normen guide - ([NCC119034 Self Harm Booklet.pdf](#) [\(asknormen.co.uk\)](#))
- Encourage students to be open with you and reassure them that they can get the help they need if they are willing to talk
- Try to make the students feel in control by asking them what they would like to happen and what help they feel they need etc.
- Discuss and promote healthy coping mechanisms and suggest ways in which students can be empowered to make positive changes in their lives
- Provide access to information and resources regarding Self-Harm and its causes
- Provide and encourage access to exterior help and support where possible
- Monitor the reactions of other students who know about the Self-Harm
- Avoid asking a students to stop Self-Harming – you may be removing their coping mechanism
- Draw up a suitable risk assessment in conjunction with other stakeholders
- Ensure agreed action on the risk assessment are in place
- Regularly review the risk assessment
- Maintain up to date record of students experiencing Self-Harm, incidents of Self-Harm and all other concerns surrounding the issue
- Monitor the help, support and progress of students in your care and maintain communication with them
- Ensure you are fully confident in your understanding of Self-Harm and seek additional information and/or training for yourself if you feel it is necessary
- Contact other organisations and key services for help and support for the student
- Liaise with the Principal and student to decide if any other members of staff who have contact with the student should be made aware of the Self-Harm and underlying concerns
- Ensure that the first aiders are well informed about the Self-Harm
- Inform the student's parents if appropriate and liaise with them as to how best manage the situation
- Be aware of when it is essential for other professional bodies to be informed, such as social services or educational psychologists
- Report any mention of suicidal feelings or behaviour as a matter of urgency
- Take care of your own emotional well-being and seek support as and when necessary

9.4 Students

- 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-Harm, focus on the emotional reasons behind your distress and not the Self-Harm itself
- Avoid talking graphically about your injuries to other students or describing the methods you use
- Never encourage anyone to try Self-Harm

- When under emotional distress or feeling the urge to Self-Harm at school, try to find a adult you are comfortable talking to for help
- Discuss any additional support you feel you may need while you are going through emotional distress
- Be aware that school staff are there to help you. The more you talk to them the better able they will be to give you the support and help you need
- If you are worried that a friend may be Self-Harming then do talk to an adult you trust for advice
- If you are concerned that a friend may be suicidal or has mentioned suicide then alert a teacher straight away.

9.5 Parents/carers are encouraged to:

- Understand and endorse the trust Self-Harm policy
- If your child is Self-Harming, work closely with the academy and take an active role in deciding the best course of action for your child
- Understand the emotional difficulties behind a student's behaviour
- Keep the academy informed of any incidents outside 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-Harm

10. Monitoring and review

The effectiveness of this policy will be measured by asking staff, students and parents for feedback as to how each stage of an incident was dealt with. It will form part of the review work of the Trust's Safeguarding Group.