

Handsworth Grange Community Sports College



SELF HARM POLICY

2021-22

SELF HARM

This policy describes the Handsworth Grange Community Sports College's approach to self-harm. It is intended as guidance for all staff including non-teaching staff and governors.

Aims

- To increase understanding and awareness of self-harm
- To alert staff to warning signs and risk factors
- To provide support to pupils who self-harm and their peers and parents/carers
- To provide support for staff dealing with self-harm

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
- Risk taking behaviour e.g. unsafe sexual behaviour, substance misuse.
- Eating disorders e.g. anorexia nervosa, bulimia nervosa

Why young people harm themselves

The exact reasons why children and young people decide to hurt themselves aren't always easy to work out. In fact, they might not even know exactly why they do it.

There are links between depression and self-harm. Quite often a young person who is self-harming is being bullied, under too much pressure to do well at school, being emotionally abused, grieving or having relationship problems with family or friends.

Often, the physical pain of self-harm might feel easier to deal with than the emotional pain that's behind it. It can also make a young person feel they're in control of at least one part of their lives. Sometimes it can also be a way for them to punish themselves for something they've done or have been accused of doing.

Risk Factors

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

Individual Factors:

- Depression / low mood / anxiety / stress
- Poor communication skills
- Low self-esteem
- Poor problem-solving skills
- Hopelessness
- LGBTQ+
- Struggling to cope with existing emotional, mental and / or physical health problems
- Impulsivity
- Drug or alcohol abuse
- Feeling like you have no control over your life

Family Factors:

- Unreasonable expectations including pressure to conform / achieve
- Neglect or physical, sexual or emotional abuse
- Poor parental relationships and arguments
- Depression, self-harm or suicide in the family. This can result in pupils struggling at significant dates in the year e.g. anniversaries

Social Factors:

- Difficulty in making relationships / loneliness
- Being bullied or rejected by peers
- Self-harm behaviour in other pupils or friends outside of the school setting (contagion effect)
- Self-harm portrayed or reported in the media

Warning Signs

School staff may become aware of warning signs which indicate pupil is experiencing difficulties which 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 a member of the safeguarding team.

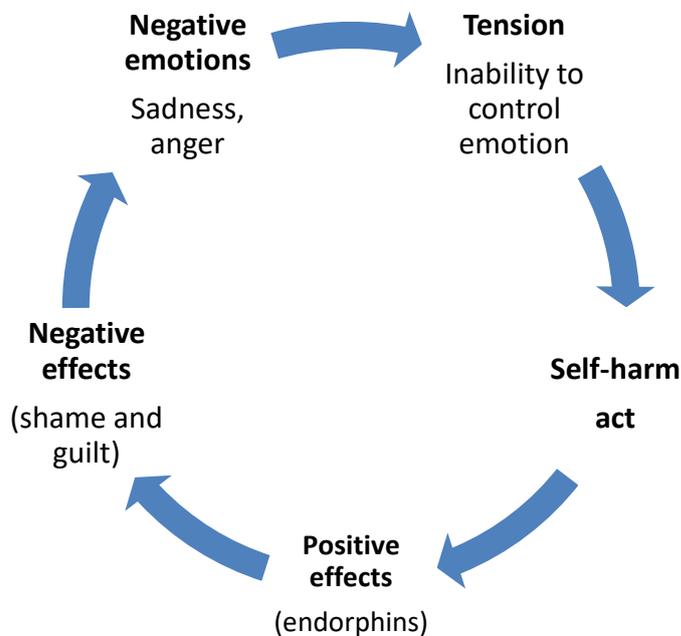
Possible warning signs include:

- Changes in eating / sleeping habits (e.g. pupil 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
- Displaying physical signs of self-harm such as cuts to arms or head banging

8. The cycle of self-harm

When a person inflicts pain on themselves, their body produces endorphins. These are natural pain relievers and can give temporary relief from distress and induce a feeling of peace. This can become an addictive sensation which in turn makes it difficult for the person to stop the self-harm behaviours. Self-harming can cause physical pain but this is easier to manage than the emotional pain which led to the self-harm in the first instance. The cycle also results in the person feeling a sense of shame or guilt. Within a school setting staff can encourage a pupil who is self-harming to replace the self-harm behaviours with safer coping strategies.



9. Management of the 'Contagion Effect'

Staff who have been made aware that a pupil is self-harming must remain vigilant in case their peers are also self-harming. Self-harm can become an acceptable way of dealing with stress and anxiety within a friendship group and can enable pupils to have a sense of identity.

Each individual pupil may have different reasons for self-harming and should be given the opportunity for one to one support. It is not appropriate for the school to offer group support.

10. Staff roles and responsibilities when working with pupils who self-harm

Pupils may choose to confide in a member of school staff if they are concerned about their own welfare, or that of a peer. If a pupil approaches a member of staff they should be listened to on a non-judgemental way. Staff should maintain a supportive and open attitude – a pupil who has chosen to discuss their concerns is showing a considerable amount of courage and trust.

Pupils must 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.

Any member of staff who is aware a pupil is engaging in or suspected to be at risk of engaging in self-harm should complete a **green safeguarding form** and pass to a member of the safeguarding team who will decide what action to take. This may include:

- Immediately removing the pupil from lessons if their remaining in class is likely to cause further distress to themselves or their peers
- Offering one to one support including harm reduction work
- Contacting parent / carers *
- Seek specialist advice
- Referring to an appropriate agency for further support

*parents / carers will **always** be informed where the pupil is under 13 years old (unless to do so would put them at greater risk of harm in which case the school's Child Protection and Safeguarding Policy will be followed).

A school risk assessment will be completed for each incident of self harm
Clear written records will be kept of all meetings with pupils including any risk assessments and actions taken. This information will be stored in the pupil's safeguarding file.

Do's and Don'ts: Advice for staff:

Do

- Stay calm and do not show anxiety, disapproval or disgust
- Listen to the pupil
- Make it clear that you cannot offer complete confidentiality and must inform a member of the schools safeguarding team
- Observe the pupil's non-verbal clues - does what they say and what you see match up?
- Reassure the pupil – they need to know they will be supported

Don't

- Panic. Self-harm is a complex issue. Panicking will not help the pupil feel safe and contained
- Send the pupil away. Make some time for them or signpost them to a member of the safeguarding team.
- Be judgemental or refer to the self-harm as 'attention seeking'
- Work alone. Concerns must be recorded on a green safeguarding form and passed to a member of the school safeguarding team
- Tell other members of school staff what the pupil has shared with you. Information is shared on a 'need to know' basis only.
- Contact parents / carers. This will be done by a member of the school's safeguarding team if appropriate.

11. Confidentiality, consent and information sharing

Confidentiality is a key concern for young people. Every pupil has the right to be treated with respect and dignity. They have the right to privacy, a safe environment and where appropriate, should be consulted and given the opportunity to express their views about decisions which may affect their lives.

The UN Convention on the Rights of the Child states that:

"the wishes of a young person must be taken into account when considering their best interests"

At Handsworth Grange Community Sports College, we recognise that our pupils span the age range of 11 – 16 years. When considering making a judgement about their interests, the member of staff should also take into account the age and maturity of the pupil and subsequently, their ability to make an informed decision about their life.

Pupils have the right to request confidentiality from a member of staff. When considering this request, staff **must** take into consideration the following factors:

- The age and the competence of the pupil (use Fraser guidelines to determine emotional maturity, intelligence, vulnerability and comprehension of the issues))
- The risk to the pupil or any another young person under the age of 18
- Whether to break confidentiality would actually increase the risk of harm to the pupil
- Whether the issue is of a safeguarding nature and the school's Child Protection and Safeguarding Policy should be followed.

Having considered the above factors, there may be occasions when trained staff feel able to keep information about a pupils self-harming confidential. Parents and carers will not automatically be informed unless:

- the pupil is under 13 years of age
- The pupil is not 'Fraser competent'
- The pupil refuses to engage with regular support ensuring that they can continue to be safely risk assessed and their emotional wellbeing monitored.

In the above circumstances, staff **must** have considered (and risk assessed using appendix 1) safeguarding factors to clarify whether informing parents / carers would increase the risk of harm to the pupil. In these situations the school's Child Protection and Safeguarding Policy would be followed.

All decisions relating to the agreement to keep information confidential must be clearly recorded with evidence of a thorough risk assessment in the pupil's safeguarding file. Risk assessments are an on-going process and it may be that information that initially has been kept confidential may need to be shared at a future point. The pupil will always be informed of a decision to break confidentiality and share information (unless to do so would place them at greater risk).

12. Useful sources of further information

Childline

ChildLine offers free, confidential advice and support to under 18's.

0800 1111

www.childline.org.uk

YoungMinds

For anyone concerned about a child or young person's mental health

www.youngminds.org.uk

Parent helpline: 0808 802 5544

Epic Friends

A website developed by the Sheffield Children's NHS Foundation Trust specialising in mental health issues such as self-harm

www.epicfriends.co.uk