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*The purpose of this document is to assist all staff to safeguard and protect children who are at risk of injury by Self Harm. This policy and procedures should be read in conjunction with the relevant sections of the London Safeguarding Children Procedures. This policy also reflects the requirements of Working Together to Safeguard Children 2006, Safeguarding Children & Safer Recruitment Guidance March 2013.*

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## **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.

## **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.

## **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.

## **Definition of Self-Harm**

We regard self-harm to be a coping mechanism for young people who are attempting to cope with high levels of distress and emotional pain. 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.

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.
- ✳ Banging or hitting the head or other parts of the body.
- ✳ Scouring or scrubbing the body excessively.

## **Risk factors**

The following risk factors, particularly in combination, may make a young person 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.
- ✘ Depressions, self-harm or suicide in the family.

## Social Factors

- ✘ Difficulty in making relationships/loneliness.
- ✘ Being bullied or rejected by peers.

## Warning Signs

School staff may become aware of warning signs which indicate a student is experiencing difficulties that may lead to thought 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.

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).

## 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 inform one of the designated teachers for safeguarding children.

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.

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- ✘ **In the case of an acutely distressed student, the immediate safety of the student is paramount and an adult should remain with the students at all times.**
  - ✘ **If a student has self-harmed in school a first-aider should be called for immediate help.**
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## Further Considerations

Any meetings with a student, their parents or their peers regarding self-harm will be recorded in writing, including:

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

This information will be recorded on a self-harm register.

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.