

St. Paul's CE Primary School

Managing self-harm policy

Introduction

There are many reasons why children and young people try to harm themselves and once they start it can become compulsive. This is why it's important to spot self-harming as soon as possible and provide support.

Self-harm is not usually a suicide attempt or a cry for attention, instead it is often a way for children and young people to release overwhelming emotions. It is a way of coping and should be taken seriously.

Self-harming behaviour can start at an early age and there is an increase in primary school presentation, this does however rise steeply during pre-adolescence and adolescence. School can play an important part in preventing self-harm and also in supporting, students, peers and parents.

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.

Self-harm is any self-injurious behaviour where the extent is to deliberately cause harm to one's own body or suicidal thoughts or actions. Examples of self-injurious behaviour are:

- Cutting, scratching, scarping 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

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/misuse
- Having additional needs/SEND

Family Factors

- Unreasonable expectations
- Neglect or physical, sexual emotional abuse
- Poor parental relationships/arguments
- Depression, self-harm or suicide in the family

Social Factors:

- Difficulty in making relationships/loneliness
- Being bullied or rejected by peers
- Interest in social networking/websites that focus on self-harm or suicide

School staff may become aware of warning signs which indicate a student is experiencing difficulties that may lead to thoughts of self-injury or suicide. These warning signs should always be taken seriously and staff observing any of these signs should seek further advice from the Designated Safeguarding Lead (DSL) or their Deputy. (DDSL)

Possible warning signs include:

- Changes in eating/sleeping habits
- 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 appearance

Staff roles in working with students 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. School staff may experience a range of feelings in response to self-harm in a pupil such as anger, sadness, shock, disbelief, guilt, helplessness, disgust and rejection. However, in order to offer the best possible help to pupils it is important to try and maintain a supportive and open attitude – a pupil who has chosen to discuss their concerns with a member of school staff is showing a considerable amount of courage and trust.

Students may need to be 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.** It is important not to make promises of confidentiality that cannot be kept even if a pupil 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 the DSL or DDSL.

Following the report, the DSL or DDSL will make an assessment of the level of risk and decide on the appropriate course of action.

This may include:

- Contacting parents/carers
- Contacting the relevant statutory agencies e.g Children's Services or the Police.
- Arranging other professional assistance e.g, doctor, nurse, etc
- 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 pupil, the immediate safety of that pupil is paramount and an adult should remain with that pupil at all times.

If a pupil has self-harmed in school a first-aider should be called for immediate help.

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
- Notes of supervision or consultation

The above information should be stored on CPOMS.

It is important to encourage pupils to let a member of staff know if one of their peers 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 individually or in a small group. Any member of staff wishing for further advice should consult the DSL or their Deputy.

When a young person is self-harming and the protective factors that have been put in place are outweighed by the remaining risks, advice should be sought from other agencies to determine whether the threshold for Child Protection has been met.

Link documents

See also the Child Protection and Safeguarding Policy.

Review date

This policy will be updated annually. Next review date September 2027.

