

TREVI GLAS COMMUNITY COLLEGE

SELF-HARM POLICY

Introduction

Research indicates that up to one in ten young people in the UK engage in self-harming behaviour (Samaritans) and the ratio is 3:1 girls to boys. The Mental Health Foundation/ Camelot Foundation (2006) suggest that there are “probably two young people in every secondary classroom who have self-harmed at some time”. (The Truth about Self-harm, London MHF/CF)

Adults who work with children and young people in a school can play an important role in preventing the self-harm and also in supporting the peers, parents/carers of the child or young person who is currently engaging in self-harm.

This policy describes our approach to self-harm and is intended as guidance for all adults working within our setting.

Aims

- To increase understanding and awareness of self-harm
- To alert adults to warning signs and risk factors
- To provide support to adults dealing with children and young people who self-harm
- To provide support to children and young people who self-harm and their peers and parents/carers

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

OR they may behave in ways that suggest they don't care whether they live or die- these are some of the less obvious ways of self-harming:

- Control eating patterns- anorexia, bulimia, over-eating
- Indulge in risky behaviour e.g. Car dodging
- Indulge in risky sexual behaviour
- Destructive use of drugs or alcohol

Suicide: People who self-harm are at increased risk of serious harm. Death may occur as the result of an accident or miscalculation of the risks of the self-harming behaviour. In some cases it can be intentional.

Risk Factors

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

- Individual factors: Depression and 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
- Social factors: Difficulty in making relationships/loneliness, being bullied or rejected by peers

Warning Signs or Indicators

About 1 in 10 young people will self-harm at some point and it can occur at any age. The following risk factors, particularly in combination, may make a young person particularly vulnerable to self-harm:

Adults may become aware of warning signs which indicate a child or young person is experiencing difficulties that may lead to thoughts of self-harm or suicide. These warning signs should always be taken seriously and adults observing any of these warning signs should seek further advice from their designated safeguarding lead in the setting.

In this setting this is Mrs V Maule or Mrs N Pender.

Possible warning signs include:

Changes in eating/sleeping habits (e.g. child/ young person 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 (in school), 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.

How does it make young people feel?

Self-harm can help young people to feel more in control and can reduce uncomfortable feelings of tension and distress. If they feel guilty, it can be a way of punishing themselves and relieving their guilt. Some young people feel better immediately afterwards and then feel guilty about what they have done.

Popular Misconceptions about self-harm?

- They are not attention seeking
- It is not a horrific prank
- It is not a phase
- It is not a cry for help

- It is not a suicide attempt, self-harm is a coping strategy; it is to do with staying alive

Are people who self-harm mentally ill?

It is important that all attempts of suicide or deliberate self-harm are taken seriously. All mention of suicidal thoughts should be noticed and the young person listened to carefully.

Most young people who self-harm are not mentally ill. However, some may be depressed or misuse alcohol and drugs. Everyone who self-harms should be taken seriously and offered help.

What can help?

When a young person wants to harm themselves:

The feelings of self-harm will go away after a while. If they can cope with the upset without self-harming for a time, it will get easier over the next few hours.

It might be useful to get the young person to think of a time when they felt like self-harming but had not done so. What had they done instead?

Try to help the young person come up with things that might work for them. If this is not possible some suggestions could be made. They could consider the following:

- Talk to someone-if they are on their own perhaps phone a friend
- Distract themselves by going out, singing or listening to music, or by doing anything (harmless) that interest them
- Relax and focus their mind on something pleasant- their very own personal comforting place
- Find another way to express their feelings such as squeezing ice cubes (which can be made with red juice to mimic blood if the sight of blood is important) or just drawing red lines on their skin
- Give themselves some 'harmless pain'- eat a hot chilli, or have a cold shower
- Focus their mind on positives
- Be kind to themselves- get a massage
- Write a diary or a letter, to explain what is happening-no one else needs to see it

When the young person does not want to stop self-harming?

If the young person decides that they don't want to stop self-harming, you can still discuss the following with them:

- How to stay safe and reduce the damage to their body
- How to deal with the things that lead them to self-harm
- How to find another way of dealing with their distress
- Every so often, to revisit their decision not to stop self-harming

Adult roles in working with young people who self-harm

Children and young people may choose to confide in a trusted adult if they are concerned about their own welfare or that of a peer. Adults may experience a range of feelings in response to self-harm in a child/young person such as anger, sadness, shock, disbelief, guilt, helplessness, disgust and rejection.

However, in order to offer the best possible help to children and young people it is important to try and maintain a supportive and open attitude a child/young person who has chosen to discuss their concerns with an adult is showing a considerable amount of courage and trust.

What can I do if I know someone who self harms?

It can be very upsetting to be close to someone who self-harms but there are things you can do. The most important is to listen to them without judging them or being critical. This can be very hard if you are upset- and perhaps angry-about what they are doing. Try to concentrate on them rather than your own feelings, although this can be hard.

- Don't worry about saying the wrong thing
- Show genuine concern
- Be open and make time to listen to them
- Encourage them to make their own decisions
- Be calm and patient with them

Don't

- Show disappointment
- Give ultimatums
- Shout
- Try to force the person to talk
- Try to force them to stop- remember self-harming might be keeping them safe

Please note:

Children and young people need to be made aware that it may not be possible for adults to offer complete confidentiality.

If you consider a child/young person 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 child/young person puts pressure on you to do so.

Any adult in the setting who is aware of a child/young person engaging in or suspected to be at risk of engaging in self-harm should consult a member of the senior designated safeguarding team Mrs V Maule or Mrs N Pender. If they are not available then our safeguarding team Mrs S Robins, Mrs V Grainger, Mrs C Bellamy, Ms N Penfold, Ms S Stephens will be available

Following the report, the designated safeguarding person 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
- In school, 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 child/young person, the immediate safety of the child/ young person is paramount and an adult should remain with the child/young person at all times.

If a child/young person has self-harmed in the setting, a first aider should be called for immediate help.

Further considerations:

Any meetings with a child/young person, 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 child/young person's child protection file.

Information regarding students at serious risk of harm will be shared with staff when necessary and relevant.

Suggested Websites for further support or guidance:

- **Childline**- 24hr helpline for children and young people. 0800 11 11 (free phone from landlines) or 0800 400 222 text phone (www.childline.org.uk)
- **Young Minds**- national charity committed to improving the mental health of children and young people. Interactive website for advice and information- www.youngminds.org.uk
- **Recover your Life**- self-harm support community, providing support and advice to those seeking to recover from self-harm- www.recoveryourlife.com
- **National self-harm network** support for individuals who self-harm, friends and family. 0800 622 6000 (Thurs-Sat 7pm-11pm, Sun 6:30pm-10:30pm) www.nshn.co.uk