



# SELF HARM POLICY

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**“Self-harm is an expression of how someone is feeling, an expression of a very difficult emotional distress.”**  
**Self-harm.co.uk**

## 1. 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 acknowledging self-harm and also in supporting pupils, peers and parents of pupils currently engaging in self-harm.

We are committed to safeguarding the emotional health and wellbeing of all pupils. We recognise that self-harm may be a sign of distress and that pupils with additional needs may require sensitive, proactive and individualised support.

### **Our approach is guided by our core values:**

**Belong** – We create a safe, trusting environment where pupils feel accepted, listened to and able to share worries without fear of judgement.

**Commit** – We are committed to early identification, clear procedures and close partnership with families and external professionals to ensure pupils receive timely and appropriate support.

**Thrive** – We support pupils to develop emotional understanding, coping strategies and resilience, enabling them to manage distress and engage positively with learning and school life.

All concerns relating to self-harm are taken seriously and responded to promptly, sensitively and in line with safeguarding procedures, with the wellbeing and safety of the pupil always our priority.

This policy should be read alongside the school's Safeguarding and Child Protection Policy, Behaviour Policy, SEND Policy, Positive Handling Policy and Online Safety Policy, and is informed by current statutory guidance including Keeping Children Safe in Education.

## 2. Scope

This document describes TPA's approach to self-harming in school during the school day. This policy is intended as guidance for all staff including non-teaching staff and trustees.

## 3. 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 pupils who self-harm
- To provide support to pupils who self-harm and their peers and parents/carers

#### **4. 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
- Scouring or scrubbing the body excessively

Self-harm should be understood as a coping response to emotional distress rather than attention-seeking behaviour.

While self-harm and suicidal ideation can be linked, not all self-harm is a suicide attempt. However, all self-harm must be treated as a significant safeguarding concern due to the increased risk of escalation.

#### **5. Risk Factors**

There are many reasons why young people engage in self-harming behaviours. 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

## 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

School staff must be alert to copy-cat behaviour linked to incidents in school and/or outside the school including on social media sites.

Research suggests that the main reasons for self-harming to be:

1. Bullying (25%)
2. Family relationships (17%)
3. Pressure to do well at school (14%)
4. Emotional abuse (11%)
5. Friendships (11%)

## **6. Warning Signs**

School staff may become aware of warning signs which indicate a pupil 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 Lead (DSL). Staff should not investigate or probe but should listen calmly, offer reassurance, and immediately pass concerns to the DSL. The DSL will inform appropriate medical and other staff on a 'need-to-know' basis.

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 including not wanting to take part in PE lessons
- Talking or joking about self-harm or suicide or taking opportunities through their work to write about/describe their feelings and actions
- Abusing drugs or alcohol
- Expressing feelings of failure, uselessness or loss of hope
- Changes in style of dress

## 7. Roles in 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. 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, **non-judgemental** 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.

Pupils need to be made aware that it is not 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 pupil engaging in or suspected to be at risk of engaging in self-harm should refer on to the DSL or their deputy who may already be aware. The DSL will inform the appropriate staff members.

Following the report, the DSL will decide on the appropriate course of action. This may include:

- Contacting parents/carers – the school will always try to include parents/carers
- Arranging professional assistance e.g. doctor, nurse, social services
- Arranging an appointment with a counsellor
- Immediately removing the pupil 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 the pupil is paramount and an adult should remain with the pupil at all times
- If a pupil has self-harmed in school a first aider should be called for immediate help

Where it is clear that the young person is using a sharp object to self-harm during the school day, the DSL, with an assistant, will try to confiscate the object. This might include a search of the school bag and/or locker if the young person is not willing to give it up voluntarily. Any search will be carried out by authorised staff, with due regard to the pupil's dignity, privacy and safeguarding needs, and in line with statutory guidance. Once confiscated it should be given only to the parent/carer and not back to the young person. Knives and other weapons may be handed to the Police.

With regard to knives/blades the actions of staff will follow the school policy on Behaviour where there is "reasonable cause" to suspect that a pupil is carrying an implement designed or likely to be used to cause harm that a search of possessions, locker and outer clothing may be carried out – with or without consent using powers granted to the school under the Education Act 1996.

In extreme cases, where the school is concerned about the safety of the individual and/or others, if there is reason to suspect that a pupil may be concealing a weapon in their inner clothing or any intimate areas the school may contact the police to carry out an intimate search. Parents will be informed.

If a pupil is believed to be at immediate risk of serious harm or suicide, emergency services may be contacted without delay, and parents/carers informed as soon as it is safe to do so.

## **8. Further Considerations**

Any meetings with a pupil, their parents or their peers regarding self-harm should be recorded including -

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

This information should be stored in the pupil's child protection file (see point 10 below).

The school may decide after taking advice that a risk assessment is appropriate (see point 11 below). Within that risk assessment the decision will be taken to confiscate blades or items used to self-harm. It is also possible that the young person may have to be accompanied to the toilet to minimise the risk of further self-harm. Risk assessments will be reviewed regularly and updated following any new incident or significant change in circumstances.

Where there is repeated self-harm the school will endeavour to arrange a referral to an educational/clinical psychologist either directly or through the family GP. The GP route is likely to be faster. Suggestions from psychologists will be taken into consideration when deciding how to manage pupils who self-harm in school, but actions taken by the staff will be determined by the risk assessment.

In circumstances where the self-harm is clearly visible to other pupils, the school may take the decision to remove the young person from mainstream classes (especially PE) if covering up is not possible.

It is important to encourage pupils 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 school will consider how e-Safety, PSHE, assembly and/or tutorial time could be used to inform pupils about the issue and how they could help support peers.

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. This person would normally be the DSL. In cases where the pupils(s) concerned request another member of staff, that member of staff should seek further advice on this by consulting one of the DSL.

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 pupils in the same peer group are harming themselves.

At all times the safety and welfare of the young person must be of paramount importance. However, school staff, unless specially trained must seek guidance and listen to safeguarding advice from external partners.

The school will, for individual young people at risk of self-harm, allow flexible timetables, issue a 'Green card', provide safe areas and so on, to allow the individual to take greater responsibility for managing their own behaviour in school. The DSL may nominate an adult mentor in school to encourage the young person to feel safe and share confidences through a trust-based partnership.

The charity ChildLine says there has been an increase in the number of self-harming incidents linked to cyberbullying. They have seen a dramatic increase in people getting in touch about the problem.

## **9. Informing parents**

It would be normal practice to encourage the young person to talk to parents/carers first. School staff respect confidentiality but at all times will endeavour to involve parents. Where the young person refuses to inform parents, school staff will refer the matter on to The Multi-Agency Safeguarding Hub (MASH) for guidance.

## **10. Record keeping**

Where a pupil has engaged in more than one incident of self-harm whilst at school, the DSL will keep an up-to-date pastoral chronology line to record incidents, actions taken and who has been informed. This is confidential to DSL and leadership team. Where agreed, the information will be shared with parents/carers and any other relevant professionals.

## **11. Risk assessment**

When a pupil self-harms in school the DSL will complete a risk assessment. The risk assessment will make clear how staff in school should manage individual young people whilst in school or on school trips. The school may not allow a pupil with a history of repeated self-harm to attend residential school trips.

## **12. Staff training**

Self-harm is a behavioural phenomenon more common than many people realise. This means it is important that school staff are trained to deal with incidents if and when they arise. The school will ensure that relevant staff receive regular training in recognising and responding to self-harm, including refresher training as appropriate.

## **13. Policy review**

This policy and any procedures employed when managing incidents of self-harm are to be reviewed annually to ensure they reflect best practice. This will be done as part of the Section 175 Safeguarding review / audit.

## **14. Support for staff**

TPA is aware that dealing with such matters can be traumatic for staff especially where self-harm is seriously injurious. There is a duty of care to staff as well as the pupil. Therefore, the lead member of staff dealing with cases of self-harm, in most cases the DSL, will be supported by the Deputy DSL or other senior member of staff. Staff are encouraged to seek support promptly and will not be expected to manage concerns in isolation. When required, the school will arrange well-being debriefing sessions with an outside facilitator.

## **15. Related internet links**

1. [www.selfharm.co.uk](http://www.selfharm.co.uk)
2. [www.youngminds.org.uk](http://www.youngminds.org.uk)
3. [www.childline.org.uk](http://www.childline.org.uk)

At all times, the school's response to self-harm will prioritise safety, compassion, dignity and partnership. Self-harm is treated as a safeguarding concern requiring careful professional judgement, collaboration and ongoing review.