

Policy number: E42

Reading School Self-Harm Policy

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 preventing self-harm and also in supporting students, peers and parents of students currently engaging in self-harm.

2. Definition - What is self-harm?

“Self-poisoning or self-injury, irrespective of the apparent purpose of the act” (NICE guidance). This may include:

- Burning
- Ligatures (harm caused by thread/tie/rope etc.)
- Hair Pulling
- Head Banging
- Pinching
- Overdosing
- Object Insertion
- Cutting
- Hitting with Objects

What is not self-harm?

- Drug misuse
- Alcohol misuse
- Eating disorders
- Psychological harm – putting yourself down etc.
- Risk taking – e.g. sexual behaviours, provoking fights

3. 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.

4. Aims

The purpose of this policy is to highlight the School's approach to self-harm ensuring consistent and appropriate care that minimises risks. These aims are achieved through:

- Increased understanding and awareness of self-harm
- Alerting staff to warning signs and risk factors
- Provision of support to staff dealing with students who self-harm
- Provision of support to students who self-harm and to their peers and parents/carers.
- Promotion of appropriate risk management of students who self-harm

5. Risk Factors

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

- Bullying
- Family Issues and difficulties at home (including parental relationship breakdown and domestic violence)
- Worrying about academic performance
- Emotional Abuse
- Friendships
- Bereavement
- Body Image
- Depression
- Friendship Issues
- Identity
- Stress
- Abuse
- Money Issues
- Feeling alone
- Low self confidence
- Low self esteem
- Feeling worthless
- Substance abuse

6. Warning Signs

School staff may become aware of warning signs which indicate a student 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 student's Head of House in the first instance. Signs that a student may be at an increased risk of self-harm may include:

- Obvious cuts/burns/scratches etc.
- Making an attempt to hide arms and legs
- Change in usual group
- Social withdrawal
- Acting out of character
- Bullying others
- Significant deterioration in academic work

7. Staff Roles in working with students who self-harm

As student safety is paramount if a student has self-harmed in school, an adult should remain with the student at all times and normal first aid procedures apply. These are outlined in the School's Medical Policies.

It may sometimes be necessary to remove a student from lessons if they have self-harmed, or are at imminent risk of self-harming. This should be undertaken if remaining in lessons is likely to further distress them, or other students in the class.

Any student who discloses self-harm should be made aware that it may not be possible for staff to offer confidentiality and, as with any safeguarding concern, if it is considered that a student is at serious risk of harming themselves then confidentiality cannot be kept. Equally, whilst key pastoral staff must be informed it is not necessarily the case that all staff will be informed about an individual who has self-harmed or is at risk of self-harm.

Any member of staff who is aware of a student engaging in, or suspected to be at risk of engaging in self-harm, should refer to the student's Head of House in the first instance. The Head of House will then be responsible for referring to one of the Designated Safeguarding Leads, the Day Matron, the student's Form Tutor or other external agencies, if appropriate; to ensure a risk assessment is completed.

If the Head of House cannot be accessed expediently the member of staff should refer their concerns to one of the School's Designated Safeguarding Leads.

8. Risk Management

Following the report of any self-harm incidence or threat/risk, the student's Head of House will complete a risk assessment that includes a risk reduction action plan. This may include:

- Contacting parents / carers
- Arranging professional assistance e.g. doctor, nurse, Children's Services, CAMHS
- Arranging an appointment with a counsellor / community school nurse
- Removal from Educational Visits or activities with heightened risk.

9. Record Keeping

Following the production of a risk assessment any meetings between staff undertaking pastoral duties and the student, their parents or their peers regarding self harm should be recorded on the Welfare Board spreadsheet. Details should include:

- Dates and times
- New, or additional concerns raised
- Suggested amendments to the action plan or risk assessment
- Details of anyone else who has been informed

Additionally, all self-harm injuries that occur in school must be recorded in the Accident and Incident Book which is kept in the Medical Centre. They will also be documented in Patient Tracker Software by Day Matron.

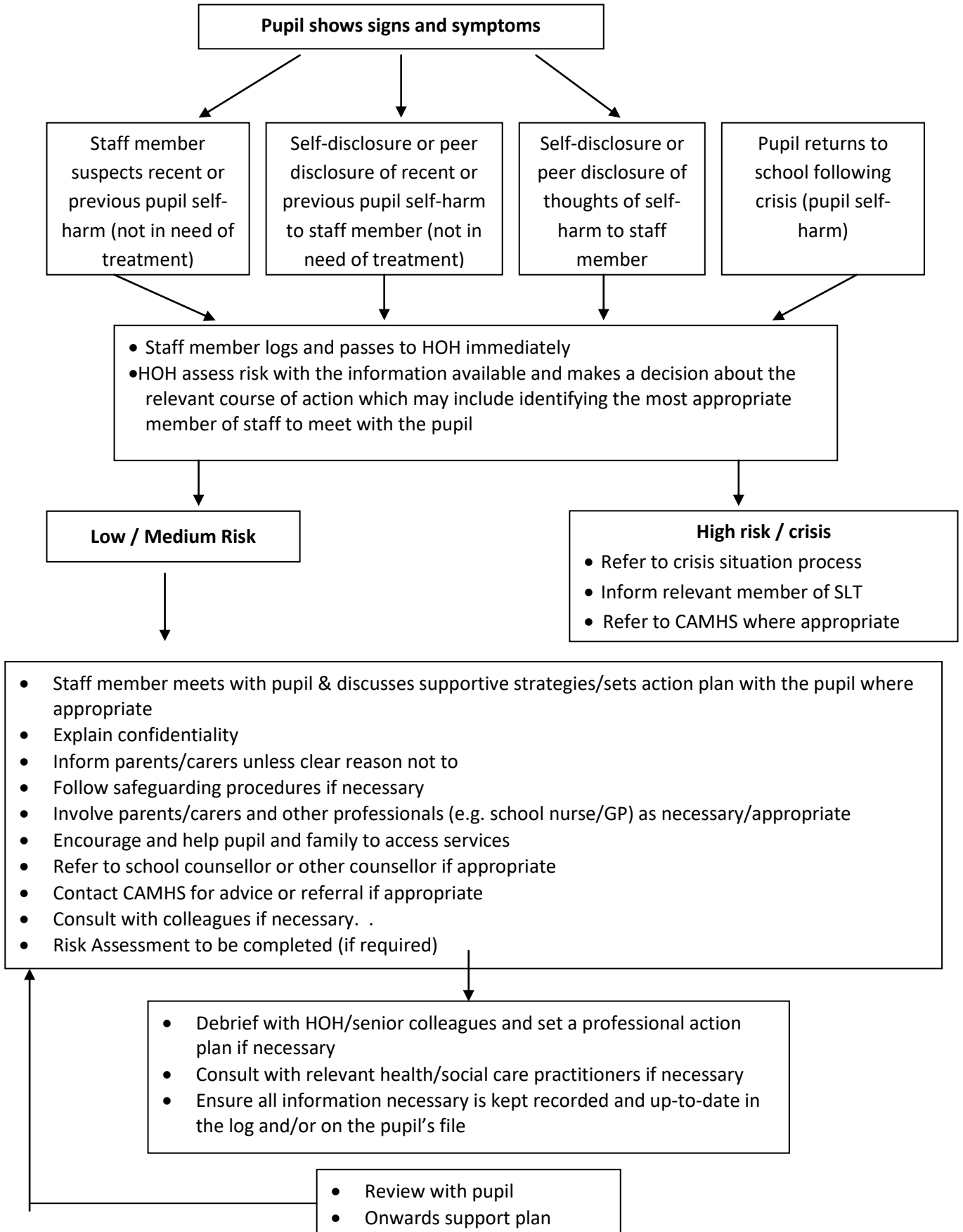
10. Boarding

In addition to the procedures identified above, any boarding student known to self-harm, or considered at risk of self-harm, will be supported by the Matron and Housemaster. Information will be shared between Housemaster and Head of House and, in addition to the Welfare Board's records, information will be entered into the Boarding Pastoral Contact Log.

The Head of Boarding will be consulted if a student is considered to be, or to be at risk of self-harming within the boarding house. If, necessary, parents may be requested to keep their son at home for a period of time. Such action will be considered on welfare and risk reduction grounds.

Appendix 1: Guidance Flow Chart

Process for managing self-harm in schools (not in need of urgent medical treatment & return to school)



Appendix 2: Guidance for Staff regarding Students who Self-Harm

Self-Disclosure

Students may choose to confide in a member of school staff if they are concerned about their own welfare, or that of a peer. In order to offer the best possible help to students, it is important that staff try to maintain a supportive and open attitude. Any student who has chosen to discuss their concerns with a member of staff is showing a considerable amount of courage, vulnerability and trust.

Disclosure by friends

It is important to encourage students to let you 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.

Peer Groups

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.

Recommendations

- Don't ask 'Why?'
- Don't focus on stopping the behaviour
- Allow the student to speak in their own time
- Appreciate their fears e.g. confidentiality

Alternatives

Provide alternatives e.g. mood diary, writing thoughts, drawing, sports. Look into harm reduction techniques: ice cubes/bandages/elastic band/ten minute rule – please see guidelines on the T:\medical\selfharming file.

Prevention

An estimated 1 in 10 children self-harm at some point and it is far better to work from a preventative approach.

The risk of self-harm can be significantly reduced by the creation of a supportive environment in which individual's self-esteem is raised and healthy peer relationships are fostered. This can be achieved through development of good relationships with all members of the school community and, in particular, through the PHSE programme in which peer reporting is included.

Staff awareness of issues leading to self-harm is increased through training and the production of comprehensive policies on Safeguarding and Child Protection, Anti-bullying, appropriate medical policies and a full and informative policy on self-harming. This policy is posted on the School's website to achieve the widest circulation, including parents.

Students are provided with a wide range of internal and external sources of help and these are widely publicised. As well as the designated persons, and a robust pastoral system within the school, students have information about Childline, The Samaritans and an Independent Listener who is a trained counsellor.

The school staff are strongly supported by the senior management in all matters concerned with Child Protection. Staff are prepared to deal with 'contagion' if self-harming leads to 'copycat' behavior within the school. Senior staff have access to external agencies who can offer advice and/or assist with issues including students who self-harm.

Appendix 3: Advice to parents

Parents should not feel isolated if they know, or suspect, that their child (or one of their child's friends) is at risk, or is actually, self-harming. The advice contained within this policy provides a first source of useful information and guidance. If a parent has any concerns they should contact the school immediately for help, support and advice. A student's tutor, Head of Year, School Matron, Head of Boarding House may be approached, or the School's Designated Person for Child Protection.

Useful websites:

Childline – 24 helpline for children and young people. 0800 1111 (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 also provides support for parents and professionals.
www.youngminds.org.uk

www.calmzone.net – Campaign Against Living Miserably - aimed at males who are experiencing depression/suicidal ideation.

BBC Radio 1 Advice pages – google this phrase – advice on current issues i.e. exams stress/substance misuse/sexual practice/self-harm and links to support groups in relation to these issues.

The family counseling and Relateen services from Relate.

Policy approved by EXPC Committee – 12 June 2023

To be reviewed: June 2025