



Safeguarding update

May 2014

Theme : Self-Harm



What is Self Harm?

Self-harm is when somebody intentionally damages or injures their body. It is a way of coping with or expressing overwhelming emotional distress. Some examples of self-harm are cutting, swallowing objects, burning and swallowing poisonous substances.

Why?

There are many different reasons why a young person may self-harm.

A group of young people who self-harm said the following:

- I deserve it.
- I hate myself and need to punish myself.
- To feel in control.
- To make me feel anything.
- To express my anger.
- To make my problems seem smaller afterwards.
- **To cope!**

Clinical experience a research say the following:

- A disrupted upbringing.
- Family relationship problems.
- Mental health problems.
- Drug or alcohol use.
- Stressful life events.

Myths

- People who self-harm are suicidal.
- Self-harming is attention seeking.
- Self-harmers can stop whenever they want to.
- Severity of the problem is determined by the severity of the injury.
- Self-harmers are dangerous to other people.
- All self-harmers are abuse victims.
- Self-harm only refers to cutting.
- Self-harming is only a teenage phase.

How to spot signs of self-harm

- Change in behavior or attitude.
- Reluctant to engage in activities such as PE.
- Unusually dressed for the weather e.g. wearing jumpers when it is hot.
- Wearing wristbands or lots of bracelets.
- Becoming more withdrawn or reluctant to talk to staff.
- Suddenly becoming accident prone.
- Regular dressings such as bandages.
- Blades missing from pencil sharpeners.
- Reduced interaction or distracted/vacant.
- Erratic mood swings or increased irritation.
- Defensive when questioned.

What to do if a young person discloses they have self-harmed:

If somebody trusts you enough to tell you that they self-harm, they are asking for our help as you may be the first person you have told.

Things to do:

- Stay calm.
- Offer support and say you're happy to listen.
- Talk openly with the young person about the self-harm and encourage them to speak to the relevant people.
- Ask questions like: How long have you been harming yourself? Why have you self-harmed?
- Why do you self-harm? How do you self-harm (method), what can I do to help and support you? Do you know how to keep yourself safe? Can you try to explain to me what you are feeling in the run up to self-harming and afterwards?

Things not to do:

- Try and put the conversation off, if you don't have time to talk then, set a specific time to talk later.
- React in a negative way or act shocked.
- Force someone to talk about it.
- Minimise the problem by listing things that are worse.
- Assume they are trying to kill themselves.
- Say 'It's only a scratch' or 'they're only superficial cuts' (minimise the wounds).
- Remind them of their family.
- Point out the negative of self-harm.
- Use comments like 'Look at the mess you're making of yourself' or 'You will regret this when you're older'.

Try to remember:

To stay within your own professional limits and comfort zones. If you do not feel comfortable having this difficult conversation with a young person, ask them who else they trust to speak to e.g. Heads of Year or Learning Mentors.

What can we do?

- Follow child protection procedures to ensure the child's safeguarding needs are assessed and addressed, speak to the designated staff in school (VS, PS, SC, RH) as risk assessment's need to be completed.
- If you have concerns that a student in school has shown any of the signs of self-harm, please record these and pass them on to the designated staff.
- Ensure that students who self-harm feel safe and believed, taken seriously and respected.

Further information

<https://www.selfharm.co.uk>

<http://www.nhs.uk/conditions/Self-injury/Pages/Introduction.aspx>

[http://www.mind.org.uk/information-support/types-of-mental-health-](http://www.mind.org.uk/information-support/types-of-mental-health-problems/self-harm/)

[problems/self-harm/ http://www.nspcc.org.uk/preventing-](http://www.nspcc.org.uk/preventing-abuse/keeping-children-safe/self-harm/)

[abuse/keeping-children-safe/self-harm/](http://www.nspcc.org.uk/preventing-abuse/keeping-children-safe/self-harm/)

