



# Self-Harm Policy

**Governing Body Sub-committee**

Name: Student Matters Equality and Community Committee  
Date approved: 11 November 2021

**Full Governing Body**

Date approved:

Belper School and Sixth Form Centre fully recognises its responsibilities for Child Protection and Safeguarding. This policy should be read in conjunction with the Belper School and Sixth Form Centre Child Protection and Safeguarding Policy.

Despite the fear and anxiety, self-harming behaviour provokes, it is a very common problem particularly among children and young people. Working with children and young people who self-harm can evoke a wide range of emotions; anger, frustration and sadness which often reflect the emotions of the child or young person who is self-harming.

It is not easy to tell if someone is self-harming and children and young people find it difficult to approach people for support. This is partly because children and young people feel ashamed and guilty about their behaviour. The stigma associated with self-harm can prevent children and young people getting the support and information they need to establish better ways of coping. Therefore, it is essential when a student makes a disclosure to a member of staff it is not dismissed and is taken seriously.

## **Aims**

The aims of this policy are:

1. To increase understanding and awareness of self-harm amongst staff, parents/carers and peers
2. To alert staff, parents/carers and peers to warning signs and risk factors
3. To provide support to those around the student who self-harm, including staff, parents/carers and peers
4. To create a culture in school where it is acceptable to report self-harm and talk about it.

## **Objectives**

The objectives of this policy are:

1. To provide a consistent approach for supporting the students who self-harm
2. To provide early intervention and support for the student's emotional wellbeing
3. To have effective signposting to ensure students are accessing the appropriate level of support
4. To ensure that staff have appropriate training to support student needs.

It is important to give students time to talk and space in order to explore some of the difficulties that may have occurred. Staff then need to be aware of types of help and support that may be available or needed. It is also important to acknowledge that self-harm is not automatically an indicator of mental illness.

Parents/carers and peers need to know that they are able to approach the school's Wellbeing Team to discuss this topic in relation to a young person that they are worried about. The Wellbeing Team will then be able to offer support to peers or signpost parents/carers to appropriate support and interventions.

## Principles

Safeguarding arrangements in our school are underpinned by two key principles:

1. Safeguarding is everyone's responsibility: all staff, governors and volunteers should play their full part in keeping children safe.
2. A child-centred approach: a clear understanding of the needs and views of children.

## Information

Self-Harm refers to the *deliberate* self-infliction of damage to one's own body, including but not limited to:

1. Cutting, scratching, scraping or picking skin.
2. Swallowing inedible objects.
3. Overdosing on prescription or non-prescription drugs.
4. Swallowing hazardous materials or substances.
5. Burning or scalding.
6. Hair pulling.
7. Banging or hitting the head or other parts of the body.
8. Scouring or scrubbing the body excessively.

Note: Self –harm does NOT usually refer to substance misuse or eating disorders although we accept that the student is communicating distress through these actions.

## Risk Factors

- Depression/anxiety/stress/academic worry
- Poor communication skills
- Low self-esteem
- Poor problem-solving skills
- Hopelessness
- Impulsivity
- Drug or alcohol abuse
- Unreasonable expectations
- Neglect or physical, sexual or emotional abuse
- Poor parental relationships and arguments
- Depression, self-harm or suicide in the family
- Difficulty in forging friendships
- Being bullied or rejected by peers
- Lack of self esteem

## School Procedures

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. Possible warning signs include:

1. Changes in eating / sleeping habits
2. Increased isolation from friends or family, becoming socially withdrawn
3. Changes in family circumstances, divorce, violence, not getting on with parents etc.
4. Changes in activity and mood e.g. more aggressive or introverted than usual
5. Lowering of academic achievement
6. Talking or joking about self-harm or suicide - more than would be expected within the context of the lesson/situation
7. Abusing drugs or alcohol
8. Expressing feelings of failure, uselessness or loss of hope
9. Changes in appearance.

Any staff concerned about a student's emotional health and wellbeing should speak to one of the Wellbeing Team. They will coordinate the appropriate sharing of information to key staff such as the Head of Year or Form Tutor who has daily contact with the student and who can monitor and offer support in the first instance. The Wellbeing Team will review which other members of the school staff need to be made aware. The Wellbeing Team will make the decision when and how the parent will be contacted. It is only in exceptional circumstances (with guidance from an outside agency) where the parent/carer would not be informed. Should this situation arise then the advice from the outside agency would be followed.

Staff supporting students **MUST** be aware of effective strategies in helping students cope. Support information can be gathered via the staff area of the Belper School intranet in the 'policies and procedures' folder.

A student may choose to confide in a member of school staff if they are concerned about their own welfare, or that of a peer. Students need to be made aware that it is not possible for staff to offer complete confidentiality and this information will need to be passed to the Wellbeing Team.

***If any member of staff feels a student is in immediate danger of harm, normal child protection procedures should be followed. The Wellbeing Team should be informed immediately and they will work with the school's medical team and appropriate outside agencies to ensure the safety of the student.***

***In the case of an acutely distressed student, the immediate safety of the student is paramount and an adult should remain with the student at all times whilst assistance from school medical staff and a member of the Wellbeing Team is sought. They will then take over in this situation.***

***If a student has self-harmed in school a first aider should be called for immediate help and then a member of the Wellbeing Team called. If the student is taken to hospital and there is no family member to accompany them, then a member of the school staff will go with them.***

Should parents/carers wish to express concern related to the self-harm of their child or another young person they can contact either their child's tutor/ Head of Year (who will inform the Wellbeing Team) or they can go direct to the school's Wellbeing Team. The school welcomes contact with parents/carers as together we can work to support the young person.

### **How Staff Can Help by:**

- Recognising the signs of distress and offering the young person the opportunity to discuss their feelings. This conversation must be student led.
- Listening to their worries and feelings, and taking them seriously.
- Staying calm.
- Being clear about the risks but making sure they know that with help it is possible to stop self-harming.
- Making sure the student gets referred to a member of the student wellbeing team as soon as possible.

### **Risk Assessments**

It is recognised that someone who has self-harmed is at greater risk of suicide than the general population. However, this does not mean that everybody that has self-harmed is an immediate risk.

Consideration may need to be given to the completion of a risk assessment. If a person is referred to specialist mental health services, guidance will be sought from CAMHS as to whether a risk assessment is required in this instance. If a student has self-harmed in school then the school will automatically formulate a risk assessment involving all relevant and appropriate professionals. The school will liaise with appropriate professionals and the parent/carer in the managing and implementation of any risk assessment and will communicate fully with them.

### **Displays of Self-Harm**

The school recognises that the majority of self-harm is a survival and coping strategy for our students. However, we are also aware that where young people are concentrated together, as in a school environment, the actions of a few can affect many others around them. Because of this, we recognise that public displays of self-harm injuries can encourage others to emulate this behaviour. This is why the school insists that all self-harm injuries are covered and not visible to other students. This is not a punishment for the student who self-harms, but a protection for other students who might 'copy' their actions were the injuries publicly visible.

## **Self-Harm Materials in School**

Parents/carers view school as a safe environment and one where their children are cared for. As a school this is what we aspire to achieve. Whilst we accept that students do self-harm and seek to support them appropriately, we will not accept self-harm on the school premises. Should this occur then the student will not be allowed out of lessons unsupervised and it may result in the withdrawal of social time in order to keep them safe.

The instrument of self-harm will affect the severity of the school's response. Self-harm can be inflicted in a number of ways, not all of which require a high-level response. However, where the injury is inflicted with a sharp object, one which may cause injury to others e.g. a blade of any description, or an implement that has been sharpened in order to harm; then the school may take the view that the student has brought an 'offensive weapon' onto the school premises. In these circumstances, it is possible that the student will receive a suspension, although an internal seclusion may be felt to be an appropriate alternative. It will depend on the circumstances, as each case is different. As part of the student's reintegration from a suspension/seclusion, they will agree to random 'bag searches' for a period of time, until the school feels assured that they are not in possession of an 'offensive weapon'.

## **Confidentiality**

Taking into account age and understanding, professionals should always involve children and young people in discussion and decision making about their treatment and care. Further advice and support should be obtained from professionals, managers and safeguarding representatives in schools, with reference to organisational protocols.

### **If the self-harm act has involved:**

- **ingestion**
- **serious lacerations**
- **excessive dose /omission of prescribed medication**

**Urgent medical attention/ advice should be sought from Childs' GP, NHS Direct or through attendance at the Accident & Emergency Department or the Children's Emergency Department.**

## **Signposting**

The school seeks to support students who are self-harming or at risk of self-harming. Staff must report any worrying conversations or disclosures around self-harm to one of the LSMs. They will discuss this with the member of staff and decide the next appropriate steps.