



SELF-HARM POLICY

Self-harm is a coping mechanism for individuals who are attempting to manage challenging emotional states. It is any deliberate, non-suicidal behaviour, which causes physical pain or injury and is aimed at reducing the emotional pain and distress of the individual concerned.

ALL incidents of self-harm are to be taken seriously. As a College we aim to provide the most appropriate emotional support possible.

Purpose: In keeping with the College's values, vision and aims, this policy aims to address the issues of self-harm:

- how to deal with pupils who self-harm and how to offer support in the short and long-term
- to provide support depending upon the individual needs of the pupil
- to help all pupils improve their self-esteem and emotional literacy
- to support staff members who come into contact with people who self-harm
- how to prevent self-harm from spreading within the College
- to have clear guidelines for staff – who needs to be informed, when do parents and outside agencies need contacting?
- education about self-harm for pupils and staff

The Child Protection Officer and his Deputies are the designated staff responsible for dealing with incidents of self-harm at the College.

The designated staff member(s) will:

- keep records of self-harm incidents and concerns
- liaise with local services about the help available for people who self-harm
- keep up to date with information about self-harm
- liaise with the Master as appropriate
- contact parent(s) or guardian(s) at the appropriate time(s), wherever possible involve the pupil in this process; inform the parent(s) or guardian(s) about appropriate help and support available for their child; monitor the pupil's progress following an incident
- know when people, other than parents, (e.g. social workers, educational psychologists) need to be informed
- know when to seek help to deal with their personal feelings and distress

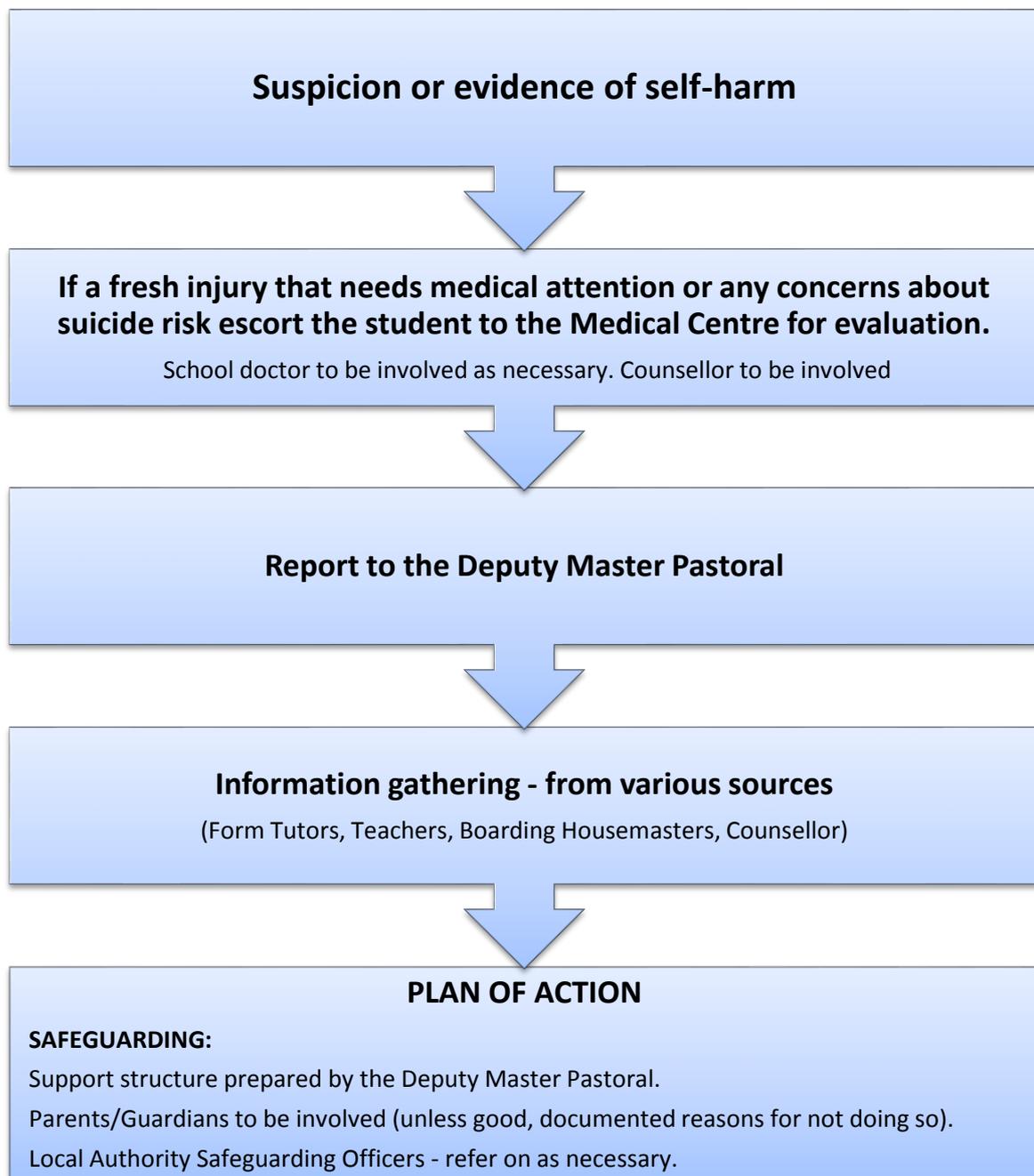
All staff and teachers are expected to:

- listen to pupils in emotional distress calmly and in a non-judgemental way
- speak confidentially to the designated person(s) if they become aware of a boy who is self-harming, be clear of the timescale in which this is expected
- not make promises (e.g. assuring confidentiality) which can't be kept, reassure pupils that in order to seek health and happiness people need to know about their problems so that they can help

- guide pupils towards appropriate help
- promote problem-solving techniques and non-harmful ways to deal with emotional distress
- enable pupils to find places for help and support
- provide accurate information about self-harm
- broaden their personal knowledge about self-harm and mental health disorders
- be aware of health and safety issues such as first-aid and clearing up if a self-harm incident takes place at the College
- be aware of their legal responsibilities – when they can help, and when they cannot

NB: If disclosure is made to the College Counsellor, he or she may wish to retain confidentiality.

Flow Diagram of action to be taken



Recognising warning signs

For some individuals there will not be any specific warning signs that they are engaging in or contemplating self-harming behaviours. For others, the following indicators may be noted:

- risky behaviours, for example drug taking, alcohol misuse
- lack of self-esteem, being overly negative
- bullying of others
- social withdrawal
- significant change in friendships
- regular bandaged wrists or arms
- obvious cuts, burns or scratches (that don't look like accidents)
- a reluctance to participate in PE or change clothes
- frequent accidents that cause physical injuries

Supporting peer groups

If the self-harming becomes known to wider group (e.g. year group) the following needs to be taken into account:

- the more 'public' the behaviour –the more 'public' consequences may be
- support and guide the peer group (either from within the College or external). These cases can be complex and protracted. Staff will not only be dealing with the pupil in question. They will also need to manage the reactions of the peer group (and possibly their parents) and will need to provide an appropriate combination of support, reassurance and information whilst observing carefully the need for patient confidentiality.
- The pupil's best interests would be the primary driver in all decision-making but this will need to be balanced against the needs of other pupils. Staff should consult the Deputy Master Pastoral regarding the communication strategy with other parents if they become concerned.

Supporting Boarding House Staff

- The Housemaster and/or a member of their team should seek guidance and appropriate support from the Deputy Master Pastoral/the College Counsellor/ College Doctor etc., as required.

Pupils will be encouraged to:

- not display open wounds/injuries; these must be dressed appropriately
- talk to an appropriate staff member if they are in emotional distress
- alert a teacher if they suspect a fellow pupil of being suicidal or at serious risk of harm to themselves, and know when confidentiality must be broken

Parents will be encouraged to:

- endorse the College's approach to self-harm education and pastoral care
- work in partnership with the College

Arrangements for monitoring and evaluation:

- feedback from parents and pupils as to how a self-harm incident/case has been dealt with

SELF-HARM: FURTHER GUIDANCE AND SUGGESTED ADVICE TO PUPILS WHO ARE SELF-HARMING

Self-harm is a way of expressing and managing emotional distress. So self-harm may serve a number of purposes. It may seem a way of:

- getting the pain out
- being distracted from it
- communicating feelings to others
- finding a kind of comfort
- self-punishing
- attempting to get control over life

People can often feel ashamed or worried about others perception of them if they reveal what they are doing, so it may become a hidden problem.

Self-harm includes anything which causes physical harm to the self, where it is a regular habit (such as pulling hair out) or something that is only done at times of stress. It can include less obvious forms, such as risk-taking, eating problems, being in abusive relationships, overdosing, or simply being careless of emotional or physical needs.

Why do people harm themselves?

There are as many reasons why people self-harm, as there are people self-harming. For example those who have a history of neglect, bullying, isolation, of being put under pressure or other experiences that affect self-esteem are likely to be more vulnerable to engage in this self-coping strategy. It is more prevalent than people think, with recent research showing 10% of 15 to 16-year-old self-harming at some point. A common factor is often a feeling of helplessness or powerlessness in relation to feelings. Indeed self-harming may sometimes feel relatively painless because of the body's natural opiates. The production of these opiates can in itself become a 'pay-back', which is why there can be quite a compulsion to repeat the experience. It means, though, that some people can become somewhat cut off from their body and their feelings. On the other hand, others harm themselves in order to escape feelings of detachment and to feel real and alive.

What triggers it?

People may harm themselves once or twice at a particularly difficult time in their life, and never do so again. But self-harming can become an ongoing way of coping with current problems and may occur regularly, on a monthly, weekly, or daily basis, depending on circumstances. The trigger could be a reminder of past difficulties or something in the present which is unexpected and which causes upset. Sometimes, ordinarily life just feels so difficult that self-harm seems the only way to cope with it.

Some steps to prevent self-harming.

Many people who self-harm want to stop hurting themselves and they can do this by trying to develop new ways of coping and expressing themselves. There are also a number of techniques, which have been shown to help reduce the risk of serious injury or minimise the harm caused.

It is helpful to understand why it is done and to work out:

- what was going on in life when the self-harm first started
- how it feels just before the urge to self-harm occurs

- whether it always takes place in the same place or in similar situations
- if certain bad memories or thoughts are involved which are difficult to share with others

The following is a list of possible strategies. It is not exhaustive as different people find different things useful. When someone feels like hurting themselves it can help to:

- stop and try to work out what would have to change now in order to no longer feeling like self-harming
- countdown slowly from ten to zero
- point out five things, one for each sense, in the surroundings to bring attention on to the present
- focus on surrounding objects and think about how they look, sound, smell, taste and feel like
- breathe slowly - in through the nose and out through the mouth

If the self-harming feelings are still there, it can help to:

- mark the place that would normally be hurt with the red water-soluble felt tip pen
- hit a cushion or a punch bag to vent anger and frustration, maybe even lining up cushions to represent others and direct angry feelings specifically
- plunge hands into a bowl of ice cubes (though not too long)
- put a rubber band around the wrist and flick it
- put sticking plasters on the parts of the body which otherwise might be harmed

Generally, it can help to:

- keep notes or a 'mood diary' and write down different feelings at different times of the day, noting when self-harming is most likely to happen. Record ways found of coping with and challenging powerful feelings
- talk about feelings with someone supportive so that it does not feel so lonely
- work on building up self-esteem and remember that self-harming is the attempt to express powerful feeling and is not shameful. Try to make positive self-affirmations, instead of only focusing on the negative
- try to find ways to make life less stressful, having occasional treats, eating healthily, getting plenty of sleep, and taking exercise, which is known to lift moods and boost self-esteem.
- know who to talk to in a crisis and how to contact them
- think about ways of dealing with anger and who this anger should really be directed at. Is it appropriate to be self-harming or is someone else the rightful object of your anger? Is the self-punishment deserved?
- create something to help express and alleviate the pain, such as drawing or poem, which can perhaps be shared with others to help explain the feelings.
- listen to music, which naturally raises the mood

If self-harming has become a way of coping with stressful and difficult thoughts and feelings, it is important to remember that this doesn't have to be managed alone. Although it is not necessarily easy to stop, it can be done. Many people have come through it with the help and support of the people around them.