

Self Harm

(Reviewer: Katy Jacques, Simon Hilliard, July 2022)

(Approved by SMT September 2022)

Purpose

This policy aims to address the issue of self-harm in a way congruent with the College's overall approach to Safeguarding. It is the College's aim to provide, within this document:

- clear guidance to staff
- information about how to deal with students who self-injure and how to offer support in the short and long term
- Support mechanisms for staff who come into contact with students who have self-harmed

1. General guidance - what is self-harm?

Self harm can be defined as the attempt to injure oneself physically without causing death and includes a range of actions that people do to themselves to injure, self-mutilate or self-poison. The actions are deliberate and usually hidden/concealed.

Self harm is a broad term and may involve any of the following:

- cutting
- taking overdoses of pharmaceuticals
- punching oneself
- swallowing toxic substances or foreign objects (e.g magnets)
- scratching, picking or tearing at one's skin causing sores, scarring or burning
- inhaling or sniffing harmful substances

It may also involve taking unnecessary risks, being addicted to alcohol or drugs, or simply not looking after one's own emotional or physical needs.

2. Why do people deliberately self-harm?

Self-harm has been interpreted as self-management of emotional pain. People self-harm to release tension (from anger, grief or anxiety) to gain control over something in their lives, to make emotional pain 'real'. It can also be used to distract from other pain or to self-punish. It might be used as a coping mechanism if subjected to bullying (see anti-bullying policy) People who self-harm often conceal their actions and find them embarrassing.

3. What can be done?

Early identification is essential to the management of self-harm in schools. Whenever self-harming is suspected or identified the Director of Safeguarding, Deputy Head Pastoral and HoM must be informed.

Self-harm can have a negative impact on the friends of the self-harmer, since they often feel a degree of responsibility for their friends behavior, once it becomes apparent. At Hurst we wish to encourage a culture of openness and 'reporting on' such behaviour. Students are encouraged to speak their HoM or the Director of Safeguarding or Deputy Head Pastoral, or PIP once such behaviour comes to light. Underpinning this openness is an educational programme, through PSHCE lessons and house/year group/whole school assemblies which encourages open discussions about a range of mental health issues.

Here is a list of terms and ideas that are often linked to self-harm:

- depression
- school failure, perfectionism and overachievement
- drug and alcohol abuse in the home
- relationship conflicts
- psychiatric illness
- recent bereavement
- chronic physical illness
- early loss experiences

4. Guidance and procedure

- Any member of staff who becomes aware of a pupil self-harming should contact one of the College DSLs immediately.
- The Mental Health First Aid (MHFA) 1 day and 2 day courses are run for staff, and these include information on self-harm.
- In a serious case, the member of staff should immediately ensure the safety of the pupil and this may require calling the emergency services if:
 - the injury is serious
 - an overdose has been taken
 - the child is suicidal or a risk to others
- Staff should keep written records of the injury, incidents and concerns and pass these onto one of the DSLs as soon as possible.
- The DSL, DHP or other trusted staff member will meet with the pupil/student, conduct an initial assessment and determine an appropriate course of action. (This may involve seeking advice from mental health professionals, medical experts or the school counsellors.)
- Any witnesses will be spoken to as necessary.
- If a pupil is under 16yrs, the DSL/HoM/tutor should notify parents, post discussion with the child, and recommend that medical/professional help is sought early in the process. This will normally be a GP visit requesting a referral to CAMHS. *In the current Covid post-lockdown environment, support services are stretched and thresholds for referral are very high. As a result the school often has to lead in the care of the pupil. The DSLs take on much of this work in line with this policy and guidance.*
- Friends of the student will be supported by the HoM/Form Tutor, who will reinforce that they (students) are not responsible for the care of fellow students who self-harm. They should also be given clear guidance about what to do if the friend continues to self-harm: this will be to notify the Director of Safeguarding, the Director of Pastoral Care or the HoM/Form Tutor. The pupils should then be monitored carefully and supported by staff.

5. Guidance

- Never promise confidentiality, just as in child protection work
- Make time to talk to the student
- Listen
- Don't judge
- Persevere with the offer of help, even if your offers are met with indifference
- Be honest with the student
- Acknowledge how hard it has been for the student to show you their injuries

- Don't ask them what happened
- Don't expect them to understand why they did it
- Don't comment on the seriousness of their injuries
- Don't over-react or trivialize it
- Don't tell them to stop
- Don't make superficial comments
- First Aid- do they need it and are they looking after their wounds appropriately?

A structured response, designed to safeguard the student and reduce the incidence of self-harm might include;

- A prevention plan.
- Professional counselling
- Psychiatric referral
- Ongoing assessment of risk
- Medical support (infection control)
- Regular meetings with the pupils
- Keeping a diary
- Use of relevant apps such as 'Calm Halm'

Strategies need to be frequently reviewed, initially every two weeks (or sooner). Response to the strategies will be closely monitored to assess the progress. Regular communication with parents to monitor the progress of the child will also be necessary. These will be coordinated by the DSL and/or HoM.

There may have to be a break from school whilst further professional intervention is sought. Return to school may be dependent on medical/psychiatric advice and may require a "fit to return letter" from the GP or Mental Health Professional leading on the case.

6. Support for Staff

Dealing with an incident where a child has self-harmed can be very upsetting. All staff should be aware that they can access the services of the school counsellors if they wish.

7. Extra Resources

ChildLine - www.childline.org.uk 0800 1111

Youthline - www.youthlineuk.com

WSCC Your Space – www.yourspacewestsussex.co.uk