

The Technical School at Broadstairs College Self-Harm Policy

Introduction: What is Self-Harm?

Self-harming is when someone chooses to inflict pain on themselves in some way. It includes, but is not limited to cutting, overdosing (self-poisoning), hitting, burning or scalding, pulling hair, picking or scratching skin, self-asphyxiation, ingesting toxic substances, fracturing bones. Some young people harm themselves in less obvious, but still serious ways such as taking drugs, having unsafe sex, or binge drinking. Some simply starve themselves (Royal College of Psychiatrists 2012). It is usually a sign that something is wrong.

These behaviours are not about seeking attention but rather to be about seeking relief and release from emotional distress. People often think that self-harm is closely linked to suicide, however the vast majority of people who self-harm are not trying to kill themselves. It's their way of coping with difficult feelings and circumstances, and people who self-harm say their behaviour is about trying to stay alive and coping, rather than killing themselves. It is possible that some incidents of self-harm may go too far and accidentally end up as suicide. But in essence, the two are very different, with different intended outcomes. The Technical School will take all incidents of self-harm seriously, investigate them and attempt to provide the most appropriate emotional support possible.

Aims

Our school team is dedicated to ensuring the emotional, physical and mental well-being of all the students in our community. We consequently aim to:

- Increase understanding and awareness of self-harm
- Alert staff to warning signs and risk factors
- Provide guidance for staff dealing with students who self-harm
- Provide the appropriate level of practical and emotional support for staff dealing with students who self-harm and ensure appropriate training and education is available to all staff regarding this issue
- Provide an appropriate awareness campaign for students and ensure the topic is a significant part of our PSHE curriculum

Recognising warning signs

We are aware that for some young people there will not be any specific warning signs that they are engaging in or contemplating engaging in 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
- Regularly 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
- Wearing long-sleeved tops even in very hot weather

Roles and Responsibilities

All members of the school community have a responsibility to promote and adhere to this policy in order to help ensure the wellbeing of all within the community. These are outlined as follows:

Head of School

- In collaboration with the Governing body develop and implement a school self-harm policy using the guidance provided.
- Appoint designated staff to be responsible for all incidents of self-harm and be responsible for disseminating the policy and training to the whole team.
- Ensure that all staff in the school community are fully conversant with and adhere to our Self-Harm policy.
- Be responsible for ensuring that designated staff receive appropriate training and supervision.

Governing body

- Ensure students have access to appropriate and accurate information regarding self-harm alongside details of relevant support agencies.
- Determine how and when the topic is covered in the school curriculum.
- Provide access to appropriate and accurate information for parents or carers.
- Ensure that 'special arrangements' are made for students who self-harm as part of the Individual Management Plans and that these are appropriately reviewed. For example, use of time out or the wearing of long-sleeved tops in PE.
- Ensure the existence of a Procedural Policy in case of self-harming incidents occurring within the school and that this is reviewed as necessary.
- Ensure that all students are aware of the behaviours that will not be tolerated and that they understand these key rules, for example, no self-injury in front of others, no attempts to manipulate others with the threat of self-injury.

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Designated Key Staff Members

- Ensure the implementation of the policy, communicate with each other and provide regular feedback to the Head of School.
- Maintain up-to-date records of students experiencing self-harm, incidents of self-harm and all other concerns surrounding the issue.
- Communicate with the Head of School on a regular basis and keep them informed of all incidents and developments.
- Monitor the help, support and progress of the students in your care and maintain communication with them.
- Ensure you are fully confident in your understanding of self-harm and seek additional information and / or training if you feel it necessary.
- Liaise with external agencies (specifically mental health) in order to provide the most appropriate support alongside utilising key services to provide up to date education and information for students, parents/carers and staff.
- Liaise with the head-teacher and student to decide if any other members of staff who have contact with the student should be made aware of the self-harm and underlying concerns.
- Ensure that all first-aiders are well informed about self-harm.
- Inform the student's parents if appropriate and liaise with them as to how best manage the situation.
- Report any mention of suicidal feelings or behaviour as a matter of urgency.
- Take care of your own emotional well-being and seek support as and when necessary.

All Staff

- Act in an empathetic manner, assuring students that they are available to actively listen in a calm and non-judgemental manner.
- Will acknowledge any students' concerns or emotional distress.
- Know the available support options or referral routes and refer students to these as appropriate.
- Ensure that students know they cannot make any promises to keep things confidential if they feel the students is at risk.
- Adhere to all duty of care documents.
- Discuss and promote healthy coping mechanisms and suggest ways in which students can be empowered to make positive changes in their lives.
- Avoid asking a pupil to show you their scars or describe their self-harm.
- Avoid telling a pupil to stop self-injuring - you may be removing the only coping mechanism they have.
- Ask for help if they feel a situation falls outside of their emotional competency, skills or knowledge base.

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Parents or Carers

- Understand and endorse the school's self-harm policy.
- Educate yourself regarding self-harm and discuss the subject with your child.
- If your child is self-harming, work closely with the school and take an active role in deciding the best course of action for your child.
- Keep the school informed of any incidents outside of school that you feel they should know about.
- Take care of yourself and seek any emotional support you may need in dealing with your child's self-harm.

Students

- Ensure all wounds are cared for properly and bandaged appropriately.
- When talking to teachers or friends about your self-harm, focus on the emotional reasons behind your distress and not just on the self-harm itself.
- Avoid talking graphically about your injuries to other students or describing the methods you use.
- Never encourage anyone to try self-harm themselves.
- When under emotional distress or feeling the urge to self-injure at school, talk to a teacher or staff member as soon as possible.
- Discuss any additional support you feel you may need while you are going through emotional distress.
- Be aware that the teachers and designated self-harm staff are there to help you. The more you can talk to them the better able they will be to give you the support and help you need. However, as with all cases where your safety is at risk and your teacher is concerned in a serious way about your safety or well-being, he or she may have to break your confidentiality for your own safety.
- If you are worried that a friend may be self-harming then do talk to a teacher for support and guidance.
- If you are concerned that a friend may be suicidal, or has mentioned suicide, then alert a teacher straight away.

Intervention and Response

If a young person self-harms and is in need of immediate medical attention then the member of staff should follow the process outlined in the flowchart making up Appendix 1.

In situations where the student is not in need of immediate medical attention then the process outlined in the flowchart making up Appendix 2 should be followed.

Monitoring and Evaluation

The Policy will be monitored by the Head of School and reviewed every 2 years by the Governing Body after requesting evaluative feedback from all key stakeholders. This will enable us to make the relevant and appropriate changes and ensure that this policy remains useful and user friendly.

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