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# Bishop Challoner School



## **SELF-HARM POLICY**



## Self-Harm Policy

### Introduction

At Bishop Challoner School we aim to provide an understanding and awareness of self-harm and to be able to identify the warning signs and risk factors. We endeavour to provide support to pupils, peers, parents and staff experiencing self-harm.

This document describes Bishop Challoner School's approach and is intended as guidance for all staff including non-teaching staff and Trustees.

### Policy Aims

- To increase understanding and awareness of self-harm
- To alert staff to warning signs and risk factors
- To provide support to staff dealing with pupils who self-harm
- To provide support to pupils who self-harm and their peers and parents

### Definition of Self-Harm

Self-harm is any behaviour where the intent is to deliberately cause harm to one's own body for example:

- Cutting, scratching, scraping or picking skin
- Swallowing inedible objects
- Taking an overdose of prescription or non-prescription drugs
- Swallowing hazardous materials or substances
- Burning or scalding
- Hair-pulling
- Banging or hitting the head or other parts of the body
- Scouring or scrubbing the body excessively
- Restrictive eating (see Eating Disorders policy)

Recent research indicates that up to three in ten young people in the UK engage in self-harming behaviours, and that this figure is higher amongst specific populations, including young people with special educational needs. School staff can play an important role in preventing self-harm and also in supporting students, peers and parents of students currently engaging in self-harm.

### Risk Factors

The following risk factors, particularly in combination, may make a young person particularly vulnerable to self-harm:

#### *Individual Factors:*

- Depression / anxiety
- Poor communication skills
- Low self-esteem
- Poor problem-solving skills
- Hopelessness
- Impulsivity
- Drug or alcohol abuse
- Stress
- Feeling rejected

#### *Family Factors*

- Unreasonable expectations
- Neglect or physical, sexual or emotional abuse

- Poor parental relationships and arguments
- Depression, self-harm or suicide in the family
- Bereavement

#### *Social Factors*

- Difficulty in making relationships / loneliness
- Being bullied or rejected by peers

#### **Warning Signs**

School staff may become aware of warning signs which indicate a pupil is experiencing difficulties that may lead to thoughts of self-harm or suicide. These warning signs should **always** be taken seriously and staff observing any of these should seek further advice from the Designated Safeguarding Lead or Deputy Designated Safeguarding Lead in her absence (Kate Brooker or Alison Barker).

Possible warning signs include:

- Changes in eating / sleeping habits
- Increased isolation from friends or family, becoming socially withdrawn
- Changes in activity and mood e.g. more aggressive or introverted than usual
- Lowering of academic achievement
- Talking or joking about self-harm or suicide
- Abusing drugs or alcohol
- Expressing feelings of failure, uselessness or loss of hope
- Changes in clothing that may be uncharacteristic of the child

Self-injury is often kept secret but there may be clues, such as refusing to wear short sleeves or to take off clothing for sports.

#### **Staff Roles in working with pupils who self-harm**

Young people who self-harm do so because they have no other way of coping with problems and emotional distress in their lives. It provides only a temporary relief and does not deal with the underlying issues. Therefore it is important to listen to their concerns.

Pupils may choose to confide in a member of school staff if they are concerned about their own welfare, or that of a peer. Staff may experience a range of feelings in response such as anger, sadness, shock, disbelief, guilt, helplessness, disgust and rejection. However, in order to offer the best possible help it is important to try and maintain a supportive and open attitude – a pupil who has chosen to discuss his/her concerns with a member of staff is showing a considerable amount of courage and trust. Try to listen and not to be judgemental. It would be appropriate to ask the individual to explain in their own words why they have self-harmed. Ensure you acknowledge their emotional distress and their courage in disclosing their concerns.

Pupils need to be made aware that it is not possible for staff to offer complete confidentiality and it is important **not to make promises of confidentiality** that cannot be kept even if a pupil puts pressure on you to do so.

*Any member of staff who is aware of a pupil engaging in or suspected to be at risk of engaging in self-harm should consult the Designated Safeguarding Lead (see above).*

Following the report, the Designated Safeguarding Lead will decide on the appropriate course of action. This may include:

- Contacting parents
- Arranging professional assistance e.g. doctor, nurse, social services
- Arranging an appointment with a counsellor

- Immediately removing the pupil from lessons if he/she remaining in class is likely to cause further distress to themselves or their peers

In the case of an acutely distressed pupil, the child's immediate safety is paramount and an adult must remain with the child at all times. If a pupil has self-harmed in school a first aider should be called for immediate help.

Parental involvement is very important but it should be recognised that they may respond in a variety of ways. Some will respond quickly and favourably, but others may need more time and help in coping with their thoughts and feelings.

- What if parents feel guilty? Parents may think their child is self-harming because of something that they did or did not do as a parent. If parents seem to be struggling with guilt or frustration, it may be helpful to remind them that they can also get counselling for themselves at this time.
- What if parents are dismissive? The school's role is to encourage parents to be more responsive to their child's needs.
- What if the parents are cross? The school's role is to encourage parents to try and understand what their child might be going through, recognize that their child is suffering, and approach their child from a non-judgemental stance.
- How should we deal with parents that have extreme reactions? The school's role is to gently suggest that the parents seek outside counselling/support services.
- How can we encourage collaboration? Schools must encourage parents and pupils to see and use school staff as resources.
- What if the parents are absent or unable to act as a resource and advocate for their child? The school must take the initiative and act as an advocate for the pupil.

Whilst it is important to validate parent's reactions, it is worth remembering that certain parental attitudes towards self-harm can promote, trigger or maintain the behaviour.

### **My friend has a problem - How can I help?**

- You can really help by just being there, listening and giving support.
- Be open and honest. If you are worried about your friend's safety, you should tell an adult. Let your friend know that you are going to do this and you are doing it because you care about him/her.
- Encourage your friend to get help. You can go with them or tell someone they want to know.
- Get information from telephone help lines, website, library etc. This can help you understand what your friend is experiencing.
- Your friendship may be changed by the problem. You may feel bad that you can't help your friend enough or guilty if you have had to tell other people. These feelings are common and don't mean that you have done something wrong/not done enough.
- Your friend may get angry with you or say you don't understand. It is important to try not to take this personally. Often when people are feeling bad about themselves they get angry with the people they are closest to.
- It can be difficult to look after someone who is having difficulties. It is important for you to find an adult to talk to, who can support you. You may not always be able to be there for your friend and that's OK.

### **Self-help - How can you cope with self-harm?**

Replacing the self-harm with other safer coping strategies can be a positive and more helpful way of dealing with difficult things in your life.

Helpful strategies can include:

- Finding someone to talk to about your feelings (this could be a friend or family member)
- Talking to someone on the phone (you might want to ring a help line)
- Sometimes it can be hard to talk about feelings; writing and drawing about your feelings may help.
- Scribbling on and/or ripping up paper
- Listening to music
- Going for a walk, run or other kinds of exercise
- Getting out of the house and going somewhere where there are other people
- Keeping a diary
- Having a bath/using relaxing oils e.g. lavender
- Hitting a pillow or other soft object
- Watching a favourite film

### **Further Considerations**

Any meetings with a pupil, the child's parents or his/her peers regarding self-harm will be recorded in writing including:

- Dates and times
- Concerns raised
- Proposed action (counsellor referral, medical treatment etc.)
- Details of anyone else who has been informed

This information will be stored in the pupil's pastoral file and on CPOMS. Staff may be informed at staff briefing if the pupil's social or academic welfare is affecting his/her school work.

It is important to encourage pupils to make the school aware if one of their group is in trouble, upset or showing signs of self-harming. Friends worry about betraying confidences so they need to know that self-harm can be very dangerous and that by seeking help and advice for a friend they are taking responsible action and being a good friend. They should also be aware that their friend will be treated in a caring and supportive manner.

When a young person is self-harming it is important to be vigilant in case close contacts are also self-harming. It could be possible that a number of pupils in the same peer group are harming themselves.

### **Useful websites and telephone numbers**

NHS: 111

Self Harm UK: [www.selfharm.co.uk](http://www.selfharm.co.uk)

MIND: [www.mind.org.uk](http://www.mind.org.uk)

YoungMinds: [www.youngminds.org.uk](http://www.youngminds.org.uk)

Childline: [www.childline.org.uk](http://www.childline.org.uk) 0800 1111

Bromley Well: 0300 330 9039 <https://www.bromleywell.org.uk/our-services/mental-health-services/>

Bromley CAMHS: <http://oxleas.nhs.uk/services/service/child-and-adolescent-mental-he>

Patient advice line: 0800 9177159

Mental Health Urgent Advice Line on 0800 330 8590

**Headscape:** <http://headscapebexley.co.uk/> HeadScape is a 'one stop' source of self-help about a range of mental health issues and conditions for young people to browse at leisure.

**Reviewed by: K Brooker**

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