



BRANNEL SCHOOL

**SELF HARM
POLICY**

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Approved by Governors: 24th September 2015

1. Introduction

Recent research indicates that about one 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/carers of students currently engaging in self-harm.

2. Context

This document describes the School's approach to self-harm. This policy is intended as guidance for all staff including non-teaching staff and governors.

3. 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 students who self-harm
- To provide support to students who self-harm and their peers and parents/carers

4. Definition of Self-Harm

Self-harm is any behaviour where the intent is to 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

You may also want to consider that some young people harm themselves in less obvious, but still serious ways, such as taking drugs, having unsafe sex, binge drinking or simply starving themselves.

Self-harm is usually conducted at times of anger, distress, fear, emotional worry, low mood or low self-esteem in order to manage negative feelings. To gain an understanding of why people self-harm, see Appendix A or refer to the Staff Information Book on Self-Harm, placed in each staff work base.

5. 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

Family Factors

- Unreasonable or unsustainable expectations of self or parents/carers
- Neglect or physical, sexual or emotional abuse
- Poor relationship with parents/carers
- Depression, self-harm or suicide in the family
- Being a current or previously looked after child
- Being a young carer

Social Factors

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

It is important to recognise that sometimes none of these risk factors may appear to be present. Some young people who harm themselves may appear well and from highly supportive backgrounds; they suffer internally and resort to harming themselves as a means of coping.

6. Warning Signs

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. These warning signs should **always** be taken seriously and staff observing any of these warning signs should seek further advice from one of the designated teachers on the Safeguarding Team.

Possible warning signs include:

- Physical signs of harm that are repeated or appear non-accidental
- Changes in eating / sleeping habits
- Increased isolation from friends or family, becoming socially withdrawn
- Changes in activity and mood
- 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 – e.g. long sleeves in warm weather
- Secretive behaviour
- Skipping PE
- Lateness to or absence from School

7. Staff Roles in working with students who self-harm

Students may choose to confide in a member of School staff if they are concerned about their own welfare, or that of a peer. School staff may experience a range of feelings in response to self-harm in a student such as anger, sadness, shock, disbelief, guilt, helplessness, disgust and rejection. However, in order to offer the best possible help to students it is important to try and maintain a supportive and open attitude – a student who has chosen to discuss their concerns with a member of School staff is showing a considerable amount of courage and trust.

Students need to be made aware that it may not be possible for staff to offer complete confidentiality. **If you consider a student is at serious risk of harming themselves then confidentiality cannot be kept.** It is important not to make promises of confidentiality that cannot be kept even if a student puts pressure on you to do so.

Any member of staff who is aware of a student engaging in or suspected to be at risk of engaging in self-harm should consult one of the designated teachers for safeguarding or refer to the Staff Information Book on Self-Harm, placed in each staff work base.

Following the report, the designated teacher/governor will decide on the appropriate course of action. This may include:

- Contacting parents/carers
- Arranging professional assistance e.g. doctor, nurse, social services
- Arranging an appointment with a counsellor
- Immediately removing the student from lessons if their remaining in class is likely to cause further distress to themselves or their peers
- **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**
- **If a student has self-harmed in School, first aid issues should be addressed as a priority**

Further support and useful websites can be found in Appendix B or in the Staff Information Book on Self-Harm placed in each staff work base.

8. Further Considerations

Any meetings with a student, their parents/carers or their peers regarding self-harm should be recorded including:

- Dates and times
- An action plan/risk assessment/behaviour contract (if considered appropriate)
- Concerns raised
- Details of who should be informed, what they should be told and why

This information should be stored on the student's safeguarding record.

It is important to encourage students to let you know if one of their friends is in trouble, upset or showing signs of self-harming. Friends can 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.

The peer group of a young person who self-harms may value the opportunity to talk to a member of staff either individually or in a small group. Any member of staff wishing for further advice on this should consult one of the designated teachers for safeguarding.

When a young person is self-harming it is important to be vigilant in case friends begin self-harming. Occasionally schools discover that a number of students in the same peer group are harming themselves.

Brannel School has a duty of care to all students and staff, and as such we will put in place a variety of measures to protect all community members from the impact of self-harm.

Therefore the following rules should be applied:

- Injuries must be covered
- Long sleeves in PE if necessary
- Possession of self-harming paraphernalia i.e. blades, aerosols, etc may result in an exclusion
- Self-Harm on school premises will result in a sanction in accordance with the school's behaviour policy
- Self-harm incidents will be responded to appropriately and practically

Policy Adoption, Monitoring and Review

This policy was considered and adopted by the Governing body in line with their overall duty to safeguard and promote the welfare of children as set out in the DfE guidance 'Keeping Children Safe in Education'. Parents/Carers will be issued with a hard copy of this policy on request. This policy will also be made available to parents/carers via the school website. The Headteacher will actively evaluate the effectiveness of this policy by monitoring the staff group's understanding and application of the procedures within this policy as their overall duty to safeguard children.

Policy Adopted by Governors on: 24th September 2015

Policy Due for Review on: September 2016

Appendix A - Why young people self-harm

There are many reasons why young people resort to self-harm as a means of managing strong and painful feelings.

"My emotions can vary rapidly and be very intense. If in an emotionally charged situation, I will either during or shortly after harm myself. I'm not good at dealing with emotions or communicating mine to others"

"I don't deal with daily stress very well, so when extra events occur however big or small my tension levels rise, resulting in my needing a 'release'. Self-harm has proven to be the most successful in dealing with this".

The reasons include some of the following factors:

- Relief of feelings: by hurting themselves, young people report they are able to release feelings that feel unbearable when held inside.
- Distraction: self-harm can provide distraction from the internal emotional pain, which may feel unbearable.
- Communication: self-harm is primarily a means of regulating feelings rather than gaining a response from others; however self-injury may also be a means of communicating distress without using words.
- Comfort: self-harm may be experienced as soothing and comforting by some young people; this may come about from the release of tension, but also by providing an opportunity to seek care and nurture from others. This is particularly important for young people with poor self-regulation skills.
- Feeling alive or real: sometimes young people's real life experiences leave them feeling numb or unreal. Hurting one's body may be experienced as a way of breaking through these feelings, and experiencing something that makes them feel alive and real again.
- Self-punishing: some young people carry feelings of shame, low self-esteem, self-blame. When these feelings become hard to bear some young people harm themselves as a way of punishing themselves. This process may operate unconsciously.
- Control: some young people explain that they feel the need for control in their lives (which is characterised by a sense of lack of control). Self-harm can be seen in terms of gaining control – by controlling injuries to their own body. Determining the nature, site, timing and severity of harm to the body is a way of staking claim to one's own body.

"When I first started self-harming, it helped me through a difficult time in my life. It was so effective at making me feel better, more powerful in a way, and like I didn't need anyone else at all to talk to or to talk to me. I could face down that teacher who kept telling me to take my nose stud out. Any time anyone upsets me at school or at home I always had my little secret friend to help me" Chole, aged 15.

This may leave professionals and carers feeling manipulated; however, it is important to remember that self-harm communicates something that a child or young person is unable to say through usual means. Understanding this 'communication gone wrong' is likely to go some way in reducing or preventing recurrence.

"I cut myself when I am angry. It hurts, but it helps my anger". Lisa, aged 11

Further Information/Training for Staff

www.minded.org.uk

Free online education to help adults identify and understand children and young people with mental health issues.

This is a really useful tool to gain knowledge and confidence about a particular issue. The sessions are easy to access and quick (most are no more than 30 minutes long).

There is a range of subjects apart from self-harm, including mental health, anxiety, substance misuse, eating problems, aggression, family relationship problems.

'Managing Self-Harm Practical Guidance for School' – this document aims to

- Increase understanding and awareness
- Alert staff to warning signs and risk factors
- Provide guidance for Staff
- Help senior leaders consider how to support staff/students and families

A copy is with Caroline Hunt, Student Welfare Officer should you wish to read it.

'Staff Information Pack on Self-Harm' – An information pack will be placed in each staff work base and will provide basic information on self-harm, including what, why, how and what you can do to help a student who has made a disclosure to you.

Useful Websites and Further Support

Getting Help Locally

www.kooth.com Free online support for young people in Cornwall

www.mindyourway.co.uk Mental health and wellbeing services for young people in Cornwall

www.savvykernow.org.uk Friendly advice and services in Cornwall

National Support Websites

www.nshn.co.uk The National Self Harm Network

www.lifesigns.org.uk User-led information and support for people who self-harm

www.selfinjurysupport.org.uk Supports girls and women affected by self-harm

www.selfharm.co.uk Online support and information for people who self-harm

www.harmless.org.uk Support and information for people who self harm

www.youngminds.org.uk The voice for young people's mental health and wellbeing.

www.papyrus-uk.org – Papyrus is aimed specifically at preventing suicide in young people. They have a free UK helpline which provides support and advice for young people at risk or those who care about them. Helpline: 0800 068 414

Get Help Now

www.childline.org.uk **0800 1111** Advice, info and help online or by telephone.

www.samaritans.org **08457 909090** Telephone support for anyone who needs to talk.

Nightlink Cornwall 0808 8000306 Confidential helpline and text service for emotional support (5pm – midnight only).

999 In an emergency you should dial 999. You can also call your GP out of hours service or go to your local A&E department.