



Warwickshire Pride

Registered Charity Number: 1162449

Recognising and Managing Self- Harming Behaviours Policy

The aim of this policy is to raise awareness of self-harming behaviours in people which will lead to an increased knowledge and understanding, and enable you to be more appropriate and confident in the management of people who self-harm.

Definition

Self-harm is any act with a non-fatal outcome, such as self-cutting, swallowing objects, taking an overdose, running in front of a car, etc. where the intent is to deliberately cause self-harm.

'Self-harming is usually an attempt to escape from unbearable feeling or from an intolerable situation' (Babiker & Arnold, 1997).

What is Self-Harm?

The list below outlines some ways people self-harm. The list is not exhaustive or limited to what is written below.

- Cutting
- Taking an overdose of tablets
- Swallowing hazardous objects or substances
- Burning
- Over/under medicating
- Punching/hitting
- Bruising
- Hair pulling/skin picking/head banging
- Episodes of alcohol/drug abuse
- Over/under eating
- Putting self in risky situations

What is the Intent of Self-Harm, if Not to Die?

- To survive
- To communicate
- To cope
- To feel better
- To get help
- Transfer emotional pain to physical
- To show they are different
- To heal
- To see blood

- To check they are alive
- To feel something
- To punish themselves
- To punish other
- To dissociate
- To control something

Self-harming is a complex subject and people who do it are not necessarily attention seeking!

Common Myths

- Self-harm is just attention seeking
- People who self-harm are mentally ill
- Self-harm is a failed suicide attempt
- All people who self-harm have been abused
- The severity of the injury is not related to the level of emotional distress

Prevalence

- 1 in 14 people self-harm, according to NHS Digital (2023).
- The UK did have the highest rate of self-harm in Europe. Although it is no longer top of that table, it remains a prevalent issue.

Triggers

- Bullying
- Self-harm in peers
- Self-harm portrayed in the media and online
- Social stress at home, work or school
- Feeling under pressure from family, colleagues, school or peers to conform or achieve
- Periods of increased stress, such as exams
- Times of change – parental separation or divorce, school transitions

Signs of Self-Harming

- Wounds, scabs or scars on the body – frequently on the arms or legs
- Verbal hints such as “I’m scared about what I might do” or “I don’t feel safe”

- Signs of hopelessness or depression
- May talk of suicide more often
- May be angrier or impulsive, or conversely display apathy and withdrawal
- Also associated with increased substance misuse, including alcohol and prescription medication
- More likely in response to life events such as the end of relationships, physical illness or significant anniversaries
- Reluctant to remove an item of clothing such as a jumper, even when it is very hot weather
- Inappropriate clothing – long sleeves in the summer

What Function Does Self-Harm Have?

- It acts as a safety valve
- It's a distraction from problems
- It's an outlet for anger and rage
- It's a form of non-verbal communication
- It's a conversion of emotional pain to physical
- It's a way of punishing self or others
- It's a form of taking control
- It elicits care from others

What to do if a Person is Self-Harming

- Ensure that any injury is treated appropriately.
- If a person has overdosed or taken pills with intent to harm or kill themselves, they must be taken to A&E immediately, regardless of how many pills they have taken. Their next of kin must be informed if that information is available (it will be for all youth group members).
- Do not act impulsively.
- Maintain records – Include factual information and how you understand this information. Keep in a confidential file securely stored. Be aware of the possible links with child protection issues. If there is any evidence of such concerns, follow the safeguarding procedures as detailed in the safeguarding policy.
- Wherever possible provide opportunities for the person to talk to you or another employee if they wish to.
- When deciding whether to break confidentiality between the person and yourself, consider the potential risk of harm to the individual. If you feel the risk is serious enough, you have a duty to break it.

- If you decide to inform other people, consider doing this in collaboration with the person. Consider who **needs** to know and how they can help.
- If you suspect the person had/has suicidal intent, you should disclose this to someone who can act to help. Ask tactfully – “have you hurt yourself or are you worried you may hurt yourself”.
- Discreetly monitor the person for any changes in their behaviour, appearance or general emotional state and record this if appropriate.
- Consider any possible triggers/reasons and remove if possible. E.g. bullying.
- If a person has harmed themselves then it is your duty to inform the manager. You must explain to the person that it is your job to inform the manager.
- If you feel that a referral needs to be made to social services or a mental health service provider, please inform the safeguarding lead who can make the arrangements.

What Not to Do

- Tell them to stop self-harming
- Panic
- Get someone else (unless you absolutely have to)
- Be wary of taking away the self-harming item even if not self-harming
- Demand that they show you where they have self-harmed
- Tell them off

Alternatives to Self-Harm

- Talking
- Art
- Playing a game
- Writing
- Music
- Exercise and sport
- Relaxation
- Physical reassurance
- Physical methods
- Ice cubes (it is common for young people to self-harm by rubbing salt into their skin and then rub an ice cube on top, which reacts with the salt and burns the skin – suggest the young person just uses the ice cube and not the salt)
- Elastic bands (to put on wrist and flick on skin each time a self-harming thought enters the mind)
- Drawing with a red pen (to imitate blood instead of actual blood)

Summary

- Self-harm can be a way of coping or communicating
- It's important to be containing and adhere to the boundaries of confidentiality
- Ensure that any health needs are attended to appropriately

If you are in any doubt about any part of this document, speak to your line manager.

Please also be mindful of our safeguarding policies, which must be followed if someone is at risk.

Last reviewed: January 2026

Next review due: January 2027