



MANAGING SELF-HARM POLICY

Approved by the Learning & Standards Committee

19.04.23

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I. INTRODUCTION

There are many reasons why children and young people try to harm themselves, and once they start, it can become a compulsion. This is why it is so important to spot self-harming as soon as possible and do everything you can to help.

Self-harm is not usually a suicide attempt or a cry for attention and instead, it is often a way for children and young people to release overwhelming emotions. It is a way of coping and so whatever the reason, it should be taken seriously.

Self-harming behaviour can start at an early age and there is an increase in primary school presentation, however, this rises steeply in pre-adolescence and adolescence.

School staff can play an important role in preventing self-harm and also in supporting pupils, peers and parents of pupils currently engaging in self-harm.

Discovery MAT schools:

- Each have a Helping us Thrive (HUT) with SEN TA's who are emotionally available adults that are available for pupils throughout the day. Interventions may be planned but support can also be on demand.
- Have STORM (Skills Training On Risk Management Children and Young People) trained staff. The STORM definition of self-harm includes self-injury and behaviours with suicidal intent.
- Has 2 Mental Health and Trauma Informed practitioners.
- Staff are routinely trained in Trauma informed practices.
- Currently access MAST therapy and EP services.

Discovery MAT has been awarded the Mentally Healthy Organisation award from TISUK.

2. SCOPE

This document describes Discovery MAT schools' approach to self-harm. This policy is intended as guidance for all staff including non-teaching staff and those in a position of governance.

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 pupils who self-harm

To provide support to pupils who self-harm and their peers and parents/carers

4. DEFINITION OF SELF-HARM

Self-harm is any self injurious behaviour where the intent is to deliberately cause harm to one's own body or suicidal thoughts or actions.

Examples of self injurious behaviour are:

- 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

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/misuse.
- Having additional needs/SEND.
- Trauma.
- ACE.

Family Factors

- Unreasonable expectations.
- Neglect or physical, sexual or emotional abuse.
- Poor parental relationships and arguments.
- Depression, self-harm or suicide in the family.

Social Factors

- Difficulty in making relationships / loneliness.
- Being bullied or rejected by peers.
- Interest in social networking/websites that focus on self harm or suicide

6. WARNING SIGNS

School staff may become aware of warning signs which indicate a pupil is experiencing difficulties that may lead to thoughts of self-injury or suicide. These warning signs should always be taken seriously and staff observing any of these warning signs should seek further

advice from the Designated Safeguarding Lead (DSL) in the school or their Deputy/Deputies (DDSL).

Possible warning signs include:

- Changes in eating / sleeping habits (e.g. pupil may appear overly tired if not sleeping well).
- 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 appearance.

7. STAFF ROLES IN WORKING WITH PUPILS WHO SELF-HARM

Pupils 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 pupil such as anger, sadness, shock, disbelief, guilt, helplessness, disgust and rejection. However, in order to offer the best possible help to pupils it is important to try and maintain a supportive and open attitude – a pupil who has chosen to discuss their concerns with a member of school staff is showing a considerable amount of courage and trust.

Pupils need to be made aware that it may not be possible for staff to offer complete confidentiality. **If you consider a pupil 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 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 (DSL) or their Deputy/Deputies (DDSL).

Following the report, the Designated Safeguarding Lead or Deputy Designated Safeguarding Lead will make an assessment of the level of risk and decide on the appropriate course of action. This may include:

- Contacting parents / carers.
- Contacting the relevant statutory agencies e.g. Gateway, Police.
- Arranging other professional assistance e.g. doctor, nurse, etc.
- Consulting with another agency, e.g. CAMHS or the Educational Psychology Service
- Arranging an appointment with a counsellor.
- Immediately removing the pupil 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 pupil, the immediate safety of the pupil is paramount and an adult should remain with the pupil at all times. If a pupil has self-harmed in school a first aider should be called for immediate help.

8. FURTHER CONSIDERATIONS

Any meetings with a pupil, their parents or their peers regarding self-harm should be recorded in writing including:

- Dates and times.
- An action plan/risk assessment.
- Concerns raised.
- Details of anyone else who has been informed.
- Notes of supervision or consultation

The above information should be stored on Behaviour Watch.

It is important to encourage pupils to let a member of staff know if one of their peers 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 & 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 the Designated Lead for Safeguarding or their Deputy.

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

Where a young person has been self-harming and the protective factors that have been put in place are outweighed by the remaining risks, advice should be sought from the 'Gateway' team to determine whether or not the threshold for formal child protection intervention has been met.

9. LINK DOCUMENTS

See also Schools Safeguarding and Child Protection Policy and Mental Health and Wellbeing Policy.