

Self-Harm Policy

Responsible person: Tim Pragnell

Last review date: 5th September 2022

New review date: 4th September 2023

“Burlington House School” refers to Burlington House Prep, Burlington House Senior and Burlington House Sixth Form.

Self-harm is a coping mechanism for individuals who are attempting to manage challenging emotional states. It is any deliberate, non-suicidal behaviour, which causes physical pain or injury and is aimed at reducing the emotional pain and distress of the individual concerned. ALL incidents of self-harm are to be taken seriously. As a school we aim to provide the most appropriate emotional support possible.

Purpose

In keeping with the Burlington House School’s values, vision and aims, this policy aims to address the issues of self-harm:

- how to manage pupils who self-harm and how to offer support in the short and long term
- to provide support depending upon the individual needs of the pupil
- to help all pupils improve their self-esteem and emotional literacy
- to support staff members who come into contact with people who self-harm
- how to prevent self-harm from spreading within the school
- to have clear guidelines for staff – who needs to be informed, when do parents and outside agencies need contacting
- education about self-harm for pupils and staff

Responsibilities

The Designated Safeguarding Lead and Deputies are the designated staff responsible for dealing with incidents of self-harm. These members of staff will:

- keep records of self-harm incidents and concerns
- liaise with local services about the help available for people who self-harm keep up to date with information about self-harm
- liaise with the Principal as appropriate

- contact parents or carers at the appropriate times, wherever possible involve the pupil in this process: inform the parents or carers about appropriate help and support available for their child; monitor the pupil's progress following an incident
- know when people other than parents, (e.g. social workers, CAMHS, educational psychologists) need to be informed
- know when to seek help to deal with their personal feelings and distress

All staff and teachers are expected to:

- listen to pupils in emotional distress calmly and in a non-judgemental way
- speak confidentially to the DSL if they become aware of a pupil who is self-harming and be clear of the timescale in which this is expected
- not make promises (e.g. assuring confidentiality) which cannot be kept
- reassure pupils that in order to seek health and happiness people need to know about their problems so that they can help
- guide pupils towards appropriate help
- promote problem-solving techniques and non-harmful ways to deal with emotional distress
- enable pupils to find places for help and support
- provide accurate information about self-harm
- broaden their personal knowledge about self-harm and mental health disorders
- be aware of health and safety issues such as first-aid and clearing up if a self-harm incident takes place at school
- be aware of their legal responsibilities – when they can help, and when they cannot

Supporting pupils who self-harm: plan of action to be taken if self-harm occurs

Suspicion or evidence of self-harm
 Report to DSL
 Seek first aid support if necessary
 Information gathering by DHTP/DSL
 Inform parents/carers unless there is a safeguarding-related reason not to
 Refer to school counsellor
 Seek additional external support as required

Recognising warning signs

For some pupils there will not be any specific warning signs that they are engaging in or contemplating self-harming behaviours. For others, the following indicators may be noted: risky behaviours, for example:

- drug taking or alcohol misuse
- low self-esteem
- bullying of others or being bullied
- changes in eating habits
- social withdrawal
- significant change in friendships
- regular bandaged wrists or arms

- obvious cuts, burns or scratches
- a reluctance to participate in PE or change clothes
- frequent accidents that cause physical injuries

Supporting peer groups

If an individual's self-harm becomes known to a wider group, it may be necessary to support and guide the peer group. Such cases can be complex and staff will not only be dealing with the pupil in question. They will also need to manage the reactions of the peer group (and possibly their parents/carers) and will need to provide an appropriate combination of support, reassurance and information whilst observing carefully the need for patient confidentiality. The pupil's best interests would be the primary driver in all decision-making and this will need to be balanced against the needs of other pupils. Pupils will be encouraged to:

- not display open wounds/injuries (these must be dressed appropriately)
- talk to an appropriate staff member if they are in emotional distress
- alert a teacher if they suspect a fellow pupil to be at risk of self-harm, currently self-harming or experiencing emotions associated with suicide, and know when confidentiality must be broken

Parents will be encouraged to endorse the school's approach to self-harm education and pastoral care, and work in partnership with the school and DSL when monitoring their child and arranging support.

It must also be noted that some pupils may self-harm in sympathy with a friend who is self-harming, and that self-harm may be emotionally 'contagious'. Such cases should all be treated with equal importance.

Guidance and advice for pupils who are self-harming

Self-harm is a way of expressing and managing emotional distress and may serve a number of purposes. It may seem a way of:

- letting emotional pain out
- being distracted from emotional pain
- communicating feelings to others
- finding a kind of comfort self-punishing
- attempting to get control over life

People can often feel ashamed or worried about what others think of them if they reveal what they are doing, so it may become a hidden problem. Self-harm includes anything which causes physical harm to oneself, where it is a regular habit (such as pulling hair out) or something that is only done at times of stress. It can include less obvious forms, such as risk-taking, eating problems, being in abusive relationships, overdosing or simply being careless of emotional or physical needs.

Why do people harm themselves?

There are many reasons why people self-harm. For example, those who have experienced neglect, bullying, isolation, abuse, being put under pressure or other experiences that affect self-esteem, are likely to be more vulnerable to engage in this self-coping strategy. It is more prevalent than people think and a common factor is often a feeling of helplessness or powerlessness in relation to feelings. Self-harm may sometimes feel relatively painless because of the body's natural opiates. The production of these opiates can in itself become a 'pay-back', which is why there can be quite a compulsion to repeat the experience. It means, though, that some people can become somewhat cut off from their body and their feelings. On the other hand, others may harm themselves in order to escape feelings of detachment and to feel real and alive.

What triggers self-harm?

People may harm themselves once or twice at a particularly difficult time in their life, and never do so again. But self-harming can become an ongoing way of coping with current problems and may occur regularly, on a monthly, weekly, or daily basis, depending on circumstances. The trigger could be a reminder of past difficulties or something in the present which is unexpected and which causes upset. Sometimes, ordinarily life just feels so difficult that self-harm seems the only way to cope with it.

Some steps to prevent self-harm

Many people who self-harm want to stop hurting themselves and they can do this by trying to develop new ways of coping and expressing themselves. There are also a number of techniques, which have been shown to help reduce the risk of serious injury or minimise the harm caused. It is helpful to understand why it is done and to work out:

- what was going on in life when the self-harm first started
- how it feels just before the urge to self-harm occurs
- whether it always takes place in the same place or in similar situations
- if certain bad memories or thoughts are involved which are difficult to share with others

Possible strategies to prevent self-harm

This is not exhaustive as different people find different things useful. When someone feels like hurting themselves it can help to:

- stop and try to work out what would have to change now in order to no longer feeling like self-harming
- count down slowly from ten to zero
- identify out five things, one for each sense, in your immediate surroundings to bring attention on to the present
- focus on objects around you and think about how they look, sound, smell, taste and feel like
- breathe slowly - in through the nose and out through the mouth
- mark the place that you would normally hurt with the red pen
- hit a cushion or a punch bag to vent anger and frustration
- line up cushions or objects to represent others and direct angry feelings specifically to them
- plunge your hands into a bowl of ice cubes (though not for too long)
- put a rubber band around your wrist and flick it

- put sticking plasters on the parts of the body which you might harm

Helpful hints that might alter mood

Generally, it can help to:

- keep notes or a 'mood diary' and write down different feelings at different times of the day, noting when self-harming is most likely to happen
- record some of the ways you have found of coping with and challenging powerful feelings
- talk about your feelings with someone supportive so that it does not feel so lonely
- work on building up your self-esteem and remember that self-harm is the attempt to express powerful feelings
- Remember that harming yourself is not shameful
- try to make positive self-affirmations, instead of focusing on negatives
- try to find ways to make life less stressful - having occasional treats, eating healthily, getting plenty of sleep, and taking exercise
- know who to talk to in a crisis and how to contact them
- think about ways of dealing with anger and who this anger should really be directed at
- create something to help you express and lesson the pain, such as drawing or writing a poem, which can perhaps be shared with others to help explain your feelings
- listen to music

If self-harm has become a way of coping with stressful and difficult thoughts and feelings, it is important to remember that it doesn't have to be managed alone. Although it is not necessarily easy to stop, it can be done. Many people have come through it with the help and support of others.