

SELF-HARM POLICY

INTRODUCTION

The term self-harm refers to a range of behaviours ranging from low level activities to high suicidal intent. It is estimated that up to one in ten young people in the UK engage in self-harming behaviours at some point, and that this figure is higher amongst specific populations, including young people with special educational needs. Reasons that young people self-harm might include expressing or coping with emotional distress, trying to feel in control, a way of punishing themselves, relieving unbearable tension, a cry for help or a response to intrusive thoughts. Self-harm may be linked to bad experiences that are happening now, or in the past. But sometimes the reason is unknown. The reasons can also change over time and will not be the same for everybody but may be caused by:

- social problems – such as being bullied, having difficulties at work or School, having difficult relationships with friends or family, confusion about sexuality or, or coping with cultural expectations, such as an arranged marriage.
- trauma – such as physical or sexual abuse, the death of a close family member or friend, or having a miscarriage.
- mental health problems – such as stress, anxiety or depression or experiencing complex difficulties that sometimes cause impulsive behavior or difficulty controlling emotions, disassociation disorders, or borderline personality disorder.

These issues can lead to a build-up of intense feelings of anger, guilt, hopelessness and self-hatred. The person may not know who to turn to for help and self-harming may become a way to release these pent-up feelings. Self-harm can also occur alongside antisocial behaviour, such as misbehaving at School or getting into trouble with the Police. Although some people who self-harm are at a high risk of suicide, many people who self-harm don't want to end their lives. In fact, the self-harm may help them cope with emotional distress, so they don't feel the need to kill themselves

School staff can play an important role in preventing self-harm and also in supporting boys, peers and parents of boys currently engaging in self-harm. Tonbridge School is committed to safeguarding and promoting the welfare of all our boys, and recognises the important role that all staff play in spotting the warning signs and identifying the risk factors associated with incidents of self-harm. The Self-Harm Policy forms part of the overall safeguarding framework of Tonbridge School.

This document describes the School's approach to self-harm and our measures to address some of the key triggers before they escalate to incidents of self-harming. This policy is intended as guidance for all staff including non-teaching staff and Governors.

MANAGEMENT OF THE POLICY

All staff and Governors of Tonbridge School have a responsibility to promote and adhere to this policy. The day to day management of the policy and the designated person responsible for all incidents of self-harm is the **Deputy Head Pastoral, Mr C J C Swinson**. (In his absence, the responsibility falls to the Second Master and then the Lower Master).

AIMS

The School aims to:

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

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.

RISK FACTORS

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

| Individual Factors | Family Factors | Social Factors |
|---|---|---|
| <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Depression / anxiety • Poor communication skills • Low self-esteem • Poor problem-solving skills • Hopelessness • Impulsivity • Drug or alcohol abuse | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Unreasonable expectations • Neglect or physical, sexual or emotional abuse • Poor parental relationships and arguments • Depression, self-harm or suicide in the family • Substance abuse by family members | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Difficulty in making relationships / loneliness • Being bullied or rejected by peers |

WARNING SIGNS

School staff may become aware of warning signs which indicate a boy 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 the Deputy Head Pastoral. Possible warning signs include:

- Changes in eating / sleeping habits (e.g. boy 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;
- A reluctance to participate in Games / change clothes;
- Obvious cuts, burns, scratches etc that don’t look like accidents.

STAFF ROLES IN WORKING WITH BOYS WHO SELF-HARM

Boys 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 boy such as anger, sadness, shock, disbelief, guilt, helplessness, disgust and rejection. However, in order to offer the best possible help to boys it is important to try and maintain a supportive and open

attitude – a boy who has chosen to discuss their concerns with a member of School staff is showing a considerable amount of courage and trust. Remember that self-harm is usually someone's way of managing very hard feelings or experiences, and that in the majority of cases it is different to suicidal feelings.

As with any safeguarding issue, boys need to be made aware that it may not be possible for staff to offer complete confidentiality. **If you consider a boy 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 boy puts pressure on you to do so.

Any member of staff who is aware of a boy engaging in or suspected to be at risk of engaging in self-harm **should inform the Deputy Head Pastoral immediately.** Following the report, the Deputy Head Pastoral will, in consultation with the Second Master, Headmaster, the Housemaster and the School Counsellor, 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 the School Counsellor.
- Immediately removing the boy 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 boy, the immediate safety of the boy is paramount and an adult should remain with the boy at all times. If a boy has self-harmed in School a First Aider should be called for immediate help.

FURTHER CONSIDERATIONS

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

- dates and times;
- any agreed actions;
- concerns raised;
- details of anyone else who has been informed.

This information should be stored securely by the Deputy Head Pastoral.

It is important to encourage boys to let you know if one of their group 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 the Deputy Head Pastoral, one of the Designated Safeguarding Leads or the School Counsellor. 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 children in the same peer group are harming themselves.

In some cases, it might be necessary for the boy to stay at home if it is felt that staff cannot provide sufficient support, especially around the clock for boarders, and/or remaining in school is likely to cause further distress to themselves or their peers.

PREVENTATIVE MEASURES

Tonbridge School is committed to creating an environment in which we seek to minimise some of the triggers associated with self-harm and, in addition, provide boys with coping mechanisms to deal with them should these triggers arise and opportunities to share their feelings with teachers and other professional colleagues. We aim to do this by:

- The provision of a School Counsellor 4 ½ days a week;
- The Mindfulness Programme;
- The PSHEE Programme;
- The Welfare Group;
- The Mental Health Strategy Group;
- Pupil societies such as Bridge the Gap and PRISM;
- The Anti-Bullying Coordinator(s) and the pupil members of the Anti-Bullying Council;
- Having an effective Anti-Bullying Policy;
- Peer mentoring;
- The House structure and Tutor system;
- Staff CPD and training.