



PONTARDDULAIS COMPREHENSIVE SCHOOL
YSGOL GYFUN PONTARDDULAIS



Self Harm Policy

Polisi Hunan - niweidio

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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 pupils, peers and parents of pupils currently engaging in self-harm.

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.

2. 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 pupils who self-harm and their peers and parents/carers

3. 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 risk taking behaviours under this policy, including those involving sexual or psychological risk.

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 1.



4. 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
- Neglect or physical, sexual or emotional abuse
- Poor relationship with parents
- Depression, self-harm or suicide in the family
- Being a currently or previously looked after child
- Being a young carer

Social Factors:

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

5. Warning Signs

School staff may become aware of warning signs which indicate a pupil 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 Headteacher, Mrs. R. Thomas, Child Protection Officer.



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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

6. **Ligaturing**

Ligaturing is the most frequently used method of suicide and/or attempted suicide for mental health service users.

Ligaturing may involve suspending the body from a high ligature point e.g. hanging although many deaths also occur through asphyxiation or strangulation, without suspension of the body, using a ligature point below head height or the use of a ligature which is not attached to a fixed point. A significant proportion of suicides are believed to occur through impulsive acts, using what may be seen as reasonably obvious ligature points.

On discovering a potential ligature point or hazard:

- REPORT to the Nurse and Mrs. Thomas, Safeguarding Officer
- COMPLETE incident on My Concern.

7. **Guidelines for staff**

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.



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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 student 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 teachers for safeguarding children, Mrs. R. Thomas, Deputy Headteacher. All incidents are recorded on My Concern.

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

- Contacting parents / carers
- Referral to the School Nurse
- Arranging professional assistance e.g. doctor, nurse, social services
- Arranging an appointment with a counsellor / educational psychologist
- 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 first aid issues should be addressed as a priority

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
- Concerns raised
- Details of who should be informed, what they should be told and why

This information should be stored in the pupils' child protection file and reported on My Concern.

It is important to encourage pupils to let you know if one of their friends 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.



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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 children.

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 pupils in the same peer group are harming themselves.



Appendix 1 – Understanding Why People Self-Harm

There are a wide range of reasons why people turn to self-harm and every single case is different but there are certain themes that recur time and time again.

Control

During adolescence, a time when young people are keen to assert their independence, they can begin to feel very out of control of their own lives. This can be for a number of reasons, perhaps their life is in chaos with difficult relationships at home or school, or perhaps they feel like they're being told what to do every minute of the day and don't have the freedom they'd like from parents or teachers. When you can't control anything else in your life, you can completely control your own body.

Release and Communication of Feelings

For people who struggle to communicate or express their feelings in another way, self-harm can feel like the only way to communicate and release those feelings.

Physical Rather Than Emotional Pain

For some people, physical pain can be a way of communicating emotional pain which is too hard to talk about. Or it can provide a more manageable form of pain that they can tend to rather than facing up to the emotional and psychological injuries they may be suffering with e.g. as a result of abuse.

Punishment

Some people talk about using self-harm as a way of punishing themselves when they don't live up to expectations – this tends to either be young people who are perfectionist in nature, or those with a history of systematic abuse who have learned that they deserve to be punished.

Nowhere else to turn

Some young people talk about not being aware of a better way to deal with their problems.



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Appendix 2 – Useful sources of support

www.youngminds.org.uk – Young Minds are committed to supporting the emotional wellbeing of all pupils. This website has lots of resources and advice for teachers on a range of mental health issues.

www.selfharm.co.uk – support for young people impacted by self-harm

Samaritans - The Samaritans helpline is available 24 hours a day 365 days a year and their trained advisers are a great source of support if you need to talk to someone.

Helpline: 08457 90 90 90 | **Email:** Jo@Samaritans.org | **Website:** www.samaritans.org/

Papyrus - 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 41 41 | **Email:** pat@papyrus-uk.org |

Website: www.papyrus-uk.org/