



SELF HARM POLICY

Reviewed by: S Roberts	Date: Sept 2025	Next review: Sept 2026
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Introduction

Recent research indicates that up to 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 a crucial role in preventing self-harm and supporting students, peers and parents/guardians of students currently engaging in self-harm. Four times as many girls as boys self-harm up to the age of 16, although this gender disparity decreases with age.

Scope

This policy outlines Adcote's approach to self-harm and serves as guidance for all staff, including non-teaching staff and governors.

Aims:

- To increase understanding and awareness of self-harm
- To alert staff to risk factors
- To provide support to staff dealing with students who self-harm
- To provide support to students who self-harm and their peers and parents/guardians.

Definition of self-harm

Self-harm refers to any behaviour where the intent is to harm one's self. Examples may include:

- 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

Risk Factors

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

Individual Factors:

- Depression/ anxiety
- Poor communication skills
- Low self-esteem
- Poor problem solving skills
- Hopelessness
- Impulsivity
- Bereavement
- Perfectionism
- Exam pressure
- Drug or alcohol abuse

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:

- Being bullied or rejected by peers
- Difficulty in making relationships/loneliness
- Easy access to drugs, medications or other methods of self-harm
- Copied self-harm behaviour
- Difficult times of year e.g. anniversaries
- Criminal behaviour
- Accessing or difficulties within school

Warning Signs

School staff may observe warning signs indicating that a student is experiencing difficulties that may lead to 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 a member of the safeguarding team.

Possible warning signs include:

1. Changes in eating / sleeping habits (e.g. student may appear overly tired if not sleeping well)
2. Increased isolation from friends or family, or becoming socially withdrawn
3. Changes in activity and mood e.g. more aggressive or introverted than usual
4. Lowering of academic achievement
5. Talking or joking about self-harm or suicide
6. Abusing drugs or alcohol
7. Expressing feelings of failure, uselessness or loss of hope
8. Reluctance to change in front of people
9. Frequent injuries (i.e. cuts, bruises and burns) with suspicious explanations
10. Wearing trousers and long sleeves in warm weather
11. Low self-esteem or an increase in negative self-talk
12. Difficulty handling emotions or easily overwhelmed
13. Extremely sensitive to rejection
14. Self-defeating comments and attitudes.
15. Avoiding sports or other activities that would require showing more of one's body
16. Bloodied wads of toilet paper or tissue, blood on clothing.
17. Withdrawing from activities once enjoyed.
18. Rubbing of arm, especially wrist, through sleeves (cuts often itch when they are healing)
19. Increased time alone
20. Increased time with peers who self-harm

Staff roles in working with students who self-harm

Students 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 feel a range of feelings in response to self-harm such as anger, sadness, shock, disbelief, guilt, helplessness, disgust and rejection.

If a student discloses they are self-harming, staff should try to remain calm, provide reassurance, and follow the first aid guidelines. In the case of an overdose, however small, advice must be obtained from a medical practitioner (Accident and Emergency or the GP).

To offer the best possible help to students, it is important to maintain a supportive and open attitude - a student who has chosen to discuss their concerns with a member of school staff is showing a considerable amount of courage and trust.

Students need to be made aware that it may not be possible for staff to offer complete confidentiality. If a student is considered at risk of harming themselves, confidentiality cannot be kept. It is important that staff do not make promises of confidentiality that cannot be kept, even if a student puts pressure on them to do so.

Self-harm is addressed in the PSHE curriculum through discussions on emotional wellbeing and coping strategies. Key topics cover identifying the causes of self-harm, dispelling myths, and teaching students how to support peers and where to seek professional help either for themselves or others. Staff delivering these lessons receive guidance on how to handle these topics sensitively.

Any member of staff who is aware of a student engaging in, or suspected to be at risk of engaging in self-harm, should consult the Designated Safeguarding Lead, or in their absence, one of the Deputy Safeguarding Leads.

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

- Contacting parents/guardians
- Arranging professional assistance e.g. doctor, nurse, social services
- Arranging for a Self Harm Risk Assessment to be carried out by the Medical Officer
- Arranging an appointment with a counsellor
- Removing the student 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 student, the immediate safety of the student is paramount and an adult should remain with the student at all times
- If a student has engaged in self-harm, it may be necessary to administer First Aid.

Further Considerations

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

- Dates and times
- Concerns raised
- An Action Plan
- Details of anyone else who has been informed

This information should be stored in the student's child protection file. It is important to encourage students to let you know if one of their group is in trouble, upset or showing signs of self-harming. Friends can worry about betraying confidence 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 one of the designated teachers for safeguarding children: Miss Sally Roberts, Designated Safeguarding Lead, Miss Louise Hudson, Deputy Designated Safeguarding Lead, Miss Nikki Jones, Head of Boarding and Deputy Designated Safeguarding Lead) and Miss Mansell, Medical Officer.

Links with other policies

1. Safeguarding and Child Protection
2. Medical Policy
3. PSHE Policy
4. Anti-Bullying Policy
5. Equal Opportunities Policy
6. Staff behaviour and Code of Conduct (in the staff handbook)

Resources for support for students, parents/guardians:

- Self-Harm Pathway Information, Advice and Guidance for Practitioners (Shropshire Safeguarding Partnership):
<https://shropshire.gov.uk/committee-services/documents/s1822/Appendix%20C%20V18%2004.03.14%20Self%20Harm%20Policy%20and%20Guidelines.pdf>
- Shropshire Family Information Services and Resource pack:
<https://www.shropshire.gov.uk/media/2587/self-harming.pdf>
- Mind:
<https://www.mind.org.uk/for-young-people/feelings-and-experiences/understanding-self-harm/>
- Young Minds:
<https://www.youngminds.org.uk/young-person/my-feelings/self-harm/>