BENSHAM MANOR School

Self-Harm Policy

Last reviewed: September 2026

1. 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 an important role in preventing self-harm and in supporting students, peers and parents and carers of students currently engaging in self-harm.

Building a positive school culture which encourages resilience and promotes help-seeking is the most important thing schools can do in relation to enhancing mental wellbeing.

2. Scope

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.

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

4. Definition of Self-Harm

Self-harm is any act or intentional self-injury or self-poisoning. Examples include:

- Cutting; scratching, scraping or picking skin
- Swallowing objects or poisons
- Hitting or bruising
- Self-strangulation with ligatures
- Burning
- 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
- Scoring 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:

5.1 Individual Factors

- Depression / anxiety
- Poor communication skills
- Low self esteem
- Poor problem solving skills
- A sense of hopelessness
- Impulsivity
- Drug or alcohol abuse

- Being on the autistic spectrum
- Having ADHD
- Having an eating disorder
- Unable to cope with overwhelming emotions

5.2 Family Factors

- Unreasonable expectations
- Neglect or physical, sexual or emotional abuse
- Poor parental relationships
- Conflict with parents
- Drug / alcohol misuse within the family
- Family history of self harm
- Depression, self-harm or suicide within the family
- Mental health difficulties in parents / carers

5.3 Social Factors

- Difficulty in making relationships / loneliness
- Being bullied (including cyber bullying) or rejected by peers
- Having friends who self harm
- Easy access to means of self-harm
- Influenced by websites or social media the encourage self-harm
- Influenced by suicide or self-harm of well-known figures in the media

6. Warning Signs

School staff may become aware of warning signs, which indicate a student 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 one of the Safeguarding team – Kirstie Byrne, Robin Barwick, Matthew Keane, Barrie Murphy, Fiona Robinson, Amy Clarke and Anne-Marie Abalo.

Possible warning signs include:

- Unexplained cuts, burns or bruises
- Low mood: lack of interest in usual activities
- Excessive self-blame for problems, expressing feelings of failure, uselessness of hopelessness
- Changes in eating / sleeping habits (e.g. student 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
- Changes in clothing - Wearing long sleeves or covering parts of their body usually shown and when clothing is not appropriate to the weather – e.g. long sleeves, jumpers or coats on a very warm day

7. Staff Roles – 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 experience a range of feelings in response to self-harm in a student such as anger, sadness, shock, disbelief, guilt, helplessness, disgust and rejection. However, in order to offer the

best possible help to students it is important to try 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. We remember that for the young person, at the time, their feelings were so overwhelming that to them, the best thing that they could do was to self-harm.

To understand why a young person may be self-harming it is important to have an open conversation about their reactions. It can be helpful to convey that you understand some of the functions of self harm to encourage the young person to open up.

Some examples - “I wonder what are the sorts of things that make you feel like harming yourself?”

“Sometimes people self-harm as a way of managing strong and difficult feelings or emotions. I’m wondering if that might be why you hurt yourself?”

“I know that people self-harm for many different reasons and that they often experience a range of different emotions. I wonder if you are able to help me understand what leads you to self-harm?”

8. Staff Roles – Managing the immediate effects of self-harm

If a student has self-harmed, there are steps you can take to help.

Management of physical injuries:

- Keep calm and follow first aid guidelines for cuts, wounds or burns
- If you have immediate concerns about the effect of an overdose, or serious physical injuries are present, emergency services should be called
- If an overdose is suspected the student will need to be taken to hospital straight away for tests and possible treatment
- Always ask the student if they are in pain – they may have needed to feel physical pain at the point of self-harm but this doesn’t mean they want to feel pain afterwards

Helping the young person:

- Identify a key member of staff to whom the young person is willing to speak who can provide a listening ear and non-judgmental support (Appendix 1 - Helpful questions or statements)
- Self-harm is often a way of communicating distress – acknowledge this distress and offer to help the young person find the support they need
- Reassure the young person that you understand that self-harm is helping them to cope at the moment
- Remind them that there are less harmful ways of coping (see below)
- Mention sources of help and support, such as calling a helpline or speaking to a GP or family member (Appendix 2 - Resources)

Confidentiality is very important to young people, but staff must remember that they cannot promise total confidentiality, in line with their institution’s safeguarding policy. Staff should respect wishes around confidentiality if possible, but young people’s health, safety and welfare are paramount. If you become aware that a student is self-harming, you are obliged to share this with your school’s designated safeguarding lead - Kirstie Byrne. This information would usually be shared with parents/carer too, unless this would pose risk of greater harm coming to the child (e.g. where there is possible abuse at home). Discuss the need to tell parents/ carers with the young person and listen carefully to any fears they may have. A decision should be made in line with the school’s safeguarding policy.

Students should be informed when the school contacts parents or carers about self-harm. Self-harm can be a way of feeling in control; by not involving the student the school may exacerbate the student’s distress. It may be helpful to invite the parents or carers into school to talk with staff and the student together to try and make sense of the self-harming behaviour and think about ways of supporting the young person. The parents/carers need information so that they can support their son or daughter and also access further help for both the young person and, if necessary, themselves.

DON’T make promises of confidentiality that you can’t keep.

If parents discover that their child is self-harming they may contact the school and request that the information is only shared with school staff that need to know. Their wishes should be followed wherever possible.

9. Understanding the circumstances of self-harm and what level of concern there should be

It is helpful to try and understand the circumstances and reasons for self-harm. Whilst all self-harm is of concern, it is important to establish what level of concern there should be about the self-harm in order to decide appropriate action.

Listen to your intuition; if you have a hunch that a student may be at risk you may well be right. Speak to a member of the safeguarding team about your concerns and record this in My Concern.

If you are concerned about high risk or are not sure about the level of concern, it may be helpful for a member of the safeguarding team to consult with our local Child and Young Person Mental Health Service (CYPMHS) team.

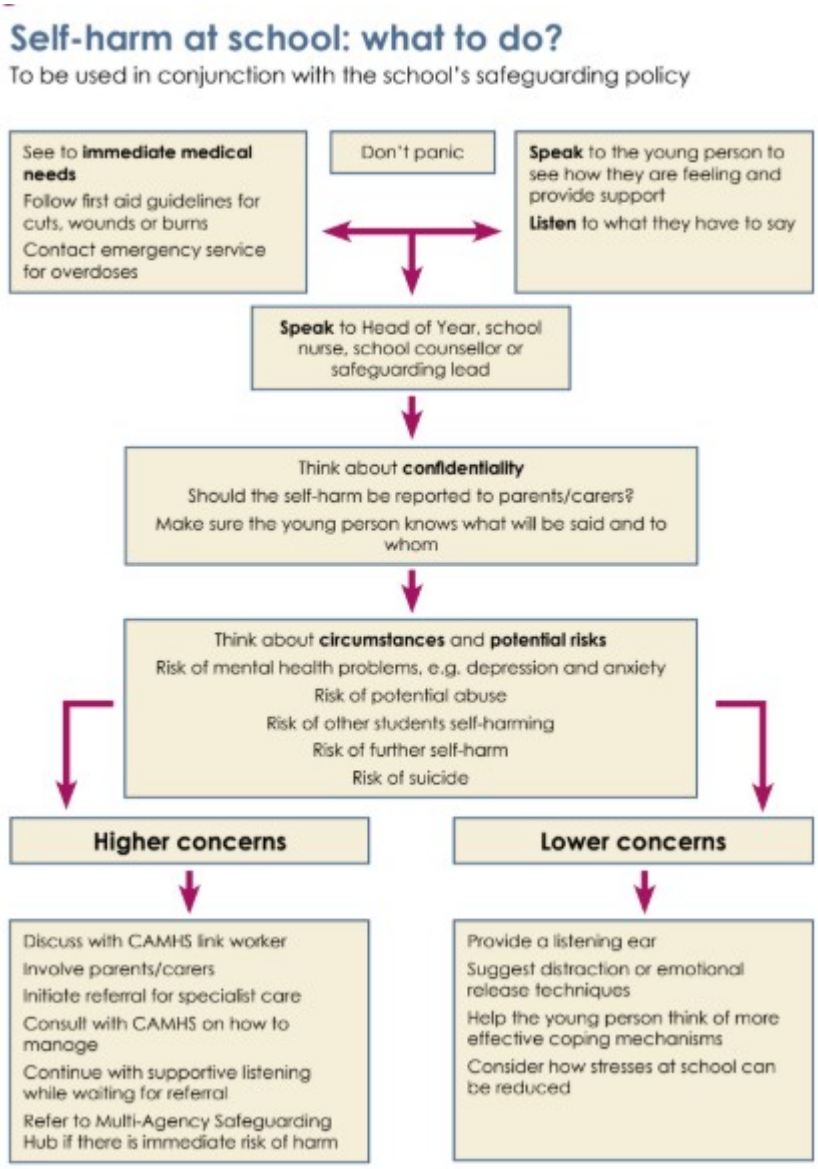
Self-harm can begin as a consequence of abuse. If you are worried that self-harm or other behaviours may be due to abuse or exploitation, this should be managed as a safeguarding concern and referred to children's social care.

Some steps that may be taken if there are higher concerns:

- Contacting the CYPMHS team for advice
- Discussion with Diane Mansell, school nurse
- Continuing to support and listen to the young person
- Making a referral to the Therapy team
- Involving parents and carers
- Being mindful of the student's peer group, they may need further support once the students' own support needs have been met

Some steps if there is lower concern about ongoing risk:

- Support and listen to the student and work out ways to support them at school
- Try to help the student identify the reasons for their self-harm or the emotions they were experiencing before they self-harmed
- Explore possible strategies to manage urges to self-harm with the young person (Appendix 3)
- Talk to the student about speaking to their parents so that they can be supported at home
- Involve the parents / carers in a discussion of how to help the young person at school and at home
- Give the young person information about other sources of support e.g. Young Minds, Childline and local voluntary groups
- Be aware that some students who are considered low risk initially may become higher risk and need appropriate actions to address this



Any member of staff who is aware of a student engaging or suspected to be at risk of engaging in self-harm should consult one of the Safeguarding Team and make a report on My Concern.

All staff have received training on recognizing and supporting children who self-harm.

Self-harm can be distressing for school staff. On discovering that a student is self-harming, you may experience emotions such as sadness, shock, anger, fear, disgust, frustration and helplessness. Such emotions are common. Because self-harm is self-inflicted, it can be more difficult to empathise with than, for example, accidental injuries.

Some suggestions:

- Be honest with yourself about your emotions
- Discuss your feelings with one of the Safeguarding or Management teams
- Seek support
- Look after yourself (making sure that you prioritise your own health and wellbeing)
- Recognise that school staff can have an important role to play in helping young people who are self-harming

This policy will be updated on an annual basis.

Appendix 1 – Helpful questions or statements

“You must be feeling very upset about something. I’d like to help if I can; would it help to talk about what’s troubling you?”

“I wonder if you’re using self- harm as a way of coping with something that is troubling you?”

“It can feel that self-harm is the only way to cope, but there are other ways. Can I show you some leaflets/websites that suggest helpful ways of coping?”

“Before you go I’d like to give you some information about people you can contact if you feel like self-harming again.”

Appendix 2 – Resources

Information and support for young people:

Childline

Tel: 0800 1111

Young Minds www.youngminds.org.uk

Samaritans www.samaritans.org

Tel: 116 123

Harmless www.harmless.org.uk

National self-harm network www.nshn.co.uk

Resources for parents:

Healthtalk.org module on parents' experiences of self- harm:

www.healthtalk.org/peoples-experiences/mental-health/self-harm-parents-experiences/topics

No Harm Done (information for school staff and parents):

www.rcpsych.ac.uk/healthadvice/problemsdisorders/self-harm.aspx

The Parent's Guide to Self-Harm by Jane Smith, Oxford: Lion Hudson

Appendix 3 – Possible strategies to manage urges to self-harm

The following are practical ways to manage self-harm (based on research) that can be suggested to students. Although not all of these will work for every student, some of these suggestions may be helpful. It may take a while to get self-harm under control, but with practice the young person can usually develop positive ways of coping.

Building support networks

It is helpful to identify who can support the young person and how they can get in touch with them.

This might be friends, family, school teachers, etc. Knowing how to access a crisis line is also important.

Distraction activities

Replacing self-harm with other safer activities can be a positive way of coping with urges to self-harm. It is important to find things that the young person is interested in.

Examples include:

- Going for a walk or other forms of physical exercise
- Getting out of the house and going to a public place, such as a cinema
- Reading a book
- Taking a dog for a walk or caring for a pet
- Watching TV
- Listening to music
- Engaging in self-soothing activity, such as having a relaxing bath

Coping with symptoms of physical stress

There are a number of strategies that can help to manage the extreme tension in the body that young people may feel.

Examples include:

- Clenching ice cubes in the hand until they melt
- Hitting a pillow or soft object
- Paced breathing (extending the breathing):
    - Sit comfortably
    - Breathe in to the count of 4
    - Breathe out to the count of 6
    - Notice your stomach moving out as you breathe in
- Counting (allows the body to slow down) e.g. count 10 films, 10 animals, 10 flowers etc.
- Engaging in physical exercise
- Relaxation exercises