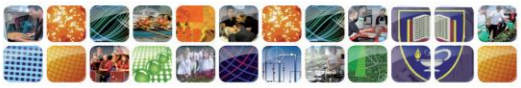
HELSTON COMMUNITY COLLEGE
ASPIRATION · AMBITION · ACHIEVEMENT



Self-Harm Policy

SLT Responsible Person: Designated Safeguarding Lead

Date of Policy: May 2021

Date to be reviewed: May 2022

Approved by: Senior Leadership Team – 20 May 2021

Published: Website/Staff Intranet

To be read in conjunction with:

Safeguarding and Child Protection Policy
Student Confidentiality Policy
Managing Medical Conditions Policy

1. Aims and Purpose of the Policy

The aim of this document is to outline the College's approach to self-harm. This Policy is intended as guidance for all staff including non-teaching staff and governors. School staff can play an important role in preventing self-harm and also in supporting students, peers and parents/carers of students currently engaging in self-harm. This Policy is informed by current research and the advice within the Cornwall Managing Self-Harm document. Further information and guidance can be found in this document.

The aims of the Policy are:

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

2. Background to Self Harm

2.1 On occasion, we may all act in ways that could be considered as harmful to ourselves. However, self-harming is when someone chooses to inflict pain on themselves in some way. It includes, but is not limited to:

- 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
- Overdosing (self-poisoning)

2.2 Why do students self-harm? There are many reasons why students resort to self-harm as a means of managing strong and painful feelings. More common reasons include some of the following factors:

- Some students have a long history of not knowing how to manage their emotions or regulate strong feelings – especially those feelings which they find internally threatening, distressing, difficult, overwhelming or shameful. Self-harm offers a means of regulating emotions, which affords a temporary sense of release, relief and control.
- Linked to the above, for a range of reasons, some students do not make strong attachments to adults when young, and this legacy compromises their capacity to manage strong and painful feelings as they develop. This is an increasing problem as they become older and are expected to manage their feelings more independently.
- Other students cannot rely on the help and support of friends and family when they are distressed; or they may not know how to communicate their strong feelings to friends and family.
- Some students feel they have very little control over their circumstances and this leaves them with limited routes of expressing their frustrations and powerful feelings. Self-harm offers these students a sense of control.
- Self-harm is also linked to other mental health problems in childhood and adolescence, such as anxiety and depression.
- Self-harm is more common among students who live in families characterised by conflict, domestic violence, parental mental health (including parenting self-harming), and poor attachment histories.

2.3 A student may self-harm because:

- It is a way of dealing with intense and painful feelings and provides a sense of relief afterwards. The strong feeling of relief (and even power at overcoming pain) may be a powerful driver to repeat self-harming.
- It is a way to communicate their distress, especially for students who lack other routes to express themselves and to have this distress understood, accepted and attended to.
- It may be a way of exacting retaliation or punishment on those close to them, when they are left feeling hurt or unable to resolve negative feelings about others – especially if they feel that others are responsible for their distress. This process may operate unconsciously.
- It can be a way to influence or control others and it may, on occasion, be used to elicit care, affection or confirm love from those close to them. Children with limited resources for controlling their environment can use self-harm to influence the feelings and actions of others.

This may leave professionals and carers feeling manipulated; however, it is important to remember that self-harm communicates something that a student is unable to say through usual means. Understanding this 'communication gone wrong' is likely to go some way in reducing or preventing recurrence.

2.4 Warning Signs - There may be no warning signs, and often people who self-harm go to great lengths to conceal their injuries, so it can be hard to know for sure if a person is self-harming. If you notice any change in a student that concerns you, it is important to open up a conversation with them. You may notice higher levels of expressed distress, or increasing withdrawal in a student, a change in academic work or behaviour around College. You may notice that a student is wearing long, heavy clothes, even in warm weather, which may be a way of hiding signs of self-harm.

If you do not feel able to open up a conversation, then ask an appropriate staff member (the pastoral support team or a safeguarding team member) and follow the College safeguarding procedures.

A change in behaviour, attitudes or attendance at College might be significant and should be followed up. Parents/carers or College staff may identify that a student's internet activity is a concern (e.g. accessing self-harm websites or groups).

Parents/carers may be the first to notice warning signs and they are encouraged to discuss these with the College through the pastoral team or the safeguarding team.

3. Risk Factors associated with Self-Harm

There is not one type of person who self-harms. Some groups are more vulnerable than others but each case is individual.

3.1 Risk Factors may include:

Individual Factors:

- Mental health problems such as depression and anxiety
- Poor communication skills
- Low self-esteem, marked relationship difficulties
- Poor problem-solving skills
- Hopelessness
- Impulsivity
- Drug or alcohol abuse
- Past or present physical or sexual abuse, neglect or trauma

Family Factors:

- Unreasonable expectations
- Neglect or physical, sexual or emotional abuse
- Poor parental/family relationships and arguments
- Depression, self-harm or suicide in the family

Social Factors:

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

It is important to recognise that sometimes none of these risk factors may appear to be present. Some students who harm themselves may appear well and from highly supportive backgrounds; they suffer internally and resort to harming themselves as a means of coping. Sometimes groups of students influence each other by discussing self-harm – in a kind of contagion of self-harming behaviour. Each person is unique and will have found the practice of self-harm by their own route, and rely on it at times of stress due to the sense of release, control and relief it offers to them. When supporting people who are self-harming it is important to be mindful that it is not always easy to stop self-harming behaviour.

3.2 Is there a link between suicide and self-harm? People often think that self-harm is closely linked to suicide; however, the vast majority of people who self-harm are not trying to kill themselves – rather they have some hope that by communicating their distress something will be understood and someone will attend to them. It is a way of coping with strong and painful feelings and circumstances. However, it is not always clear from the severity of the self-harm what the intention of the student is. If you discover that someone is self-harming, it gives you a real opportunity to help them deal with the underlying problems they are wrestling with. Therefore, it is important that you explore with them what their intentions are, and what it is that cannot be tolerated with the support of more healthy coping skills. In rare circumstances, the internal distress becomes so great that self-harming becomes increasingly dangerous and can become a real threat to life; or the way in which the student harms themselves becomes more dangerous – either by accident or intent. This, of course, requires close monitoring.

4 Relationship of the Self-Harm Policy to other policy documents, in particular safeguarding procedures and policies; risk assessment processes; and confidentiality

4.1 The Self-Harm Policy supplements the Safeguarding and Child Protection Policy.

4.2 Please refer to our Student Confidentiality Policy for more details. All members of staff will refer any concerns or disclosure to the Safeguarding team through the Safeguarding Referral procedure by logging a concern on MyConcern. Students must be made aware that any information regarding self-harm will be shared with relevant people. This should be done before a disclosure where possible.

5 Roles and Responsibilities for all Staff

5.1 Senior Leadership Team

The Senior Leadership Team have a pivotal role to play in developing positive mental health strategies in College. They recognise the need to develop a whole College awareness of mental health and emotional wellbeing, including self-harm. Strategies to do this will include:

- Implementation of a PSHE programme as part of addressing the student's emotional wellbeing and mental health needs.

- Support the prioritisation of self-harm training for College staff.
- In collaboration with the College's Local Governing body and Designated Safeguarding Lead, the Senior Leadership Team will develop, implement and review a College Self-Harm Policy using the guidance provided.
- Ensure staff, parents, carers and students are aware of their roles and responsibilities when implementing the Policy across the College.
- Ensure that all designated staff receive full and appropriate training regarding self-harm and are fully confident with the procedures to follow.
- Ensure that all staff, including support staff are made aware of, and understand, the Self-Harm Policy, and receive training and support as appropriate.
- Ensure that good procedures are in place for record keeping, audit and evaluation of all activities in relation to self-harm in the College.
- Ensure that all staff know where they can access support if required.

5.2 Local Governing Body

The Local Governing Body will work with College staff in order to:

- Provide students with open access to information about self-harm and details of who to go to for help and support.
- Decide, in collaboration with the College Senior Leadership Team, how awareness and understanding of self-harm should be promoted. This includes self-harm being covered in the College PSHE curriculum, extra-curricular presentation for parents/carers, and training for all College staff.
- Consider issues of parental consent and whether parents/carers should be invited to learn more about self-harm.
- Review special permissions for students who self-harm, for example 'time out' of the classroom during emotional distress and permission to wear long sleeves for sports.
- Support the development of procedural policy for self-harm incidents occurring at College.
- Be clear about what behaviour cannot be accepted, and ensure that all students are aware and understand the guidance (for example, self-harming in front of other students or threats to self-harm as bargaining, may be deemed by the College as unacceptable).

5.3 All Staff and Teachers

- Review all self-harm guidance and policy documents, alongside Safeguarding and Child Protection policy documents, and be aware of guidance on communication processes.
- Refer any concerns to the Safeguarding Team through the referral process.
- Discuss an incident or disclosure of self-harm with a designated member of staff as soon as you become aware of the problem, and inform the student that you are doing this.
- Make it known to students that there are staff available to listen to them (and how they can be accessed).
- Remain calm, respectful, sensitive and non-judgemental at times of student distress.
- Encourage students to be open with you and assure them that they can get the help they need, if they are able to talk.
- Endeavour to enable students to feel in control by asking what they would like to happen and what help they feel they need.
- Do not make promises you cannot keep, especially regarding issues of confidentiality.
- Monitor the reactions of other students who know about the self-harm, and refer on to appropriate staff.
- Do not ask a student to show you their scars or describe their self-harm.
- Do not simply tell a student to stop self-harming – you may be removing the only coping mechanism they have.

5.4 Designated Safeguarding Lead

- Ensure the implementation of the Self-Harm Policy; report to the Headteacher at each stage of the process.
- Maintain up to date records of students experiencing self-harm, incidents of self-harm and all other concerns surrounding the issue.
- Monitor the support provided and progress of the students in your care and maintain communication with them.
- Ensure you are fully confident in your understanding of self-harm and seek additional information and/or training if you feel it necessary. You may need to reflect upon, and update, your practice in relation to those who self-harm.
- Contact other organisations and key services in your area and find out what help and support is available for students who self-harm.
- The Designated Safeguarding Lead and/or Headteacher and student to decide if any other members of staff who have contact with the student should be made aware of the self-harm and underlying concerns. Whenever possible adhere to the 'need to know' principle.
- Ensure that all first-aiders are well informed about self-harm.
- Inform the student's parents/carers, if appropriate, and liaise with them as to how to best manage the situation.
- Be aware of when it is essential to liaise or share information with other professionals (such as social services, educational psychologists, GP, Primary Mental Health team, CAMHS).
- Respond to any mention of suicidal feelings or behaviour as a matter of urgency (see Appendix 1).
- Take care of your own emotional wellbeing and seek support/supervision as and when necessary.

6. Students' Entitlements

- Students should have access to leaflets and guidance about self-harm, including guidance for students, which clearly sets out their rights, and what they should expect when they disclose their self-harm to professional staff. These leaflets are available to download on the College website on the "Safeguarding" page.
- Ensure that students are aware that the teachers and designated staff are there to help them.
- If students are under emotional distress at College, encourage them to talk to a staff member as soon as possible.
- If students are worried that a friend may be self-harming, then encourage them to talk to a member of staff for support and guidance.

7. Pathways for immediate (including risk assessment) and ongoing response to self-harm

- All concerns and responses to self-harm must be referred to the Safeguarding Team using MyConcern referral.
- All incidents of self-harm or concerns raised will be recorded, audited, monitored and followed up by the Safeguarding Team.
- Additional support for parents, carers, siblings and peers will be provided as necessary.

Self-Harm Incident Response Flowchart.

