

January 2024

Safeguarding Updates – Self Harm



What is self-harm?

Self-harm is when someone hurts themselves on purpose as a way of trying to manage distressing or overwhelming feelings and experiences. Someone who is self-harming might be dealing with lots of intense thoughts and feelings, and hurting themselves may feel like the only way to cope. Or, they might feel numb and hurt themselves in order to feel something.

If your child is self-harming, or you're concerned they might be, it can be incredibly worrying and upsetting for you as their parent. The important thing to remember is that you and your child are not alone - lots of young people go through this and come out the other side with different ways of coping with their feelings.

Some ways that young people self-harm include:

- cutting themselves
- scratching skin with fingernails
- burning skin
- biting skin
- hitting themselves, or banging their head or another part of their body on a wall
- pulling hair out from their head, eyebrows or eyelashes
- inserting objects into their body

If you are worried your child may be self-harming, here are some things to look out for:

- unexplained cuts, burns, bite marks, bruises or bald patches
- keeping themselves covered, for example wearing long sleeves or trousers even during hot weather, not wanting to change clothes around others or avoiding activities like swimming
- bloody tissues in waste bins
- seeming low or depressed, for example withdrawing from friends and family
- blaming themselves for problems or expressing feelings of failure, uselessness or hopelessness
- outbursts of anger or argumentativeness

Some myths you might hear about self-harm can make it harder to talk about as a parent – including that it's a "phase" young people go through, or that it's an attention seeking behaviour. While it might feel hard to understand sometimes from the outside, self-harm can be a way for a young person to:

- Manage, reduce or express very strong and upsetting emotions – such as hurt, sadness, anger, fear or feeling bad about themselves
- Relieve tension and pressure, or reduce feelings of panic and anxiety temporarily feel calmer
- Experience a feeling of physical pain to distract from emotional pain

- Gain a sense of control over feelings or problems – for example, by feeling there's something they can do when things feel too much
- Stop feeling numb or "zoned-out" – which can be a protection mechanism our bodies use when we're experiencing overwhelming feelings

However, while it often feels like self-harm brings some relief in the moment, this is only temporary. As feelings build up again, so does the urge to self-harm. As this cycle continues over time, a young person may start to feel ashamed, confused or frightened about the fact that they're self-harming – increasing the load they're carrying on top of what they're already going through. This can become a cycle that's really hard to break, and a habit that's hard to stop.

When the urge to self-harm does build in the moment, having a list of other things they can do straight away can also help your child to 'ride the wave of' their intense feelings without self-harming.

Remember that different things will work for different people, and that what helps will usually depend on the feelings your child is trying to manage. Some young people will want to do something soothing like wrapping themselves up in a comfy space, while others might want to do something very active to burn off the energy in their body.

Over the longer-term, becoming more aware of how they feel when they self-harm, what's making them feel this way and what kinds of things help, will empower your child to feel more in control. This will hopefully reduce the sense of being overwhelmed and the feeling that they need to self-harm.

If you have any concerns or worries that your child may be self-harming then please contact the school safeguarding team for further support.

Head Teacher – Ms Smyth

Deputy Head Teacher and Designated Safeguarding Lead – Mrs Jones

Deputy Safeguarding Leads – Christine Kirkham, Mr Shillcock, Mr Backhouse, Ms Lyons, Mrs Jackson, Mrs Gilmore, Mr Phipps, Ms Boateng.

Mental Health First Aiders – C Kirkham, W.Townson, B Kelly-Ince, S. Curran

Emotional Literacy Support Assistant – Ms McCabe

SAFE Officer – Ms Watson

School Counsellors – Ms A McStea and Mrs K Fieldsend

YPAS Worker on site – Greg Wynter