



Self-Harm Policy

School	Birch Wood Area Special School
Headteacher	Philip Leaney
Date approved by Governors	June 2025
Date of next review	June 2026

1. Introduction

This policy outlines the procedures and responsibilities of staff and the school community in preventing, identifying, and managing incidents of self-harm among students at Birch Wood School. The school is committed to providing a safe, supportive environment where students can develop emotionally, socially and academically.

2. Purpose

The purpose of this policy is to:

- Ensure that all staff understand how to respond to incidents of self-harm.
- Promote early identification and intervention to prevent escalation.
- Provide a clear, consistent approach to supporting students affected by self-harm.
- Ensure that a holistic and individualized approach is taken with each student.

3. Definition of Self-Harm

Self-harm refers to any act of deliberately injuring or harming oneself. This can include behaviours such as:

- cutting, scratching, scraping or picking skin
- scouring or scraping skin excessively
- burning or scalding
- swallowing inedible objects
- swallowing hazardous materials or substances
- taking an overdose of prescription or non-prescription drugs or intentionally taking drugs prescribed to others
- banging or hitting the head or other parts of the body
- hair-pulling

It is important to recognize that self-harm may be a coping mechanism for emotional distress, mental health difficulties, or other challenges and should always be taken seriously. Staff should also be alert to risk taking behaviour. Mental health advice* is clear that:

- self-harm is not attention-seeking or manipulative
- self-harm is not a mental illness – it is a symptom of internal stress or distress and suggests a person is struggling with something else
- self-harm can affect anyone
- self-harm is not always suicide attempt
- self-harm is not a problem that can't be solved – people can learn to manage their emotions in a different way
- self-harm is not done because people enjoy the pain

4. Risk Factors

There are a number of factors that could cause distress and lead someone to harm themselves. The following risk factors, particularly in combination, could make a young person vulnerable to self-harm:

Individual factors:

- mental health difficulties such as depression / anxiety
- disordered eating
- poor communication skills
- low self-esteem
- poor problem-solving skills
- a feeling of hopelessness
- impulsivity
- drug or alcohol abuse/misuse
- having additional needs
- trauma
- Adverse Childhood Experiences (ACE)

Family factors:

- Unreasonable expectations
- Physical, emotional or sexual abuse or neglect
- Poor parental relationships and arguments or witnessing domestic abuse (children who witness domestic abuse are considered to be victims of domestic abuse)
- Depression, self-harm or suicide in the family
- Housing issues
- Family financial issues

Social factors:

- Loneliness or difficulty making / maintaining relationships
- Being bullied or rejected by peers
- Interest in social networking/websites that focus on self-harm or suicide
- Pressures from school/college
- Death of a loved one or friend

5. Prevention and Awareness

The school will implement strategies to promote emotional well-being and reduce the risk of self-harm:

- **Education:** Provide education to students about emotional literacy, coping strategies, and mental health. Use of strategies such as Zones of Regulation in classes.

- **Staff Training:** All staff receive training in identifying safeguarding concerns, including changes in behaviour that could indicate self-harm and how to respond effectively.
- **Safe Environment:** Ensure the school environment is safe and supportive, where students feel comfortable expressing their feelings and concerns.

6. Identifying Self-Harm

All staff should be alert to potential warning signs indicating that a young person is experiencing distress that may lead to thoughts of self-injury or suicide including:

- Unexplained injuries or marks on the body.
- Wearing long sleeves or covering up inappropriately, especially in hot weather.
- Withdrawal from social activities or friends.
- Sudden changes in behaviour, mood, or academic performance.
- Expressing feelings of hopelessness, depression, or anxiety.
- Suicidal ideation (talking or joking about suicide)
- Abusing/misusing drugs or alcohol

If you have any concerns, please seek the advice of the DSL or DDSs and follow Birch Wood's usual reporting procedures.

7. Responding to an Incident of Self-Harm

If a student is suspected of engaging in self-harm, the following steps should be followed:

1. Immediate Action:

- Ensure the student's safety and provide immediate first aid if necessary (e.g., cleaning and dressing wounds)
- **IF THE INJURY IS SEVERE OR REQUIRES MEDICAL ATTENTION, CONTACT THE HEALTH & WELLBEING TEAM AND/OR EMERGENCY SERVICES IMMEDIATELY.**
- Ensure that the environment is safe, especially if a young person has engaged in self-harm in school
- Ensure that conversations and treatment occur away from other young people

2. Emotional Support:

- It is important to remain calm and non-judgmental, ensure that you provide care and explain that you want to make sure the young person is ok.
- Provide an environment where the student can express their feelings.
- It is important to maintain confidentiality for the young person in line with usual safeguarding practice. Remember, we cannot keep secrets for young people, we have a duty of care, which entails reporting concerns appropriately.
- Offer emotional support by listening and reassuring the student that they are not alone.
- Encourage the student to speak to a trusted adult and offer further support if needed.

- Make a request for involvement for the therapeutic team if appropriate

3. Reporting:

- Report the incident to the designated safeguarding lead (DSL) immediately and record all details.
- Parents or guardians should be informed in a sensitive and timely manner, with the involvement of relevant professionals if appropriate.

8. Supporting Students at Risk

- **Individualized Plans:** ensure individualized support for students identified as being at risk of self-harm, which may include regular check-ins, emotional support, or coping skills training. Ask for help to support a young person who is engaging in self-harm if you feel that you need it. If staff become aware that a young person is engaging in self-harm, a protocol should be written and agreed with parents/carers (see attached)
- **Parental Involvement:** Encourage regular communication with parents/guardians to ensure consistent support both at school and at home.
- **Mental Health Support:** Ensure that students have access to counselling or therapy as needed, either through the school's own resources or external agencies. (Referrals to CAMHS are typically submitted by a young person's GP)
- **Staff support:** Staff teams can use the request for SLT debrief on StaffShare if they feel that they require support or advice following an incident. Those staff teams would then be seen that day by a member/members of SLT

9. Monitoring and Review

- **Monitoring:** The school will monitor students identified as at risk and ensure that appropriate interventions are in place. Regular reviews will be conducted to assess the effectiveness of support and to make adjustments as needed.
- **Policy Review:** This policy will be reviewed annually to ensure its effectiveness and relevance to the needs of students. Feedback from staff, parents, and external agencies will be considered in this process.

10. Confidentiality

Confidentiality is important in supporting students with self-harm. However, there may be situations where it is necessary to share information with others, such as parents, medical professionals, or child protection agencies. Any decision to share information will be made with the student's best interests in mind.

11. Conclusion

This policy reflects Birch Wood's commitment to supporting students who may be experiencing self-harm. By fostering a compassionate and supportive environment, we aim to provide the necessary resources and interventions to help students manage their emotional well-being and lead fulfilling lives.

Additional support and signposts

- *Harmless <https://harmless.org.uk/>
- Kooth <https://www.kooth.com/> (please note that there is currently no local offer)
- Mind <https://www.mind.org.uk/information-support/types-of-mental-health-problems/self-harm/treatment-and-support-for-self-harm/>
- Shout <https://giveusashout.org/get-help/issues/help-self-harm/>
- Papyrus <https://www.papyrus-uk.org/self-harm/>
- Young Minds <https://www.youngminds.org.uk/>
- Calm Harm <https://calmharm.stem4.org.uk/>
- Samaritans <https://www.samaritans.org/about-samaritans/research-policy/self-harm/>

Linked policies

- Search & Confiscate Policy
- Positive Behaviour for Learning
- Safeguarding & Child Protection



Self-Harm Disclosure flow chart

In the event "*student A*" discloses self-harm or self-harms in school please action the following

Ensure the student's safety and provide immediate first aid if necessary (e.g., cleaning and dressing wounds)

IF THE INJURY IS SEVERE OR REQUIRES MEDICAL ATTENTION, CONTACT THE HEALTH & WELLBEING TEAM AND/OR EMERGENCY SERVICES IMMEDIATELY.



If self-harm has occurred in school, ensure that the environment is safe.



In the event of a student disclosing self-harm a member of staff (ideally health and wellbeing team) must see the wound to be able to assess and treat. If the student refuses to show the wound then a phone call to parents/carers must be made recommending appropriate actions to take e.g. walk in centre



Record incident on CPOMs



DSL to contact parents/carers



DSL to contact any allocated social workers