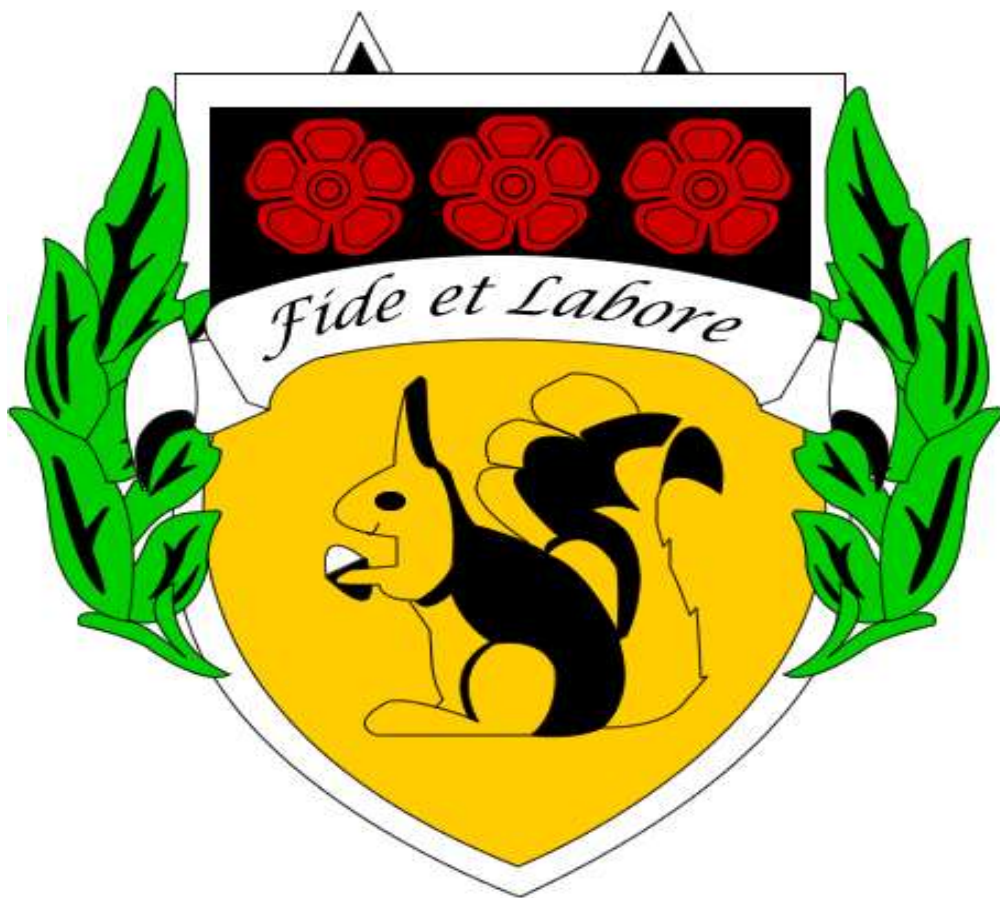


Approved : December 2019

Reviewed : Biannual

Bacup and Rawtenstall Grammar School



Self Harm Policy

Bacup & Rawtenstall Grammar School Policy on Self-Harm

This policy is based on guidance from the Pan-Lancashire Policy and Procedures for Safeguarding Children Handbook concerning both self-harm and confidentiality. The quotations used are taken from this document. It also relates to guidance provided in:

- The Ethical Framework for Good Practice in Counselling and Psychotherapy (BACP 2013)
- The Code: Standards of Conduct, Performance and Ethics for Nurses and Midwives (NMC 2008)
- 0-18: Guidance for all Doctors (GMC 2007)

The policy should be read in conjunction with our policy in Confidentiality and Information Sharing.

Introduction

A recent World Health Organisation study reported that as many as one in five English 15 year olds have self-harmed. Other current 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 also in supporting students, peers and parents of students currently engaging in self-harm. This document describes BRGS' approach to self-harm. This policy is intended as guidance for all staff including non-teaching staff and governors and information to students and parent/carers to ensure a consistent, caring and appropriate response.

Aims

- To increase understanding and awareness of self-harm
- To alert staff/parents 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

Definition of Self-Harm

Lancashire's Youth and Community Service conducted some research with young people in 2002 and produced a paper which offers a helpful baseline (Coupe et al, 2002):

"Self-harm might be described as the term used to describe the coping strategy that some people use to deal with stresses in their life:

- It involves a person hurting themselves physically;
- Self-harm often takes the form of a person cutting, burning or banging themselves;
- According to the young people who participated, self-harm is often about "surviving", "coping", "taking control", "release of pressure", "distraction from other stuff - places/people", "complex emotions".

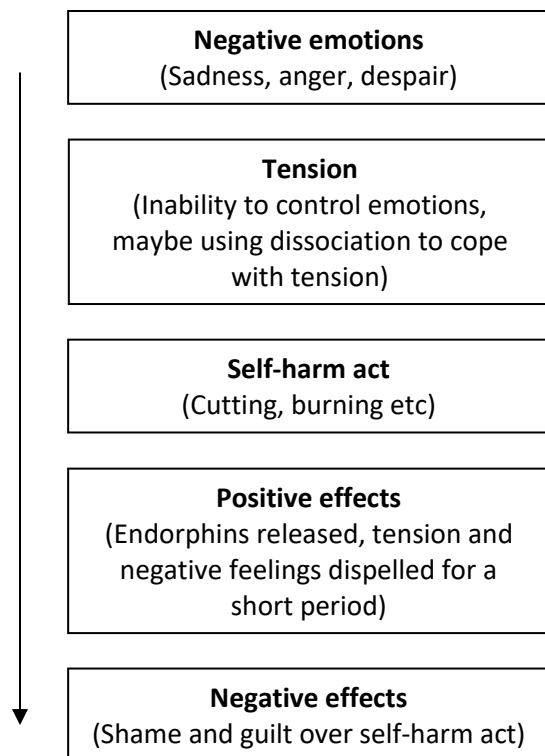
Self-harm is any behaviour where the intent is to deliberately cause harm to one's own body for example:

- 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
- Restrictive or binge eating
- Problematic substance misuse
- Risk taking behaviour – consuming excessive alcohol, taking away and driving cars, "playing chicken", irresponsible sexual behaviour

Why do some young people self-harm?

Some young people who self-harm may say that they want to die and a proportion of them may genuinely want to. Nevertheless, self-harm and suicide differ in terms of the intent behind the behaviour - self-harm is motivated by the desire to endure and survive. Understandably, many people assume that when a person injures themselves they are making a suicide attempt. But "self injury is not the same thing as a suicide attempt, in fact it is usually something very different: a desperate attempt to cope and to stay alive in the face of great emotional pain" (Arnold and Magill, 1996).

When a person inflicts pain upon himself or herself the body responds by producing endorphins, a natural pain reliever that gives temporary relief or a feeling of peace. The addictive nature of this feeling can make self-harm difficult to stop. Young people who self-harm still feel pain, but some say the physical pain is easier to stand than the emotional/mental pain that led to the self-harm initially.



Research indicates that a number of factors may motivate young people to self-harm and the list below is not exhaustive:

- **To express emotional distress:** *"you're showing other people how much you're hurting inside"; (Bywaters and Rolfe 2002)*
- **Release and relief from pressure:** *"it's like a release. It feels better after I've taken tablets"; (Spandler 1996)*
- **Letting bad feelings 'out':** *"getting all the anger and the hurt out, and the pain"; (Bywaters and Rolfe 2002)*
- **Distraction from emotional pain:** *"Taking the pain away from what's in your head and transferring it onto your body"; (Bywaters and Rolfe 2002)*
- **To gain control over seemingly out-of-control situations and feelings:** *"You've got to have control over something"; (Spandler 1996)*
- **To induce a pleasurable state:** *"my whole body goes kind of calm"; (Bywaters and Rolfe 2002)*
- **To feel special, to express individuality:** *"I took a certain pride in being able to take pain. It was like I was good at something"; (Spandler 1996)*
- **To physically express emotional pain:** *"it's my way of turning emotion and pain, and things like that into something physical, which is a lot easier to handle in the long-run". (Bywaters and Rolfe 2002)*

According to "**Youth and self-harm**" (Samaritans 2002), the most common reasons given for self-harm by school-age young people were 'to find relief from a terrible state of mind'. Contrary to popular belief, few were 'trying to frighten someone' or 'get attention'.

Risk Factors

A number of factors may trigger the self-harm incident:

- Family relationship difficulties (the most common trigger for younger adolescents)
- Difficulties with peer relationships e.g. break up of relationship (the most common trigger for older adolescents)
- Bullying
- Significant trauma, e.g. bereavement, abuse
- Self-harm behaviour in other students (contagion effect)
- Self-harm portrayed or reported in the media
- Difficult times of the year (e.g. anniversaries)
- Trouble in school or with the police
- Feeling under pressure from families, school and peers to conform/achieve
- Exam pressure
- Times of change (e.g. parental separation/divorce)

The Pan-Lancashire Policy and Procedures for Safeguarding Children Handbook extends this list to also include some individual, family and social factors.

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. These warning signs should always be taken seriously and staff observing any of these warning signs should inform school's safeguarding leads via the CPOMS system indicating a safeguarding concern (handwritten communication may also be used; e-mail should not). The safeguarding leads at BRGS are Mr. Reeves, Mr. Morriss and Mrs. Baines.

Some possible warning signs include:

- Physical signs of harm that are repeated or appear non-accidental
- 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
- Expressing feelings of failure, uselessness or loss of hope
- Changes in clothing e.g. long sleeves in warm weather
- Secretive behaviour
- Skipping PE lessons
- Lateness to or absence from school

Staff Roles

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 and 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 where there are issues related to self-harm. If you consider a student is at risk of harming themselves then confidentiality cannot be kept. It is important not to make promises of confidentiality that cannot be kept even if a student puts pressure on you to do so.

Any member of staff who is aware of a student engaging in or suspected to be at risk of engaging in self-harm should inform the school's safeguarding leads via the CPOMS system indicating a safeguarding concern (handwritten communication may also be used; e-mail should not). The safeguarding leads at BRGS are Mr. Reeves, Mr. Morriss and Mrs. Baines.

Following the report, the safeguarding leads will assess the situation, which will involve a supportive and sensitive interview with the student who is, or is considering, self-harming. The following actions may take place, based on the assessment:

- clean and dress wounds (Mrs. Baines is a qualified nurse)
- offer support and counselling within school
- provide links to external counselling services
- encourage student to share their self-harm/potential self-harm with their parents/carers
- offer to liaise/mediate with parents/carers in order to share the situation
- keep accurate records to continue to monitor the student
- seek guidance from Lancashire's Safeguarding Advisor

In line with our Confidentiality and Information Sharing Policy we will not break the confidentiality of the student's disclosure if he/she does not give us permission to share unless we determine that the student is not "Fraser Competent". We will, however, act without the student's consent (but with their knowledge):

- When there is evidence that the student is suffering or is at risk of suffering Significant Harm
- Where there is reasonable cause to believe that the student may be suffering or at risk of Significant Harm
- To prevent Significant Harm arising to others, including through the prevention, detection and prosecution of serious crime, i.e. any crime which causes or is likely to cause Significant Harm to a student or serious harm to an adult.

Where it is necessary for a student to be transported to hospital or require the urgent intervention of mental health professionals we will consider this to be a situation of potential Significant Harm and will contact parents/carers with the knowledge of, but possibly without the consent of, the student.

Where there has been a concern of Significant Harm school will liaise with parents/carers, health professionals and the student to ensure a safety monitoring plan is devised.

Responding to self-harm "fads"

Schools are increasingly reporting low level self-harm "fads". This can include the following:

- Superficial cutting
- Superficial burning
- Scratching
- Aerosol burns

While this form of self-harm is often behavioural rather than a coping mechanism for individuals, we will still treat each case seriously. Within school, our policy is that injuries must always be covered up.

For Students

- Ensure all wounds are cared for properly and dressed appropriately
- Do not display fresh or open wounds
- When talking to teachers or friends about your self-harm, focus on the emotional reasons behind your distress and not on the self-harm itself

- Avoid talking graphically about your injuries to other pupils or describing the methods you use
- Never encourage anyone to try self-harm themselves
- When under emotional distress or feeling the urge to self-harm at school, talk to a teacher or staff member as soon as possible
- Discuss any additional support you feel you may need while you are going through emotional distress
- Be aware that the teachers and designated self-harm staff are there to help you. The more you can talk to them the better able they will be to give you the support and help you need
- Endeavour to seek fun and laughter every day
- If you are worried that a friend may be self-harming then do talk to a teacher for support and guidance
- If you are concerned that a friend may be suicidal, or has mentioned suicide, then alert a teacher straight away

For parents

- Understand and endorse our self-harm policy
- Educate yourself regarding self-harm and discuss the subject with your child
- Create a home environment where you child has opportunities to share with you
- If you discover your child is self-harming, work closely with the school and take an active role in deciding the best course of action for your child
- Keep the school informed of any incidents outside of school that you feel they should know about
- Take care of yourself and seek any emotional support you may need in dealing with your child's self harm

For reference

Pan-Lancashire Policy and Procedures for Safeguarding Children Handbook:

<http://panlancashirescb.proceduresonline.com/chapters/contents.html>

LifeSIGNS (Self-Injury Guidance & Network Support) is an online, user-led voluntary organisation founded in 2002 to create understanding about self-injury and provide information and support to people of all ages affected by self-injury.

Life SIGNS fact sheet for those who self-injure: <http://www.lifesigns.org.uk/files/factsheet-people-who-si-v2.pdf>

LifeSIGNS fact sheet for parents: <http://www.lifesigns.org.uk/files/factsheet-parents-v4.pdf>

LifeSIGNS fact sheet for friends: <http://www.lifesigns.org.uk/files/fact-sheet-friends-v4.pdf>

LifeSIGNS fact sheet for males: <http://www.lifesigns.org.uk/files/factsheet-males-v3.pdf>

Young Minds are committed to supporting the emotional well-being of all students. Their website has lots of resources and advice on a range of mental health issues: www.youngminds.org.uk

Samaritans – a 24 hour helpline with trained advisors.

Helpline: 08457 90 90 90

E-mail: jo@samaritans.org

Website: www.samaritans.org