



Wychwood School  
OXFORD

## Self-Harm Policy Author: AKJ, BS

**Date of last review: June 2022**

**Date of next review: June 2023**

### Aim

The aim of this policy is to ensure that staff are able to work with students to reduce the risk of self-harming behaviour and to react appropriately when self-harm is suspected.

This policy should be viewed in conjunction with the Safeguarding Policy, the Anti-Bullying Policy, Sex and Relationships Education Policy, Mental Health and Wellbeing Policy and Searching Policy.

Keeping Children Safe in Education, DfE, September 2019  
Working together to safeguard children, DfE, September 2018  
Mental health and behaviour in school, DfE, November 2018

Oxfordshire Self Harm guidelines can be found at:

<https://www.oxfordhealth.nhs.uk/wp-content/uploads/2018/03/self-harm-guidelines-for-school-staff.pdf>

OSCB Guidance on self harm and suicide

<https://www.oscb.org.uk/safeguarding-themes/mental-health/suicide-self-harm/>  
<https://www.oscb.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2019/07/SelfHarmInfographic.pdf>

Oxfordshire Schools Guidance

<http://schools.oxfordshire.gov.uk/cms/sites/schools/files/folders/folders/documents/behavioursupportservice/selfHarm-Gu.pdf>

### Introduction

Self-harm is an increasing affliction for young people. Self-harm is when children hurt themselves as a way of dealing with very difficult feelings, old memories, or overwhelming situations and experiences. The ways they can hurt themselves can be physical, such as cutting themselves. They can also be less obvious, such as putting themselves in risky situations, or not looking after their physical or emotional needs.

Ways of self-harming can include:

- cutting
- poisoning
- over-eating or under-eating
- burning skin
- inserting objects into the body

- hitting themselves or walls
- overdosing
- exercising excessively
- scratching and hair pulling.

After self-harming, children might feel better and more able to cope for a while. However, self-harm can bring up very difficult feelings and could make them feel worse.

If children self-harm, they may feel embarrassed or ashamed about it. They might be worried that other people will judge them or pressurise them to stop. This may mean that children keep self-harming a secret. This is a very common reaction, although not everyone does this. Disclosure of self-harm can bring very deeply rooted feelings of shame, guilt and inadequacy to the surface leading to a reduced ability to cope.

### **Why do people harm themselves?**

There are no fixed rules about why people self-harm. For some people, it can be linked to specific experiences, and be a way of dealing with something that is happening now, or that happened in the past. For others, it is less clear.

Any difficult experience can cause someone to self-harm. Common causes include:

- pressures at school or work
- bullying
- money worries
- sexual, physical or emotional abuse
- bereavement
- confusion about sexuality or gender
- breakdown of relationships
- an illness or health problem
- difficult feelings, such as depression, anxiety, anger or numbness, experienced as part of a mental health problem
- poor self-esteem.

Self-harm is sometimes also associated with 'dares' and 'copycat behaviour'.

Some people have also described self-harm as a way to:

- express something that is hard to put into words
- make experiences, thoughts or feelings that feel invisible into something visible
- change emotional pain into physical pain
- reduce overwhelming emotional feelings or thoughts
- have a sense of being in control
- escape traumatic memories
- stop feeling numb, disconnected or dissociated (see dissociative disorders)
- create a reason to physically care for themselves
- express suicidal feelings and thoughts without taking their own life
- communicate to other people that they are experiencing severe distress.

### **Warning signs**

- visible signs of injury
- change in dress that may be intended to disguise injuries (e.g. an unexpected / sudden change to wearing long sleeved tops)
- change in eating/ sleeping habits
- change in mood

- becoming withdrawn or isolated
- deterioration in academic performance

## **Self-Harming at Wychwood**

### **Prevention:**

The risk of self-harm can be reduced by the creation of a supportive environment where individuals are valued, their self-esteem is maintained or raised and healthy peer relationships are fostered. The PSHE program at Wychwood is very important in this regard as is the general ethos of the school.

In a girls' school, self-harming can spread among the pupils because when girls discuss or see self-harm, it can be perceived as attractive or "cool" or worth trying. This state of affairs needs to be avoided by support for individuals and vigorous, accurate and robust PSHE.

### **Action in case of suspected self-harm**

Anyone concerned about a student self-harming should liaise with a member of the SPT/designated person for safeguarding. If physical harm needs medical attention this will be arranged as appropriate (first aid – dressings etc., GP, A&E). Children who self-harm will be supported within school as far as is possible without them having an adverse effect on other girls. Parents will be contacted to discuss concerns unless there are valid reasons why they should not be contacted.

Children who self-harm will be required to see the school Counsellor or seek counselling elsewhere.

If safeguarding issues are raised the safeguarding policy must be followed. OSCB will be consulted if this is judged to be a child protection issue rather than a mental health issue.

CAMHS will be consulted if the Head, SPT or the school's Counsellor advises accordingly.

In general parents should be informed so that they can work in partnership with the school to support the young person but each individual case needs to be considered carefully and sympathetically to support the wellbeing of the young person. Parents will be informed if the child is judged not to be Gillick competent. It is worth noting that most girls who self-harm are exhibiting very dubious judgement and are therefore likely not to be Gillick competent in this situation. If the child is vehemently opposed to the parents being informed, the Head or member of SPT will consult with the Counsellor, OSCB or CAMHS, take advice and act accordingly. Although confidentiality is often a key concern for young people, this cannot be kept if the young person is considered to be at severe risk of harming themselves.

Where a self-harming child is adversely affecting another girl or other girls, she may be required to go home temporarily. Children with easily visible self-harm scars will be required to cover them up by use of long sleeves, opaque tights or trousers or other garments to avoid other children seeing them and wishing to emulate the self-harmer.

Where this adverse effect is unacceptable in terms of potential or actual damage, whether mental, emotional or physical, to other girls, then the self-harming child may be required to leave Wychwood permanently.

The peer group of a self-harming girl may need the opportunity to talk about their experience.

All non-urgent referrals to CAMHS can be done online using this link:

<https://secureforms.oxfordhealth.nhs.uk/camhs/>

Out of hours service - 01865 20901000 This service offers advice and consultation by professionals and emergency assessment as required, for students under the age of 18.

Other Support organisations:

Young Minds: 0808 802 5544 [www.youngminds.org.uk](http://www.youngminds.org.uk) with a 24/7 Crisis Messenger for young people: text YM to 85258 answered by trained volunteers

Samaritans Helpline: 116 123 <https://www.samaritans.org/>

Samaritans Coronavirus, young people and self harm

<https://www.samaritans.org/about-samaritans/research-policy/understanding-our-callers-during-covid-19-pandemic/coronavirus-young-people-and-self-harm/>

Child Line: 0800 1111 [www.childline.org.uk](http://www.childline.org.uk)

National Self-Harm network: 0800 622 6000 [www.nshn.co.uk](http://www.nshn.co.uk)