

John Port Spencer Academy



SELF-HARM POLICY

Safeguarding Team

Lead Designated Safeguarding Lead: Mr L Shepherd

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Designated Lead for Prevent: Mr N Collier

Designated Teacher for Looked After Children: Mrs K Thomas

Designated Lead for Sixth Form: Mrs G Barnett

Safeguarding Officer: Miss Southall

Acting Safeguarding Officer: Mrs M Pemberton

Designated Link Governor for Safeguarding: Emma Twigg

Other documents/policies referred to are:

John Port Spencer Academy's Child Protection and Safeguarding policy

John Port Spencer Academy's First Aid policy

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Self-Harm Policy

As part of our continued remit for safeguarding and promoting the welfare of children and young people, John Port Spencer Academy has developed this policy to ensure that incidents of self-harm are handled appropriately and in accordance with both safeguarding and confidentiality procedures. The Academy will follow the protocols and "Care Pathway" developed by the Derbyshire Safeguarding Children's Board and Derby Hospitals NHS Foundation Trust.

Introduction

Recent 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. Academy staff can play an important role in preventing self-harm and in supporting students, peers and parents of students, engaging in self-harm.

Scope

This document describes John Port's approach to self-harm. This policy is intended as guidance for all staff including non-teaching staff and governors.

Aims

- 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
- To outline the ways in which we may provide support to students who self-harm, their peers and their parents/carers

Definition of Self-Harm

Unwanted emotions such as anger and frustration are often behind self-harm, which provides an unhealthy, but often cathartic, outlet for built-up feelings. Self-harm is any behaviour where the intent is to deliberately cause harm to one's own body, without causing death, 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

It is important to remember that for many self-harmers the activity is a very private one, it is a form of release that doesn't attract the attention of others. It can be performed in private, dealt with in private and then covered up with clothing.

Potential Risk Factors

The following risk factors, particularly in combination, may make a child or young person particularly vulnerable to self-harm:

Individual Factors:

- Depression / anxiety
- Poor communication skills
- Low self-esteem or self-worth
- Poor problem-solving skills
- Hopelessness
- Impulsivity
- Drug or alcohol abuse
- Being a close friend of someone who self-harms
- Eating disorders

Family Factors

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

Social Factors

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

Warning Signs

Academy staff may become aware of warning signs that indicate a student is experiencing difficulties that may lead to thoughts of self-harm. These warning signs should **always** be taken seriously and staff members observing any of these warning signs should share their concerns with Heads of Year and the Safeguarding team.

Possible warning signs include:

- Changes in eating / sleeping habits
- 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
- Evidence of abusing drugs or alcohol
- Expressing feelings of failure, uselessness or loss of hope
- Adopting a marked change of image e.g. becoming a “goth” or an “emo”; or acting out of character in challenging dress codes; having body piercings etc.

Staff Roles in working with students who self-harm

Students may choose to confide in a member of Academy staff if they are concerned about their own welfare, or that of a peer. Academy 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 to maintain a supportive and open attitude. A student who has chosen to discuss their concerns with a member of Academy staff is showing a considerable amount of courage and trust, and should be reassured that they will be helped and supported.

However, students must be made aware that it may not be possible for staff to offer complete confidentiality. If you consider a student is at serious risk of harming themselves, it is important **not** to make promises of confidentiality that you cannot keep, even if a student puts pressure on you to do so.

Any member of staff who has evidence that a student is engaging in, or is suspected of engaging in, self-harm should consult with the Head of Year and the Safeguarding team.

- **Where the self-harm causes serious injury or is in the form of an overdose the emergency services must be called and parents must be informed.**
- **In the case of an acutely distressed student, the immediate safety of the student is paramount and an adult should remain with the student at all times**
- **If a student has self-harmed in the Academy, first aid should be called for immediate help**

Otherwise:

- The early involvement of parents is desirable. Students often feel most supported by the Academy when they are helped to tell the parents with a member of the Academy staff present. Where a student is insistent that they would prefer to inform their parents themselves a specific, short deadline must be set by which the Academy will contact the parents.
- If the self-harm relates to an issue at home which would make it inappropriate to contact parents advice should be sought from Social Care in the first instance.
- Referrals or request support may be made to Social Care, MAT, and CAMHS as appropriate.

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- An appointment may be made with the Academy's 'Safespeak' counsellor
- It may be necessary to immediately remove the student from lessons if their remaining in class is likely to cause further distress to themselves or their peers
- A risk management protocol may need to be prepared and distributed specifically for that student.

Record Keeping

Any meetings with a student, their parents or their peers regarding self-harm should be recorded in writing including:

- Dates and times
- An action plan
- Concerns raised
- Details of anyone else with whom information has been shared

This information should be forwarded to the Safeguarding office, who will store this in the student's safeguarding file, separate from their education records. An entry in the main file should indicate that further information is held in the student's safeguarding file.

Supporting Friends and Peers

It is important to encourage students to let you know if one of their peer group is in trouble, upset or showing signs of self-harming. Friends can worry about betraying confidences so they need to know that self-harm can be very dangerous, and that by seeking help and advice for a friend they are taking responsible action & being a good friend. They should also be aware that their friend will be treated in a caring and supportive manner.

The friend(s) of a young person who self-harms may value the opportunity to talk to a member of staff either individually or in a small group. Any member of staff wishing for further advice on this should consult one of the designated staff members for safeguarding.

When a young person is self-harming it is important to be vigilant in case children and young people in close contact with the individual are also self-harming. Occasionally the Academy may discover that a number of students in the same peer group are harming themselves.