

# John Port Spencer Academy



## SELF-HARM POLICY

Safeguarding Team

Please see the safeguarding page on our website for the latest information about our Safeguarding Staff Team

This policy compliments the John Port Spencer Academy Child Protection and Safeguarding policy

This policy refers to the John Port Spencer Academy First Aid policy

### **Included in this policy**

INTRODUCTION, AIMS AND DEFINITION OF SELF-HARM  
POTENTIAL RISK FACTORS AND WARNING SIGNS  
STAFF ROLES IN WORKING WITH STUDENTS WHO SELF-HARM  
SUPPORTING FRIENDS AND PEERS

APPENDIX – Search and Confiscation Procedure

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## **INTRODUCTION, AIMS AND DEFINITION OF SELF-HARM**

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 Derby and Derbyshire Safeguarding Children Partnership and Derby Hospitals NHS Foundation Trust.

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.

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. Examples include, but are not limited to:

- 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 AND WARNING SIGNS**

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

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.

*Students who cause concern can be searched in line with the Search and Confiscation Procedure (See APPENDIX) to ensure that they are not in possession of items or substances that may cause them harm.*

**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.

**Note: 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 assistance must be requested using the First Aid Procedures outlined in the First Aid Policy.**

**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.**

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, the Early Help Team (EHT) and CAMHS as appropriate.

- 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.

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 and 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.

## APPENDIX

### Search and Confiscation Procedure

In this procedure, the term “member of academy staff” means any teacher who works at the academy, and any other person who with the authority of the Principal has lawful control or charge of students for whom education is being provided at the academy.

#### Why conduct a search and what can be searched for?

The Principal and any member of staff authorised by the Principal may conduct a search where it is suspected that a student is in the possession of the following:

- Knives or weapons, alcohol, illegal drugs and stolen items; and/or
- Tobacco and cigarette papers, vape, fireworks and pornographic images; and/or
- Any article that the member of staff reasonably suspects has been, or is likely to be, used to commit an offence, or to cause personal injury to, or damage to property; and/or
- Any item banned by the academy rules that has been identified in the rules as an item which may be searched for
- Academy staff can view CCTV footage in order to decide as to whether to conduct a search for an item. In doing so academy staff must ensure they act in accordance with current Data Protection legislation.

#### Who Can Search?

- Under normal circumstances and especially in the case of a search without the student’s consent the search should be conducted by the Principal or staff authorised by the Principal so to do.
- The DfE guidance states that any member of staff can search a student who has given their consent. Good practice at John Port Spencer Academy is that the Principal or Designated Safeguarding Lead should be consulted prior to such a search taking place unless there is an urgent and immediate need for that search.
- The member of staff must be the same gender as the student being searched; and there must be a witness (also a staff member) and, if possible, they should be the same gender as the student being searched.
- There is a limited exception to this rule. The member of staff can carry out a search of a student of the opposite gender and without a witness present, but only where it is reasonably believed that there is a risk that serious harm will be caused to a person if the search is not conducted immediately and where it is not reasonably practicable to summon another member of staff.

#### Where a search can be conducted

Searches without consent can only be carried out on the academy premises or, if elsewhere, where the member of staff has lawful control or charge of the student, for example on academy trips or in training settings. Searches should be carried out in a private and discreet place e.g. a senior leader’s office to afford privacy and confidentiality to the student as well as to the process.

#### What are the limits of a search?

The person conducting the search may not require the student to remove any clothing other than outer clothing. Outer clothing means clothing that is not worn next to the skin or immediately over a garment that is being worn as underwear. Outer clothing includes (but is not limited to) blazers; hats; shoes; boots; gloves and scarves.

‘Possessions’ means any goods over which the student has or appears to have control – this includes desks, lockers and bags. A student’s possessions can only be searched in the presence of the student and another member of staff, except where there is a risk that serious harm will be caused to a person if the search is not conducted immediately and where it is not reasonably practicable to summon another member of staff. **Also note:** *The power to search without consent enables a personal search, involving removal of outer clothing and searching of pockets; but not an intimate search going further than that, which only a person with more extensive powers (e.g. a police officer) can do.*

#### Lockers and Desks

Under common law powers, school and academies are able to search lockers and desks for any item provided the student agrees to this. Schools and academies can also make it a condition of having a locker or desk that the student consents to have these searched for any item whether or not the student is present. If a student does not consent to a search (or withdraws consent having signed a consent form) then it is possible to conduct a search without consent but only for the “prohibited items” listed above.

### **Searching a student with their consent**

There is no DfE recommendation that two persons of the same gender should be present where a student readily agrees to a search or a request to demonstrate that she/he is not in possession of something that should not be in the academy. However, academy recommendations are that there should be two persons of the same gender unless the exceptional circumstances referred to previously apply. All of the restrictions regarding the limits and extent of a search still apply.

### **Searching a student without their consent**

Where possible students should be encouraged to co-operate with a request to search by an invitation to show that she/he is not in possession of something that they should not have. The Principal or member of staff authorised by the Principal can search a student without consent where there are reasonable grounds for suspecting that a student is in possession of a prohibited item.

### **The Use of Force**

See the academy policy on Physical Restraint. The governors advise against the use of anything other than the use of minimum force and only in exceptional circumstances. The DfE advise that members of staff can use such force as is reasonable given the circumstances when conducting a search for knives or weapons, alcohol, illegal drugs, stolen items, tobacco and cigarette papers, fireworks, pornographic images or articles that have been or could be used to commit an offence or cause harm. Such force cannot be used to search for items not described above that are banned under the academy rules.

### **Confiscation**

- Academy staff can seize any prohibited item found because of a search. They can also seize any item, however found, which they consider harmful or detrimental to academy discipline.
- The school's general power to discipline, as set out in Section 91 of the Education and Inspections Act 2006, enables a member of staff to confiscate, retain or dispose of a student's property as a disciplinary penalty, where reasonable to do so.
- The member of staff may use their discretion to confiscate, retain and/or destroy any item found as a result of a 'with consent' search so long as it is reasonable in the circumstances. Where any article is thought to be a weapon, it must be passed to the police.
- Staff have a defence to any complaint or other action brought against them. The law protects members of staff from liability in any proceedings brought against them for any loss of, or damage to, any item they have confiscated, provided they acted lawfully.

### **Police Requests to Search**

- The academy always meets its legal obligations to co-operate with the police with any criminal investigation. Should the police request that they search a student or students in the academy this request, on official police headed notepaper or from the official police "PNN" email address and preferably from an officer of the rank of Inspector or above, must be forwarded to the Principal for consideration.
- Before agreeing to such a request, the Principal will base the decision on the necessity of the search taking place in the academy rather than away from the academy. The Principal will discuss the issue with the Chair of Governors unless a legitimate request from the police limits the number of persons who should know of the search in advance.
- The academy will provide an appropriate adult (usually a member of the Senior Leadership Team or the Safeguarding Team) of the same gender as the student to be present during the search to assure that the wellbeing of that student is maintained.

### **Telling parents and dealing with complaints**

Schools and academies are not required to inform parents before a search takes place or to seek their consent to search their child. Although it is not a requirement to inform parents, the academy regards it as a common courtesy to make parents aware that a search has taken place.

There is no legal requirement to make or keep a record of a search however, the academy recommends that such a record should be kept in a student's file and logged by the Safeguarding Team. Schools and Academies should inform the individual student's parents or guardians where alcohol, illegal drugs or potentially harmful substances are found, though there is no legal requirement to do so. Complaints about screening or searching should be dealt with through the normal academy complaints procedure.