

## **Self-Injury Policy**

### **1. Rationale**

**The Self Injury Policy is committed to and guided by the principles of:**

The ethos of the school should promote self-esteem in young people. Young people who self-injure should be treated with care, respect and privacy. This is linked to the strategy of Every Child Matters. All children, whatever their background or circumstances, should have the support they need to:

- Be healthy
- Stay safe
- Enjoy and achieve
- Make a positive contribution
- Achieve economic well being

### **2. The aims of this Self Injury Policy are to:**

Increase knowledge, skills and competence of staff to recognise and respond appropriately when working with a pupil who self-injures, and/or knows of someone who self-injures. To help pupils develop efficient coping strategies in times of crisis.

### **3. Context**

The National Inquiry Into Self-Harm Amongst Young People, Truth Hurts (2004) found that at least 1 in 15 young people had self-injured as a response to the pressures of growing up in a complex and challenging world. The report stated that 'levels of self-harm are one indicator of the mental health and mental well-being of young people in our society in general'. Young Minds, the Mental Health Charity, states that there is no 'typical' person who self-injures; it can affect anyone. There are many misconceptions about self-injury and the young people who do it. Some believe that it is attention-seeking behaviour, and others see it as a type of fashion statement. Self-injury is in fact a physical way of coping with stress and emotional distress. Usually the young person is struggling with another problem; s/he may be depressed or being bullied, or perhaps there is a lot of pressure at school or home.

Self-injury is a very secretive problem, and a young person can self-injure for years before anyone notices or s/he finds the courage to tell someone. More often than not there is an underlying emotional problem. Self-injury can be a coping mechanism that allows the young person to take control in a situation where s/he often has none. Whatever is happening in the outside world that cannot be controlled, s/he at least has control over what happens to her own body. Parents are often unaware that their child is self-injuring. Young people may also be at risk of self-injury and particularly suicide attempts due to the emergence of internet sites and chat rooms giving detailed information about methods of suicide and allowing those who may be contemplating suicide to communicate with each other.

### **4. Definition of self-injury**

Self-injury describes a wide range of things that people do to themselves in a deliberate and usually hidden way. In the vast majority of cases self-injury remains a secretive behaviour that can go on for a long time without being discovered. Self-injury can involve:

- Cutting, often to the arms using razor blades, broken glass, scissors or a pair of compasses (including scratching, picking, biting or scraping).
- Burning using cigarettes or caustic agents.
- Punching and bruising.
- Inserting or swallowing objects (sharp objects or harmful substances).
- Head banging (hitting themselves against objects).
- Hair pulling out (hair, eyelashes or eye brows).

- Restrictive or binge eating.
- Overdosing/possible suicide attempts
- Self-neglect.
- Alcohol abuse.
- Taking personal risks
- Sleep deprivation.
- Drug abuse.

## 5. Risk factors

The following risk factors, in combination, may make a young person particularly vulnerable to self-injury.

### a) Individual factors

- Depression / anxiety
- Poor communication skills
- Low self esteem
- Poor problem solving skills
- Hopelessness
- Impulsivity
- Drug or alcohol abuse
- Loss or bereavement
- Issues of gender or sexual orientation
- Time of year e.g. exam pressure, anniversaries, etc
- In response to a traumatic incident
- Bullying/peer pressure/texting/cyber-bullying

### b) Family factors

- Unreasonable expectations
- Neglect or physical, sexual or emotional abuse
- Poor parental relationships and arguments
- Depression, self-harm or suicide in the family
- Divorce / family breakdown
- Moving home (between parents)
- Alcohol / drug abuse in family

### c) Social factors

- Difficulty in making relationships / loneliness
- Being bullied, rejected or not understood by peers
- Anti-social behaviour, anger, hostility

## 6. Warning signs

School staff may become aware of warning signs which indicate a pupil is experiencing difficulties that may lead to thoughts of self-injury. Possible warning signs include:

- Changes in eating / sleeping habits (e.g. pupil 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.
- Abusing drugs or alcohol.
- Expressing feelings of failure, uselessness or loss of hope.
- Changes in clothing e.g. unwilling to remove jumper in PE.
- Scarring / cuts on arms / hands.
- Hair loss on head or around the eyes.
- Constant day dreaming and withdrawal in lessons.

## 7. Strategies

Any member of staff who is aware of a pupil engaging in or suspected to be at risk of engaging in self injury should refer to the Deputy Headteacher, or Pastoral Support. PE and Drama teachers should be especially alert to any key indicators. Pupils may choose to confide in a member of staff if they are concerned about their own welfare or that of a peer. In order to offer the best possible help to pupils it is important to try to maintain a supportive and open attitude – a pupil who has chosen to discuss concerns with a member of school staff is showing a considerable amount of courage and trust. Pupils need to be made aware that it is **not possible to offer confidentiality**. (See policy on Confidentiality.) It is important not to make promises of confidentiality that cannot be kept even if a pupil puts pressure on you to do so. In the case of an acutely distressed pupil, the immediate safety of pupils is paramount and an adult should remain with them at all times.

If a pupil has self-injured in school the Pastoral Support, or another first aider should assess the injury.

On receipt of this referral, the Deputy Headteacher will implement the following as appropriate:

- a) Inform pupil that parents/carers will be contacted and when
- b) Contact parents / carers as soon as possible and arrange a meeting in school if necessary
- c) Advise parents / carers to book an appointment with their GP to set seek further professional assistance
- d) Arrange professional assistance through any agencies who work with the school e.g. Early Help, school nurse, CHYPS/ CAMHS
- e) Arrange an appointment with the school counsellor or Pastoral Support
- f) Inform a member of the PE staff and excuse from lessons if necessary
- g) Inform other members of teaching staff that the pupil is experiencing severe emotional difficulties
- h) Set up support group for friends if necessary
- i) Inform the Designated Safeguarding Lead
- j) Report back to the member of staff who raised concerns

## 8. Guidelines for staff dealing with a pupil who has disclosed self-injury

It is important to remember the following when dealing with a pupil who has disclosed self-injury:

- a) Refer to the Deputy Headteacher and tell the pupil that this will be passed on
- b) Be yourself, listen and be non-judgemental
- c) Be patient with the pupil and think about what you will say
- d) Encourage the pupil to talk to family and friends
- e) Ensure the pupil knows where to access support in school
- f) Focus on positive relationships e.g. friends, family, school, sport, music
- g) Reassure pupils that they have done the right thing
- h) Make sure that the pupil knows when you will meet again
- i) Discuss how they can keep themselves safe until seen again
- j) Refer pupils to appropriate websites / resources for help and advice
- k) Do not jump to quick solutions
- l) Do not ignore or dismiss what the pupil is saying
- m) Do not see it as attention seeking
- n) Do not assume that it is used to manipulate the system or individuals
- o) Do not trust appearances
- p) Do not try to give answers to problems
- q) Do not promise confidentiality
- r) Written record of exactly what they said

Possible information to acquire:

- a) How long has the pupil has been self-injuring
- b) The nature of the self-injury
- c) The frequency of the self-injury

- d) Specific triggers of self-injury
- e) Who knows about the self-injury
- f) Whether s/he has any intent to self-injure in the near future
- g) What the current mood is

It is important that pupils know that they should report to a member of staff if they notice one of their peers self-injuring. Often the peer group may notice this first.

## **9. Training**

Staff are given the opportunity to participate in in-service training courses which will lead to a greater understanding of the signs and symptoms of self-injury; awareness of procedures for dealing with individual cases; the relationship between self-injury and child protection issues and advice on making use of the curriculum to build preventative approaches to self-injury. Self-injury will be addressed in PSHE lessons and assemblies. Assemblies will be led by either the pupils, Directors of Achievement or SLT. Information and support will be available for pupils and parents via pastoral support. Information will be available on display boards around school and in the pastoral support area. Parents can contact the Deputy Headteacher on [deputyhead@twggs.kent.sch.uk](mailto:deputyhead@twggs.kent.sch.uk) and Pastoral Support on [pastoralsupport@twggs.kent.sch.uk](mailto:pastoralsupport@twggs.kent.sch.uk) via email or telephone – 01892 520902

## **10. Links to other policies**

Confidentiality Policy; Child Protection/Safeguarding Policy; PSHE Policy; Online Safety Policy; Pastoral Policy

## **11. Monitoring and Review**

The Deputy Headteacher is responsible for working with pastoral support and Directors of Achievement in order to monitor and review this policy, and to share relevant information with staff.

The Deputy Headteacher will review this policy every 3 years. The review will take place in consultation with SLT and Pastoral Support at KS3/4 and Sixth Form, prior to discussion and approval by the Governing Body.