



## 1. 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. 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.

## 2. SCOPE

This document describes the school's approach to self-harm. This policy is intended as guidance for all staff including teachers, professional services staff and governors.

## 3. 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 provide support to students who self-harm and their peers and parents/carers

## 4. DEFINITION OF SELF-HARM

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

## 5. RISK FACTORS

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

Individual Factors:

- Depression / anxiety
- Poor communication skills
- Low self-esteem
- Poor problem-solving skills
- Hopelessness
- Impulsivity
- Drug or alcohol abuse





## 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

## 6. 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 or suicide. These warning signs should always be taken seriously and staff observing any of these warning signs should seek further advice from one of the pastoral staff or Gillian Clarke/Ashley Cornfoot.

### Possible warning signs include:

- 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. becoming a goth

## 7. STAFF ROLES IN WORKING WITH STUDENTS WHO SELF-HARM

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. If you consider a student is at serious 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 consult one of the pastoral staff for safeguarding children – or the designated Senior member of staff for safeguarding children (Gillian Clarke/Ashley Cornfoot).

Following the report, the pastoral staff member will decide on the appropriate course of action. This may include:





- Contacting parents / carers,
- Arranging professional assistance e.g. doctor, nurse, social services,
- Arranging an appointment with a counsellor,
- Immediately removing the student from lessons if their remaining in class is likely to cause further distress to themselves or their peers,
- 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 school, Matrons or a first aider should be called for immediate help.

## 8. FURTHER CONSIDERATIONS

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 who has been informed

This information should be stored in the student's Wellbeing/Child Protection file.

It is important to encourage students to let you know if one of their 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 peer group 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 members of staff responsible for safeguarding children.

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

### **Talking about suicide and self-harm: advice for staff**

#### **How to talk about self-harm**

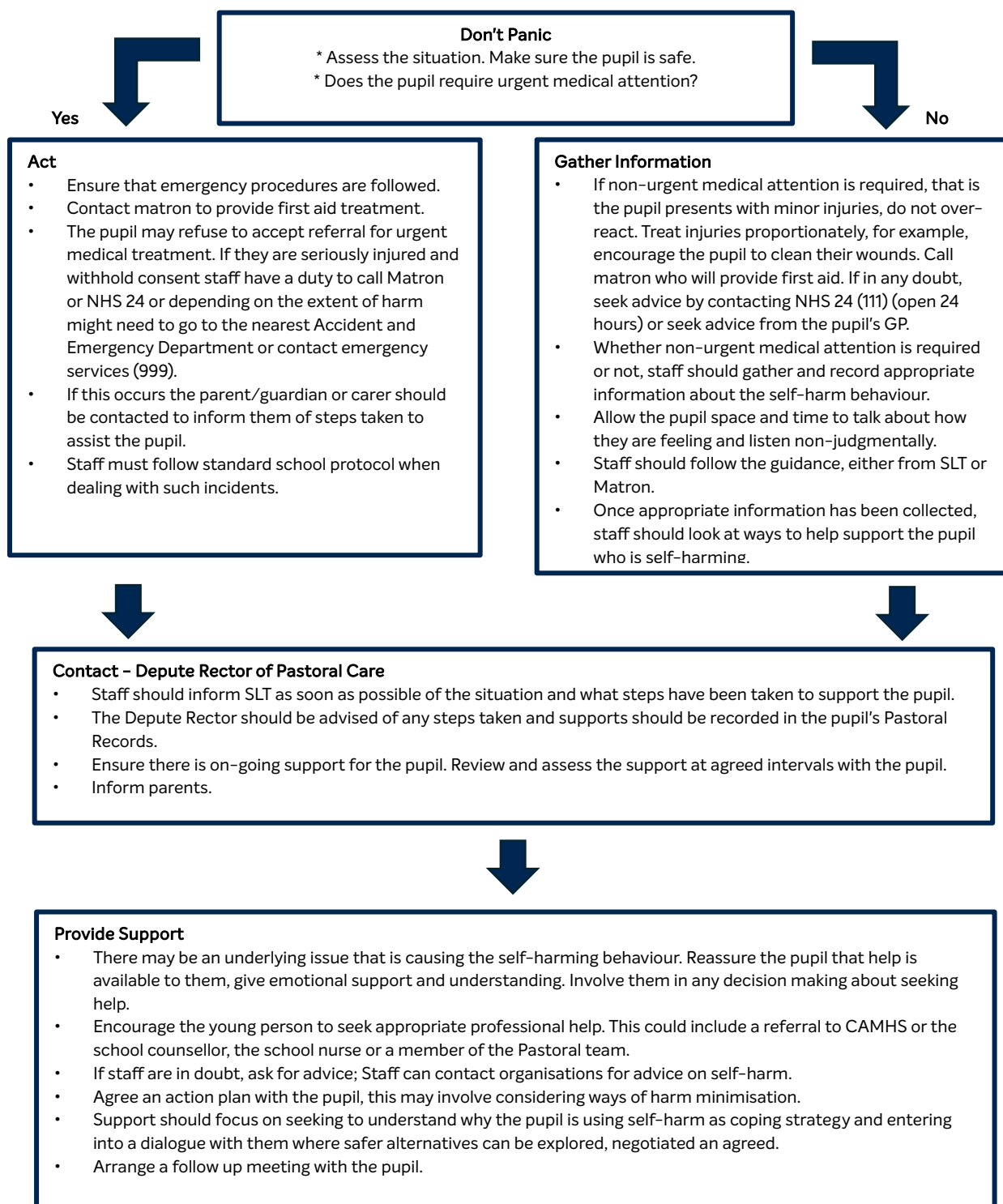
- Show compassion and respect.
- Don't hold back on asking questions about self-harm, try to make the young person feel safe about discussing it, let them know you are available.
- Recognise signs of distress and find a way of talking to the young person about how they are feeling.
- Listen to their worries and problems and take them seriously.
- Try to remain calm and reassuring, however upset you feel about the behaviour.
- Pay attention to the healthier coping strategies the young person has.
- Offer help with problem solving.
- Highlight that it is normal to feel tension and anxiety when depressed or upset.
- Help the young person to understand that talking about worries and feelings is the best way to reach a solution.





- Encourage all young people to raise worries they may have about friends who seem depressed, either with school or parents.
- Accept your limitations and seek advice if you feel stuck or out of your depth.

## SELF HARM: TAKING ACTION





<b>Policy Owner</b>	Mrs L Alexander, Mrs A Mustafa, (Matrons) Mrs G Clarke, Depute Rector
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The Governors of Hutchesons' Educational Trust, Registered Charity Number SC002922, is the governing body of Hutchesons' Grammar School.

