



Self-Injury Guidance for St George’s School

Status: Good Practice

Introduction:

Self-injury is recognised in schools as a significant issue for some students. All teachers and non-teaching staff need a general understanding of self-injury, signs to look out for, and what to do if they become aware that a pupil is self-injuring.

“Self-injury in middle and high school students should not be minimized or dismissed as “attention seeking” or “just a fad”. When people take the radical step of harming their bodies, they should be taken seriously and the sources of their stress addressed.”
(Walsh)

Purpose:

In keeping with the school’s values, vision and aims, this guidance aims to address the issue of self-injury:

- How to deal with pupils who self-injure and how to offer support in the short and long-term
- To provide support depending upon the individual needs of the pupil. To help all pupils improve their self-esteem and emotional literacy
- How to support staff members who come into contact with people who self-injure
- To have clear guidelines for staff – who needs to be informed, when do parents and outside agencies need contacting?
- Facilitate education about self-injury for pupils, staff and parents.

What is self-injury?

Self-injury is any deliberate, non-suicidal behaviour that inflicts physical harm on someone’s own body and is a manifestation of emotional distress. It can include cutting, scratching, burning, banging and bruising, overdosing (without suicidal intent) and deliberate bone-breaking/spraining and eating disorders.

Suicide:

While self-injury and suicide are separate, those who self-injure are in emotional distress, and those who end their lives are also normally in emotional distress. It is vital that all emotional distress is taken seriously to minimise the chances of self-injury, and suicide. All talk of suicide and warning signs must be taken extremely seriously and the DSP informed immediately.

Relationship to other policies: this guidance should be read in conjunction with St George’s Child Protection, Broader Learning, Learning Support, and Discipline policies.

Things for schools and teachers to remember

- Anyone from any walk of life or any age can self-injure, including very young children
- Self-injury affects people from all family backgrounds, religions, cultures and demographic groups
- Self-injury affects both males and females
- People who self-injure can often keep the problem to themselves for a very long time which means opening up to anyone about it can be difficult.
- You can’t just tell someone who self-injures to stop- it’s not that easy and this may be counter-productive.

General advice for Staff

- Listen to the student and try not to show them if you are anxious, frustrated or upset. ‘Staff should learn that the best way to respond to common self-injury is with a low-key, dispassionate demeanour and respectful curiosity.’
(Walsh,2006,page 245)
- Learn about the difference between self-injury and suicide
- If someone tells you they self-injure it means they trust you and are willing to share this very personal problem
- Some people will just want to be heard and empathised with. Try not to push them by asking questions that may overwhelm them
- Some people may want to get further help with their self-injury and in this case you may be able to help in a number of ways. For instance, by putting them in touch with organisations that may be able to help further such as the School Counsellor or nurse or charities like self-harm.co.uk
- If they want to talk to their parents about their self-injury it may be helpful if you offer to act as a mediator.
- Self-injury is not the only way for people to deal with emotional distress. Try to encourage the young person to seek alternative and more constructive coping mechanisms. However, do not expect them to be able to stop self-injuring

Roles and responsibilities of Head Teacher, and other staff:

The Head Teacher will:

- Appoint a designated teacher to be responsible for self-injury matters, and liaise with them. This person will be the DSP or Deputy DSP.
- Ensure that the designated teacher receives appropriate training about self-injury
- Ensure that self-injury guidance is followed by all members of staff
- Decide whether self-injury education should be in the school curriculum, and how it should be addressed.
- Ensure that education about self-injury neither promotes or stigmatises
- Look at provisions for people who self-injure, such as time out of lessons when under intense stress.

All staff and teachers are expected to:

- Listen to pupils in emotional distress calmly and in a non-judgemental way.
- Report self-injury to the designated staff member(s) for self-injury. Be clear of the timescale in which this is expected.
- Not make promises (e.g. assuring confidentiality) which can't be kept.
- Reassure pupils that in order to seek health and happiness people need to know about their problems so that they can help.
- Guide pupils towards seeking health and happiness
- Enable pupils to find places for help and support
- Provide accurate information about self-injury
- Widen their own knowledge about self-injury and mental health disorders
- Be aware of health and safety issues such as first-aid and clearing up if a self-injury incident take place at school
- Be aware of their legal responsibilities – when they can help, and when they cannot
- Obtain basic details concerning the nature of the self-harm when a child discloses: what is being used to injure; what is the severity of the injuries; where and when is the self-injury taking place.

The designated staff member(s) will:

- St George’s has a designated member of staff to deal with self-injury. That person is Tessa Corbett (Deputy DSP).
- Keep records of self-injury incidents and concerns
- Liaise with local services about help available for people who self-injure
- Keep up-to-date with information about self-injury
- Liaise with the Head Teacher
- Contact parent(s) at the appropriate time(s) and meet with them face-to-face wherever possible. Involve the pupil in this process.
- Inform the parent (s) about appropriate help and support for their child which is available.
- Monitor the pupil’s progress following an incident
- Know when people other than parents (e.g. social workers, educational psychologists) need to be informed
- Know when to seek help to deal with their own feelings and distress

Pupils will be expected to:

- Not display open wounds/injuries. These must be dressed appropriately
- Talk to a staff member if they are in emotional distress
- Alert a teacher if they are concerned that fellow pupil may be suicidal or at serious risk of harm to themselves, and know when confidentiality must be broken
- Respect their peers and be sensitive to the emotional distress of other students.

Parents will be encouraged to:

- Endorse the school’s approach to self-injury education and pastoral care
- Work in partnership with the school
- Display the tolerance and understanding that they would like others to display towards their child.