Southerly Point Co-operative Multi-Academy Trust

Self-Harm Policy: Primary

Equality Impact Assessment

The EIA has not identified any potential for discrimination or adverse impact and all opportunities to promote equality have been taken.*	✓
The EIA has not identified any conflict with the Trust's co-operative values and the Church Schools' values.	✓
Adjust the policy to remove barriers identified by the EIA or better promote equality.	✓

*Inclusive of protected characteristics

Provenance	Date
Working Party	October 2021
HR checks	
Union Consultation	
Staff Consultation	October 2021
Trustees' Ratification	February 2022
Implementation	March 2022

Review Date
September 2023

Responsible Person: Designated Safeguarding Lead

To be read in conjunction with:	Safeguarding and Child Protection Policy Managing Medical Conditions Policy

Southerly Point Co-operative Multi-Academy Trust
SELF-HARM POLICY: PRIMARY

1. **Aims and Purpose of the Policy**

The aim of this document is to outline Coverack School School's approach to self-harm. This Policy is intended as guidance for all staff, including non-teaching staff, and governors. School staff can play an important role in preventing self-harm and also in supporting young people, peers and parents/carers of pupils currently engaging in self-harm. This Policy is informed by the advice within the Cornwall Managing Self-Harm document. Further information and guidance can be found in this document.

The aims of the Policy are:

- To provide support to pupils who self-harm and their peers and parents/carers
- 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

2. **Background to Self-Harm**

2.1 Self-harming is a self-inflicted physical response to emotional pain. It includes:

- Cutting, scratching, scraping or picking skin
- Swallowing inedible objects
- Taking an overdose of prescription or non-prescription drugs
- Swallowing hazardous materials or substances or inedible objects
- Burning or scalding
- Hair-pulling
- Banging or hitting the head or other parts of the body, fracturing bones
- Scouring or scrubbing the body excessively
- Asphyxiation

2.2 Why do pupils self-harm?

There are many reasons why pupils resort to self-harm as a means of managing strong and painful feelings including the following factors:

- Some pupils have a long history of not knowing how to manage their emotions or regulate strong feelings – especially those feelings which they find internally threatening, distressing, difficult, overwhelming or shameful. Self-harm offers a means of regulating emotions, which affords a temporary sense of release, relief and control.
- Some pupils do not make strong attachments to adults when young, and this legacy compromises the development of healthy ways to calm and self soothe when faced with strong emotions. This is an increasing problem as they become older and are expected to manage their feelings more independently.
- Other pupils cannot rely on the help and support of friends and family when they are distressed; or they may not know how to communicate their strong feelings to friends and family.
- Some pupils feel they have very little control over their circumstances and this leaves them with limited routes of expressing their frustrations and powerful feelings. Self-harm offers these students a sense of control.
- Self-harm is also linked to other mental health problems in childhood and adolescence, such as anxiety and depression.

- Self-harm can be linked to anxiety and depression arising from diagnosed or undiagnosed special educational needs: ADHD, dyslexia, dyspraxia, ASD, OCD.
- Self-harm is more common among pupils who live in families characterised by conflict, domestic violence, parental mental health [including parenting self-harming], and poor attachment histories.

2.3   How self-harm works:

- **Comfort:** Self-harm is a way of dealing with intense and painful feelings [linked to conflict or trauma] and provides a sense of relief afterwards. The strong feeling of relief [and even power at overcoming pain] may be a powerful driver to repeat self-harming. Comfort is achieved through a release of tension and by the care and nurture provided by others in response to self-harm.
- **Communication**: Self-harm is primarily a means of regulating feelings rather than gaining a response from others. However, it is also a way to communicate distress, especially for pupils who lack other routes to express themselves, and is a means to have this distress understood, accepted and attended to.
- **Control:** Some young people use self-harm to exert control over a life, which is otherwise out of control. Through self-harm they gain control over injuries to their own body. Determining the nature, site, timing, severity of harm to the body is a way of staking a claim to one's own body. Children with limited resources for controlling their environment can use self-harm to influence the feelings and actions of others. This may leave professionals and carers feeling manipulated; however, it is important to remember that self-harm communicates something that a pupil is unable to say through usual means. Understanding this 'communication gone wrong' is likely to go some way in reducing or preventing recurrence.
- **Distraction:** Self-harm can provide a distraction from the unbearable emotional pain they feel inside.
- **Punishment:** It may be a way of exacting retaliation or punishment on those close to them, when they are left feeling hurt or unable to resolve negative feelings about others – especially if they feel that others are responsible for their distress. This process may operate unconsciously.
- **Self-punishing**: some young people carry feelings of shame, low self-esteem and self-blame. These feelings can become so severe that they self-harm as a punishment.

2.4   Warning Signs:

There may be no warning signs, and often people who self-harm go to great lengths to conceal their injuries, so it can be hard to know for sure if a person is self-harming. If you notice any change in a pupil that concerns you, it is important to open up a conversation with them.

Things to look out for:
- Changes in eating or sleeping habits.
- Wearing long, baggy or heavy clothes, even in warmer weather, to conceal the body.
- Appearing distressed
- Poor attendance
- Increased isolation from family and friends
- Lowering of academic performance
- Talking about self-harm or suicide
- Drug or alcohol misuse
- Expressing feelings of failure, uselessness or loss of hope.
- Giving away possessions
- Risk taking behaviours

2.5 Key triggers for self-harm:

- Family relationship difficulties
- Difficulties with peer relationships
- Bullying
- Significant trauma: bereavement, abuse and neglect
- Self-harm behaviours in others [the contagion effect].
- Self-harm reported in the media
- Difficult times of the year: anniversaries, stressful academic times.
- Trouble in school or with the police
- Pressure of expectation

3. Risk Factors associated with Self-Harm

There is not one type of person who self-harms. Some groups are more vulnerable than others but each case is individual.

3.1 Risk Factors may include:

Individual Factors:

- Mental health problems such as depression and anxiety
- Poor communication skills
- Low self-esteem, marked relationship difficulties
- Poor problem-solving skills
- Hopelessness
- Impulsivity
- Drug or alcohol abuse
- Past or present physical or sexual abuse, neglect or trauma

Family Factors:

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

Social Factors:

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

It is important to recognise that sometimes none of these risk factors may appear to be present. Some pupils who harm themselves may appear well and from highly supportive backgrounds; they suffer internally and resort to harming themselves as a means of coping. Sometimes groups of students influence each other by discussing self-harm – a contagion of self-harming behaviour. Each person is unique and will have found the practice of self-harm by their own route, and rely on it at times of stress due to the sense of release, control and relief it offers to them. When supporting people who are self-harming it is important to be mindful that it is not always easy to stop self-harming behaviour.

3.2 Is there a link between suicide and self-harm?

People often think that self-harm is closely linked to suicide; however, the vast majority of people who self-harm are not trying to kill themselves – rather they have some hope that by communicating their

distress something will be understood and someone will attend to them. It is a way of coping with strong and painful feelings and circumstances. However, it is not always clear from the severity of the self-harm what the intention of the young person is. If you discover that someone is self-harming, it gives you a real opportunity to help them deal with the underlying problems they are wrestling with. Therefore, it is important that you explore with them what their intentions are, and what it is that cannot be tolerated with the support of more healthy coping skills. In rare circumstances, the internal distress becomes so great that self-harming becomes increasingly dangerous and can become a real threat to life; or the way in which the young person harms themselves becomes more dangerous – either by accident or intent. This, of course, requires close monitoring.

4   Relationship of the Self-Harm Policy to other Policy Documents, in particular Safeguarding Procedures and Policies; Risk Assessment Processes; and Confidentiality

4.1   The Self-Harm Policy supplements the Safeguarding and Child Protection Policy.

4.2   All members of staff will refer any concerns or disclosure to the Safeguarding team through the Safeguarding Referral procedure by logging a concern on MyConcern. Pupils must be made aware that any information regarding self-harm will be shared with relevant people. This should be done before a disclosure where possible.

5   Roles and Responsibilities for all Staff

5.1 Senior Leadership Team

The Senior Leadership Team have a pivotal role to play in developing positive mental health strategies in school. They recognise the need to develop a whole school awareness of mental health and emotional wellbeing, including self-harm. Strategies to do this will include:

- Implementation of a PSHE programme as part of addressing the pupil's emotional wellbeing and mental health needs.
- Support the prioritisation of self-harm training for school staff.
- Ensure staff, parents and carers are aware of their roles and responsibilities when implementing the Policy across the school.
- Ensure that all designated staff receive full and appropriate training regarding self-harm and are fully confident with the procedures to follow.
- Ensure that all staff, including support staff are made aware of, and understand, the Self-Harm Policy, and receive training and support as appropriate.
- Ensure that good procedures are in place for record keeping, audit and evaluation of all activities in relation to self-harm in the school.
- Ensure that all staff know where they can access support if required.
- Provide practical and emotional support for key staff dealing with self-harm.

5.2 **Local Governing Body**

The Local Governing Body will work with school staff in order to:

- Provide pupils with open access to information about managing their emotions and details of who to go to for help and support.
- Decide, in collaboration with the School Senior Leadership Team, how awareness and understanding of self-harm should be promoted. This includes emotional regulation being covered in the school PSHE curriculum and training for all school staff.
- Consider issues of parental consent where cases are identified and whether parents/carers should be invited to learn more about self-harm.
- Review special permissions for students who self-harm, for example 'time out' of the classroom during emotional distress and permission to wear long sleeves for sports.

- Support the development of procedural policy for self-harm incidents occurring at school.
- Be clear about what behaviour cannot be accepted [for example, self-harming in front of other pupils or threats to self-harm as bargaining, may be deemed by the school as unacceptable].

5.3 All Staff and Teachers

- Review all self-harm guidance and policy documents, alongside Safeguarding and Child Protection Policy documents, and be aware of guidance on communication processes.
- Refer any concerns to the Safeguarding Team through the referral process.
- Discuss an incident or disclosure of self-harm with a designated member of staff as soon as you become aware of the problem, and inform the pupil that you are doing this.
- Make it known to pupils that there are staff available to listen to them [and how they can be accessed].
- Remain calm, respectful, sensitive and non-judgemental at times of pupil distress.
- Encourage pupils to be open with you and assure them that they can get the help they need, if they are able to talk.
- Endeavour to enable pupils to feel in control by asking what they would like to happen and what help they feel they need.
- Do not make promises you cannot keep, especially regarding issues of confidentiality.
- Monitor the reactions of other pupils who know about the self-harm, and refer on to appropriate staff.
- Do not ask a pupils to show you their scars or describe their self-harm.
- Do not simply tell a pupil to stop self-harming – you may be removing the only coping mechanism they have.
- Discuss and promote healthy coping mechanisms.
- Discuss an incident or disclosure of self-harm with a designated member of staff as soon as you become aware of the problem and inform the pupil that you are doing this.

5.4 Designated Safeguarding Lead

- Ensure the implementation of the Self-Harm Policy; report to the Headteacher at each stage of the process.
- Maintain up to date records of pupils experiencing self-harm, incidents of self-harm and all other concerns surrounding the issue.
- Communicate with the head teacher and other key staff on a regular basis and keep them informed of all incidents and developments.
- Monitor the support provided and progress of the pupils in your care and maintain communication with them.
- Ensure you are fully confident in your understanding of self-harm and seek additional information and/or training if you feel it necessary. You may need to reflect upon, and update, your practice in relation to those who self-harm.
- Contact other organisations and key services in your area and find out what help and support is available for pupils who self-harm.
- Liaise with the head teacher and pupil to decide if any other members of staff who have contact with the pupil should be made aware of the self-harm and underlying concerns. Whenever possible adhere to the 'need to know' principle.
- Ensure that all first-aiders are well informed about self-harm.
- Inform the pupil's parents/carers, if appropriate, and liaise with them as to how to best manage the situation.
- Be aware of when it is essential to liaise or share information with other professionals [such as social services, educational psychologists, GP, Primary Mental Health team, CAMHS].
- Respond to any mention of suicidal feelings or behaviour as a matter of urgency [see Appendix 1].
- Take care of your own emotional wellbeing and seek support/supervision as and when necessary.

6. Students' Entitlements

- Pupils should have access to information about self-harm including their rights upon disclosure.
- The focus of discussions must be on the emotional causes of self-harm not on the act alone.
- Ensure that pupils are aware that the teachers and designated staff are there to help them.
- Pupil's should avoid talking graphically to other pupils about their injuries or methods used.
- If pupils are under emotional distress at school, encourage them to talk to a nominated key adult as soon as possible. The adult should be chosen by the pupil.
- If pupils are worried that a friend may be self-harming, then encourage them to talk to a member of staff for support and guidance.

7. Parents' Entitlements

- If their child is self-harming, parents should work closely with the school and take an active role in deciding the next course of action.
- Keep school informed of any incidents outside school that are important.
- Educate themselves about self-harm and discuss the subject with their child.
- Seek emotional support for themselves if needed.

8. Pathways for Immediate [including Risk Assessment] and Ongoing Response to Self-Harm

- All concerns and responses to self-harm must be referred to the Safeguarding Team using MyConcern referral.
- All incidents of self-harm or concerns raised will be recorded, audited, monitored and followed up by the Safeguarding Team.
- Additional support for parents, carers, siblings and peers will be provided as necessary.

Self-Harm Incident Response Flowchart

Alerted to incident of self-harm

⬇

Does the pupil require immediate medical care?

⬇   ⬇

YES Heavy bleeding, overdose or unconscious, call 999	**NO** Follow next steps

⬇

Are you the right person to deal with this incident? Should you refer to DSL or First Aider?

⬇   ⬇

YES Reassure student and decide on next steps	**NO** Discuss next steps with DSL or First Aider

⬇   ⬇

Decide on best course of action based on pupil's injuries and emotional state. Is the pupil in immediate danger?

⬇   ⬇

YES Take child to A&E	**NO** Administer first aid if required

⬇   ⬇

Once stable, emotionally and physically, gather more information and plan next steps for support.

Refer to guidance for on-going support