



# SELF HARM POLICY 2024-25

## Summary of changes

Staff member responsible	Revision date	Approved by	Approval date	Reason for update
Assistant Rector - Pastoral	Sept 2022	SSG	Sept 2022	Annual Review
Assistant Rector - Pastoral	Nov 2023	SSG	Nov 2023	Annual Review
Assistant Rector Pastoral	October 2024	SSG	Oct 2024	Annual Review

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## LINKS TO UNCRC

This policy links to the following UNCRC articles:

- **Article 3 – Best Interests of the Child:** Any self-harm policy should prioritize the best interests of the child in all actions taken by the school, including providing support, safeguarding, and appropriate intervention.
- **Article 6 – Right to Life, Survival, and Development:** This article stresses that every child has the right to life and that governments and institutions must ensure children's survival and development. A self-harm policy directly relates to this by ensuring children are supported in maintaining their physical and mental wellbeing.
- **Article 19 – Protection from Violence, Abuse, and Neglect:** Schools have a responsibility to protect children from all forms of harm, including self-harm. A comprehensive self-harm policy would aim to prevent, identify, and address instances of self-harm to protect children's mental and emotional health.
- **Article 24 – Right to Health and Health Services:** This article emphasizes that children have the right to the best possible health care, which includes both physical and mental health. A self-harm policy should ensure that students are directed toward the appropriate mental health services and support.
- **Article 27 – Adequate Standard of Living:** Self-harm often reflects underlying issues such as poor mental health, which could be linked to unmet needs in a child's standard of living. A school policy should aim to support the child's overall wellbeing, including their emotional and psychological needs.
- **Article 34 – Protection from Sexual Exploitation and Abuse:** If self-harm is related to experiences of abuse, the policy should ensure the child is protected and provided with the necessary support.
- **Article 39 – Rehabilitation of Child Victims:** This article is particularly relevant for children who may be recovering from self-harm or related trauma. Schools must help facilitate rehabilitation, offering counseling, therapy, and supportive measures as part of the policy.

## LINKS TO OTHER DOLLAR ACADEMY POLICIES

This policy has links with the following Dollar Academy policies:

- Suicide Postvention policy
- Child Protection Policy
- Anti-Bullying Policy
- Transgender Policy

## INTRODUCTION

Dollar Academy is committed to safeguarding and promoting the welfare of pupils and expects all staff and volunteers to share this commitment. We endeavour to provide a safe and welcoming environment where children are respected and valued. We are alert to the signs of self-harming and follow our procedures to ensure that children receive effective support and protection. The school works in partnership with other children's services.

The procedures contained in this policy apply to all staff.

## CONTEXT

This guide has been put in place to ensure that we have a consistent approach from staff who deal with pupils who self-harm. It is designed so that those pupils seeking help will feel secure in knowing how we can deal with them, giving staff a structure for the early identification of self-harming behaviour and for dealing with the problem.

### **Associated Guidance and Documentation:**

1. Dollar Academy Child Protection and Safeguarding Policy
2. Dollar Academy Behaviour Policy (The power to search and confiscate prohibited items)

### **WHAT IS SELF-HARM?**

The nature and meaning of self-harm varies greatly from child to child and the reason or trigger for each action may differ on each occasion. Essentially though, self-harm is any behaviour where a person intentionally sets out to harm themselves. This may be an impulsive act or may be planned.

Self-harm is a relatively common problem that is frequently misunderstood and kept hidden. Therefore, it is not surprising that myths and stereotypes have grown around the subject. Most commonly there is a belief that self-harm is an 'attention seeking behaviour'.

Given that most self-harm is carried out in private and over a long period before help is sought, it is hard to give credence to this perception. Another belief is that self-harm is something that groups of pupils do together. Whilst it is important to be aware that within friendship groups, some individuals may self-harm, it is rare that students self-harm in front of others.

Self-harm is a term that is used to describe a range of actions and behaviour. It is important to be aware of signs that a student is self-harming. Below is a non-exhaustive list of some of the behaviours that some people might consider to be self-harm:

- Scratching or picking skin
- Cutting body
- Tying something around body
- Inserting things into body
- Scouring/scrubbing body excessively
- Hitting, punching self
- Pulling out hair
- Over/under eating
- Excessive drinking of alcohol
- Taking non-prescription drugs
- Burning or scalding
- Hitting walls with head and/or fist
- Taking an overdose or swallowing something dangerous
- Self-strangulation
- Risky behaviours such as running into the road

### **WHY DO PEOPLE SELF-HARM?**

During adolescence, young people may encounter particularly painful emotional events for the first time. They often do not know where to go for help and have not developed sufficient problem-solving skills to overcome these difficulties on their own. As a result, they experience feelings of helplessness and hopelessness, which can lead them to self-harm or attempt suicide.

The three most common reasons why young people self-harm are:

**Tension relief** – several young people are unable to deal with their unpleasant feelings and find self-harm as a way of relieving stress and tension.

**Self-punishment**– young people who self-harm often have low self-esteem and feel that they are worthless or bad people who should be punished.

**To express distress** – for some young people self-harm is a way of showing others how bad they are feeling. They may use this as a way of reaching out to get help.

Other explanations from pupils about why they self-harm include:

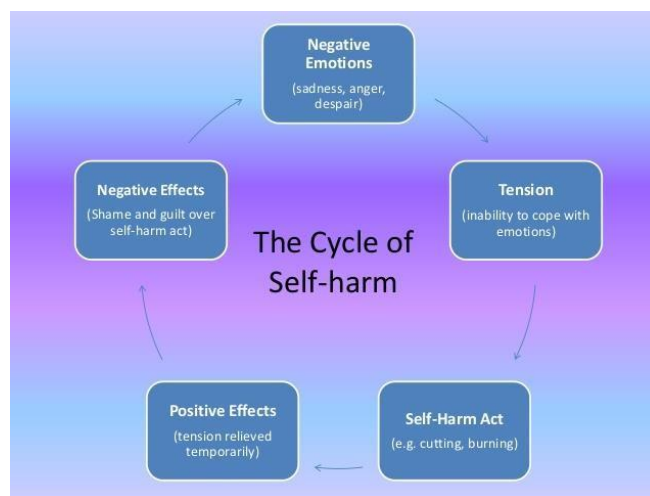
- That physical pain is easier to control than emotional pain.

- It is a way of coping with past and current events.
- Rarely, it can be a way of becoming a part of a group.
- Some pupils may only self-harm once or twice in response to a particular difficulty, however, it can also become a regular activity that is hard to stop and may indicate more serious and longstanding emotional distress.

It may be helpful to understand that when a pupil inflicts pain upon himself or herself the body responds by producing endorphins, a natural pain reliever that gives temporary relief or a feeling of peace. The addictive nature of this feeling can make self-harm difficult to stop.

Pupils who self-harm still feel pain, but some say the physical pain is easier to stand than the emotional/mental pain that led to the self-harm initially.

The following is an illustration of the cyclical nature of self-harm and demonstrates how such behaviour may become addictive.



### HOW CAN STAFF IDENTIFY SIGNS OF SELF-HARMING?

All staff at Dollar Academy are expected to be vigilant and report concerns immediately, if they notice the following signs:

- Changes in clothing to cover parts of the body, e.g. wearing long sleeved tops.
- Reluctance to participate in previously enjoyed physical activities, particularly those that involve wearing shorts or swimsuits, for example.
- Changes in eating and/or sleeping habits.
- Changes in consumption of drugs/alcohol.
- Changes in levels of activity or mood.
- Increasing isolation from friends/family.

Self-harm occurs more frequently in pupils with learning disabilities. In those with severe learning disabilities, self-harm can form part of the pupil's profile of behaviour (for example, a pupil with autism biting his/her arms repeatedly). Any change in the frequency, severity or site of self-harm in these pupils is a cause for concern. Self-harm may be the only way a pupil with communication difficulties can display her/his emotional distress.

Self-harm in younger pupils is unusual but not unknown, so it is really important to be aware that behaviours such as hair pulling, small surface cuts, head banging and self-grazing/scratching may be signs of self-harm.

### **FACTORS WHICH MAY CONTRIBUTE TO SELF-HARMING**

Staff should be aware that the factors that students identify as contributing or triggering self-harm include:

Being bullied

- Experiencing poor mental health
- Having a parent who has poor mental health
- Stress and worry about school work and exams. Feeling under pressure from family, school or peers to achieve or conform
- Feeling isolated
- Difficulties in peer relationships, including the breakup of a relationship
- Not getting on with parents/carers or other family members
- Family relationship difficulties, including parents/carers separating or divorcing
- Bereavement
- Past experience of abuse (physical, sexual or emotional)
- Current experience of abuse (physical, sexual or emotional)
- Experience of domestic abuse
- The self-harm or suicide of someone close to them
- Confusion about sexuality
- Low self esteem
- Feeling unhappy with yourself
- Feeling isolated, rejected or bullied due to race, culture or religion
- Being in trouble in school or with the police
- Difficult times of the year (e.g. anniversaries)
- Use of alcohol or drugs
- Feelings of rejection socially, or within their family
- Termination of pregnancy
- Self-harm behaviour in social group
- Self-harm portrayed in the media

### **SUICIDAL THOUGHTS AND SELF-HARM**

Self-harm by cutting is not usually associated with suicidal thoughts but as described previously, it can be thoughts or behaviours used as an expression of distress or to relieve distress.

Suicidal ideation (a term often used by mental health practitioners) is where a young person expresses a genuine desire to die. Thoughts of hopelessness such as "I wish I was dead" are common. It is therefore important to explore the meaning behind the words the young person says. This can be because a pupil has a serious depression with low self-esteem, low mood, inability to see that his/her situation could improve, nothing to live for and no chance of ever being happy. Suicidal ideation is rare. If staff encounter a pupil who demonstrates these thoughts they should immediately follow the protocols outlined in Section 7.

### **SCHOOL PROCEDURES WHEN A PUPIL SELF-HARMS**

Any member of the school staff who knows a pupil who may be thinking of self-harming must report this to the Child Protection Co-ordinator or SSG link or Head of Year of that year group.

**What to do if a child discloses thoughts of self-harm and/or superficial injury**

- Keep calm and give reassurance to the pupil.
- Seek medical help if there is an injury.
- Focus on the pupil, not the behaviour or reasons for it and remember the pupil may be reluctant to talk about self-harm.
- It is important not to make promises of confidentiality even though the pupil may put pressure on you to do so.
- Report the disclosure immediately to the Head of Year or the SSG link for that year group and complete a 'yellow'.
- The HOY will inform the pupil's parents/carers of the situation and be actively involved in the handling of the situation unless there is some overriding reason not to. The decision not to involve parents/carers should be taken in consultation with ELA.
- The HoY will also liaise with the Houseparent if the pupil is a boarder.
- Some instances of self-harm are Child Protection issues. In this case the procedures laid down in the school's Child Protection and Safeguarding policy must be followed by the ELA. There must be no promise of confidentiality made to the pupil and they must be told that the CPC will be informed.
- If there are no child protection concerns and it is not deemed a referral to CAMHS is required then A Child's Plan may be considered.

Referral to:

School Nurse

School Counsellor

- It may be necessary to hold a multi-agency meeting with those involved to discuss the way forward. If this is the case then the procedures laid down in the Child Protection and Safeguarding Policy should be followed.

**What do if a pupil engages in serious self-harm with/without suicidal ideation, requiring medical treatment. e.g. injury or overdose (however small).**

Required action is the same as above but also includes:

- If a member of staff finds that a pupil is in possession of dangerous equipment then a member of SSG should be informed immediately.
  - If physical harm has been done the pupil should be taken to the Nursing Centre for medical assessment and care. If appropriate, emergency services may be called by the nurses.
  - If the pupil is taken into hospital - a CAMHS Referral may be activated by the hospital and the School Nurse will be informed.

### **CONFIDENTIALITY**

Confidentiality is a key concern for pupils; however, Dollar Academy Child Protection Policy states pupils need to know that it is not possible to offer unconditional confidentiality. If you consider that a pupil is at risk of seriously harming themselves or others then confidentiality cannot be kept. It is important not to make promises of confidentiality that you cannot keep, even though the pupil may put pressure on you to do so. If this is explained at the outset of any meeting the pupil can make an informed decision as to how much information they wish to divulge.

#### **HOW TO HELP A PUPIL WHO SELF-HARMS**

Continued support for a pupil who self-harms will normally be undertaken by a member of the guidance team or an external specialist. It may be that a pupil identifies an alternative member of staff who they wish to support them. For example, one of the Mental Health First Aiders (see list at the back of this document).

The two main skills to employ when exploring these issues are effective listening skills and honest talking, for example:

- Let the pupil know you care and that they are not alone.
- Help the pupil express their emotions.
- Be an active listener; use your eyes as well as your ears to truly pay attention to what someone is saying or not saying. Watch the pupil's facial expression and the posture that accompanies the words they are speaking. These will all give clues as to how someone is truly feeling.
- Empathise with the pupil – imagine walking in their shoes.
- Be positive about what the pupil is saying without being dismissive.
- Know when to listen and when to talk.
- Do not try to solve the problem or say the "right" thing.
- Don't give advice too quickly or evaluate how the pupils are feeling and defining their experiences for them.
- Be aware of what you can and cannot do to help, and be prepared to discuss this with the pupil sensitively. Do not make promises you cannot keep.
- Use open questions rather than closed ones to help the pupil explore their concerns.
- Encourage and support the pupil to talk to others, such as parents/carers or other professionals.
- Encourage and support the pupil in seeking appropriate help.
- Do make sure you have an opportunity to "debrief" if necessary following a disclosure.
- Do not attempt to keep information to yourself, but share it with an appropriate colleague
- Look after yourself – speak to a trusted colleague.

### **Tips for developing an action plan together**

It is important that pupils feel that their concerns are being taken seriously and that they have an element of control over the process. A jointly negotiated action plan is a useful way of providing this. Action plans need to have achievable targets and agreements about whom to involve and other possible next steps. Pupils may benefit from being encouraged to establish more positive daily routines (eating, sleeping etc) or may need to establish a greater social network, for example, by taking on a new activity.

### **Distraction activities**

Replacing the cutting or other forms of self-harm with safer activities can be a positive way of coping with the tension. What works depends on the reasons behind the self-harm. Activities that involve the emotions intensely can be helpful.

Examples:

- Contacting a friend, family member or helpline.
- Going for a walk/run or other forms of physical exercise.
- Getting out of the house and going to a public place e.g. a cinema.
- Reading a book. Keeping a diary.
- Looking after an animal.
- Watching TV.
- Listening to music or singing along.
- Going shopping.
- Cooking/eating your favourite meal.

### **Coping with distress using self-soothing**

- Using stress management techniques such as relaxation or massage.
- Having a bubble bath.
- Stroking a cat or other animal.
- Going to the park and looking at the things around you (birds, flowers, trees).



- Listening to the sounds as you walk.
- Listening to soothing music.

Sometimes it can be helpful to find other ways of discharging emotion which are less damaging than self-harm:

- Clenching ice cubes in the hand until they melt.
- Writing, drawing and talking about feelings.
- Writing a letter expressing feelings, which need not be sent.
- Going into a field and “screaming”.
- Hitting a pillow /soft object.
- Listening to loud music
- Physical exercise

An important part of prevention of self-harm is having a supportive environment which is focused on building self-esteem and encouraging healthy peer relationships. These are taught through the PSE programme and also supported by the school’s Anti-Bullying Policy.

It is helpful to identify the support people in a pupil’s life and how to get in touch with them. Examples are friends, family, school teacher, counsellor. Knowing how to access a crisis line is also important.

In the longer term a pupil may need to develop ways of understanding and dealing with the underlying emotions and beliefs. Regular counselling/therapy may be helpful. Support from family members or carers are likely to be an important part of this.

It may also help if the pupil joins a group activity such as a keep fit class or a co-curricular club, which will provide opportunities for them to develop friendships and feel better about themselves. Learning stress management techniques, ways to keep safe and how to relax may also be useful.

### SUPPORT ORGANISATIONS

Young Minds: 0808 802 5544 [www.youngminds.org.uk](http://www.youngminds.org.uk)

Samaritans: 08457 90 90 90

Child Line: 0800 1111 [www.childline.org.uk](http://www.childline.org.uk)

National Self-Harm network: 0800 622 6000 [www.nshn.co.uk](http://www.nshn.co.uk)

SAMHS: <https://www.samh.org.uk/about-mental-health/mental-health-problems/self-harm>

See Me Scotland: <https://www.seemescotland.org/stigma-discrimination/stigma-relating-to-individual-mental-health-conditions/self-harm/>

**Penumbra** - providing services for those in need of practical and emotional support, including supported accommodation services in three local areas for those needing care and support. Crisis and short-term support is available at their **Edinburgh** Crisis Centre, which has a 24hour helpline for those aged 16+ and their carers. Penumbra's award-winning Nova (social inclusion) Services aim to integrate those experiencing mental ill health, including those at risk of self harm, into their community through various activities and groups. Self-directed support allows you to choose how your support is provided, and peer work promotes recovery. Penumbra's Self Harm projects are community-based services.

**Time and Space** - based in Glasgow, this service is devoted to its client-led support groups and providing information about self harm and voice hearing. Time and Space also arranges and delivers training for their workers and the general public to make information for supporting people widespread. Support to family members can also be provided and the group produces two newsletters about its service per year.

**Suicide and Self Harm Support Group** - this is a confidential safe space in **Perth** for those affected by self harm or suicide within their families; whether you care for someone who self harms, or who talks about or tries to take their own life, or for someone who has taken their own life. **Meetings are**

currently on hold as a new space to meet in is waiting to be moved into, which cannot happen at the moment due to covid-19. However, you can contact those running the group by messaging the page in order to learn more about when groups meet and how you can join them.

[Alumina](#) - an online 6week course for 14-19 year olds, run in groups of 2-6 people by trained counsellors; it's a safe place to explore how you are doing, what your struggles are and receive support for your harming behaviour. Each session (approx. 45-60mins) is based around a different topic and participants can leave at any point.

[Adullam Ministries](#) - provides online information and support to those who self-harm and the people who care for them. There is also an online forum where you can share your experiences of self-injury, and a sidebar of self-injury related tweets to view.

[BEAT](#) - offers information resources, online support groups, message boards, and chat rooms for anyone affected by eating disorders. Peer coaching and helplines (general, "Youthline" and "Studentline") are also accessible from this page, as well as training opportunities for anyone; from school staff to parents, carers, and healthcare professionals. **Advice related to coping during Covid-19 is also available on this page.**

[Harmless](#) - harmless is a national user-led organisation that provides a range of self harm and suicide prevention related services including: support, information, workbooks and questionnaires, to people who self harm, their friends and families and professionals and those at risk of suicide. A blog area can also be found here, as well as information about their professionals, training and consultancy.

[Recover Your Life](#) - although known for helping people suffering with self harm, people with other issues (such as eating disorders, mental health problems, those dealing with abuse, and many more) are also welcomed and supported. The site contains sections devoted to awareness, community, advice, and distractions. Additionally, there are forums which you can view as a guest, or create a login for to access additional features and website areas.

[LifeSIGNS \(Self-Injury Guidance and Network Support Group\)](#) - this online voluntary user-led organisation provides information about self-injury, guidance for others, understanding and support for those who do self-injure, as well as fact sheets and information on how to "come out" as a person who self-injures. The bottom of the page also contains their self-injury related blog articles.

[SelfHarmUK](#) - a project dedicated to this site providing a safe space for young people impacted by self-harm to talk, ask questions, and speak openly about their experiences. Blog posts and information resources can be easily found on this page too.