

The Friars Primary School
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School Self-Harm And Suicide Policy



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We don't talk about suicide among children –for many of us, it is too painful to comprehend. Statistics were only released for the 10-14 age group for the first time in 2015 in England and Wales only, and suicides by children under 10 remain unrecognised in official statistics.

Ged Flynn, Chief Executive,
PAPYRUS Prevention of Young Suicide

Statement of Purpose

The Friars Primary School is aware that:

Suicide is the leading cause of death in young people

We play a vital role in helping to prevent young suicide.

We want to make sure that children and young people at our school are as 'suicidesafe' as possible and that our governors, parents and carers, teaching staff, support staff, pupils themselves and other key stakeholders are aware of our commitment to be a suicide-safer school.

Our Beliefs about Suicide and its Antecedents

This school acknowledges that:

Suicidal Thoughts are Common

We acknowledge that thoughts of suicide are common among young people.

Suicide is Complex

We believe that every suicide is a tragedy. There are a number of contributory factors surrounding a suicide and the reasons are often complex and individual to that person. However, we believe that there are lessons that may be learned from each death that may help prevent future deaths.

Stigma Inhibits Learning – Stigma Can Kill

We recognise that the stigma surrounding suicide and mental illness can be both a barrier to help seeking and a barrier to offering help. This school is committed to tackling suicide stigma. In our language and in our working relationships, we will promote open, sensitive talk that does not stigmatise and perpetuate taboos. This will include avoiding the use of language which perpetuates unhelpful notions that suicide is criminal, sinful or selfish. We know that unhelpful myths and misconceptions surrounding suicide can inhibit young people in seeking and finding appropriate help when it is most needed.

Suicide is Our Business

As a school community, we recognise that pupils may seek out someone whom they trust with their concerns and worries. We want to play our part in supporting any pupil who may have thoughts of suicide.

Safety is Very Important

We know that pupils who are having thoughts of suicide may or may not also be behaving in a way that puts their life in danger (suicide behaviours). Schoolchildren

experiencing suicidal thoughts are potentially at risk of acting on these thoughts. Those who are already engaging in suicide behaviours are also clearly at risk of death or harm. This school will work with our pupils who may be thinking about suicide, or acting on their thoughts of suicide. We want to support them, sometimes working in partnership with family, caregivers and other professionals where this may enhance suicide safety.

Suicide Is A Difficult Thing To Talk About

We know that a child or young person who is suicidal may find it very difficult to make their feelings known and speak openly about suicide. We will equip adults with the skills to identify when a pupil may be struggling with thoughts of suicide. These adults will be trained to keep our young people 'suicide-safe'.

Talking about Suicide does not create or worsen risk

We will provide our pupils with opportunities to speak openly about their worries with people who are ready, willing and able to support them. We want to make it possible for schoolchildren and young people, and those who support them at this school/college, to do so safely. This will be in a way that leads to support and help where this is needed. We will do all we can to refrain from acting in a way that stops a pupil seeking the help they need when they are struggling with thoughts of suicide.

Our Team and its Responsibilities

Our governors and leadership team will be clear about how we will respond in the event of a suicide. Each member of our named response team will have a defined responsibility within our plan including leadership, family liaison and any communications with external agencies, including the media.

We will have a clear picture of who has received general suicide awareness education and commit to this being refreshed periodically. We will have a clear policy about how staff should work together where thoughts of suicide or suicide behaviours are known among our young people. We will manage the sharing of information in a way that enhances safety.

Ongoing Support and Development of our Policy and Practice

Our Governors and Leadership Team will keep our practice up to date by staying in contact with best practice and on-going training.

The Friars Primary School

Self-Harm and Suicide Policy

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 children, peers and parents of children engaging in self-harm.

2. Scope

This document describes the school's approach to self-harm and suicide. This policy is intended as guidance for all staff including non-teaching 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
- Other deliberate self-harming actions likely to place the child's health or life in danger

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
- Difficult 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 child 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 designated staff for safeguarding children – while recording of concerns is expected (CPOMS), these concerns should be **quickly** communicated to safeguarding staff.

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
- For older children, changes in clothing or image
- New attendance issues

Staff Roles in working with Children 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 child 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 child engaging in or suspected to be at risk of engaging in self-harm should consult one of the designated staff for safeguarding children.

Following the report, the designated safeguarding 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 child from lessons if remaining in class is likely to cause further distress to themselves or their peers
- **In the case of an acutely distressed child, the immediate safety of the student is paramount and an adult should remain with the child at all times**
- **If a student has self-harmed in school a first aider should be called for immediate help; serious self-harming should lead to the calling of medical services. Police and fire services may be required in specific incidents.**

8. Further Considerations

Any meetings with a child, 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 CPOMS file. Any written work around the case should be stored in the child's safeguarding file kept securely in the safeguarding cabinet.

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. These key messages will be transmitted via the school curriculum in relation to good mental and physical health.

The peer group of a child 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 teachers 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.