



Self-harm within schools; how can school staff respond?

Dr. Anne Stewart

Consultant Child & Adolescent Psychiatrist,
Oxford Health

Honorary Senior Clinical Lecturer, University
of Oxford

What I will cover

- Creating a supportive school culture
- The influence of the internet and social media
- Identifying self harm in schools
 - Communication and confidentiality
- Assessing risk and managing safety
- Contagion

Creating a supportive school culture



School ethos

Young people feel safe and respected
and enabled to develop their potential
(cognitively, physically, socially, emotionally)

Support for staff

Support for yp

Staff awareness

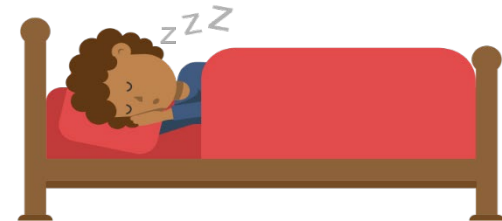
PHSE

**Communication with
parents**

Communication with other agencies

PHSE

- Importance of life skills
 - Managing stress
 - Resilience
 - Healthy eating
 - Social skills
 - Positive peer relationships
 - Problem-solving skills
 - Role of exercise
 - Sleep
 - Safe use of internet
 - Managing social media



The internet, social media and self-harm

- Summary of research
 - Internet and self-harm
 - What is out there?
 - Cyberbullying
 - Imagery and self-harm
 - Positive impacts
 - Support
 - Reduced social isolation
 - Understanding
 - Negative impacts
 - Encouragement to self-harm
 - Awareness of methods
 - Normalisation of self-harm



Singaravelu et al, 2015, Marchant et al 2017,
John et al 2018, Marchant et al 2021

Identifying self-harm

- Warning signs
 - Unexplained injuries, keeping self covered,
 - Becoming withdrawn, low mood, sudden change of behaviour, self-blame, hopelessness;
 - Explicit statements such as “I wish I wasn’t here, I am worthless”
- How to approach young people
 - Sharing concern, exploring
 - Trying to understand
 - Being clear about limits of confidentiality
- Functions of self-harm (Rasmussen, Hawton et al 2016)
 - Relieving tension/managing distress
 - Punishing self/others
 - Distraction from emotional pain/form of escape
 - Eliciting care
 - Identifying with a peer group,
 - Effort to regain control
 - may be SUICIDE ATTEMPT

Consider language in talking about self-harm

- Unhelpful language
 - Attention seeking
 - Just a cry for help
 - Failed suicide
 - Its not that serious
 - You're not thinking of doing something silly?
 - Commit suicide
- Helpful language
 - Can you tell me a bit more about how you are feeling
 - Take your time
 - Sounds like things are really hard
 - Have you felt like hurting yourself?
 - Have you felt that life is not worth living?

Confidentiality and parents

- Respect for confidentiality
- Young people's health, safety and welfare are paramount
- Involving safeguarding lead
- Information usually shared with parents
- Crucial to involve student
 - Work together where possible
 - Don't make promises you can't keep
- Work on a "need to know" basis

Research on parental experience of help and support including perspectives on support at school

- 37 parents interviewed
- Key areas of focus
 - How parents understand self-harm
 - Impact of self-harm on families
 - How parents experience support and treatment including **support from schools**
- Thematic analysis of transcripts

Hughes et al 2016, Stewart et al, 2016.
Healthtalk.org

Key themes

- Schools attitudes
- Support from school
- Confidentiality
- Communication with school
- Impact on education

“I had to pick her up and take her back and we did work very closely with school picking which lessons she would go in for and they were very good at giving her a flexible timetable and they were brilliant”

“they didn’t go frantic, they didn’t make a big thing...they just treated her as her and they talked to her about her interests and the, you know it was very much not the most important thing, it (self harm) was not the thing that was defining her at all”

“now we’re in a situation where she hasn’t been in the classroom properly for so long that it’s a real confidence thing to go back.”

Managing self-harm



- Immediate management
 - Management of physical injuries
 - Low threshold for calling emergency services
 - Listen to young person
 - Identify key member of staff who young person can talk to
 - Build up a full picture of yp's life
 - **All self-harm needs to be taken seriously**

Mental health

- Depression
- Hopelessness
- Behaviour change
- Low self-worth/self-hatred
- Expressing suicidal ideas

History

- Previous self-harm
- Self harm/suicide in friend/family member

Higher concern

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graph TD; MH[Mental health] --> HC[Higher concern]; H[History] --> HC; IC[Individual circumstances] --> HC; FC[Family circumstances] --> HC;
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Individual circumstances

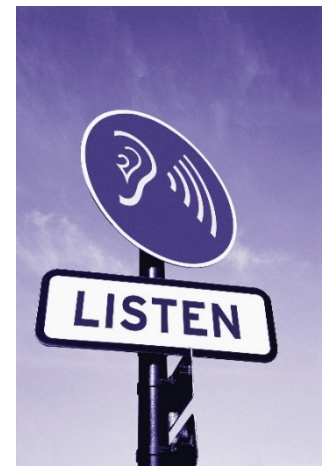
- Bullying
- Possible abuse/sexual exploitation
- Gender/sexual identity issues
- Drug misuse

Family circumstances

- Lack of family support
- Abusive family relationships
- Bereavement
- Access to lethal agents

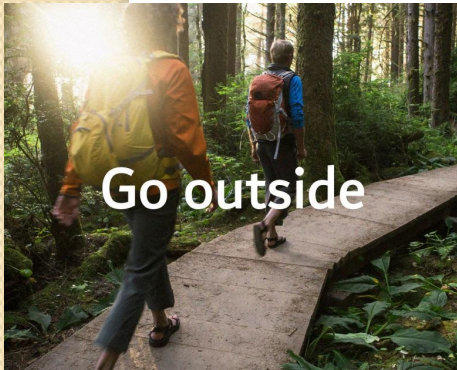
Next steps

- Listen to young person and keep them informed of any action
- Discuss with senior member of staff/safeguarding lead
- Consult with local CAMHS/school mental health team
- Create safety plan
 - Explore possible alternatives to self-harm
 - Ensure yp knows who to contact
- Involve parents
- Continue to support and listen
- Consider how stresses at school can be reduced
- Be mindful of peer group
- Continued contact with CAMHS
- Ensure staff are supported



Building support networks

Dealing with difficult emotions



Strategies to manage urges to self-harm

Distraction activities

Making the environment safe

Coping with symptoms of stress



Hope box

Contagion and peer groups

- Be observant
- Raise awareness of how students can get help
- Continue to provide individual support
- Encourage positive ways of managing stress
- Emphasise that it is normal to experience strong emotions at times
- Encourage mutual care and talking to staff member if students have concerns
- Be aware of suicide clusters protocol
 - Identifying and responding to suicide clusters: a practical resource www.gov.uk/phe/

Summary and key points

- Schools have a vital role in preventing, identifying and managing self harm
- Support needs to be accessible
- Important to identify those at most risk (this may change)
- Important to involve parents
- Close communication with other agencies crucial
- **Managing self-harm is a team effort.**

Resources

- **For schools**

- Coping with self-harm – guide for school staff (obtainable from Charlie Waller Centre)
- Building suicide-safer schools and colleges: a guide for teachers and staff (www.papyrus-uk.org)

- **Resources for parents:**

- Coping with self-harm: a guide for parents and carers (obtainable from Charlie Waller Centre)
- Healthtalk.org module on parents experience of self-harm
- The parents guide to self-harm Jane Smith Lion Hudson

- **App for young people**

- Bluelce app (needs to be prescribed by health professional)

