



Loreto College, Cavan

Self-Harm Policy

School Mission Statement:

As part of the family of Loreto schools, and in co-operation with parents and the community, we are dedicated to Catholic education. We aim to provide a balanced academic, pastoral and physical education for all our students, affording space for reflection and for learning through experience.

We seek to promote self-esteem, self-discipline and the goal of self-fulfilment and to foster in our students the virtues of courage, sincerity and truth.

Introduction

- Recent research indicates that Ireland has the fourth highest rate of youth suicide in Europe.
- Suicide is among the top 5 causes of mortality in the 15-19 year age group in Ireland.
- Self-harm is more prevalent among girls aged 10-17.
- Suicidal thoughts, rates of self-harm and suicide attempts were found to be higher among young people who did not seek help or talk about their problems.

This document describes the school's approach to self-harm while reflecting our core mission and values. This policy is intended as guidance for all staff including non-teaching staff.

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/ guardians.

Definition of Self-Harm

Self-harm is any behaviour where the intent is to deliberately cause harm to one's own body and is aimed at relieving emotional distress. Examples include:

- 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.

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/negative thought patterns
- Poor problem-solving skills
- Hopelessness/depression/anxiety
- Impulsivity
- Drug or alcohol abuse
- Perfectionism
- Mental Health issues

Family Factors

- Unreasonable expectations
- Neglect or physical, sexual or emotional abuse
- Poor parental relationships and arguments
- Depression, self-harm or suicide in the family
- Recent trauma e.g. death of relative or parental separation/divorce



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Social Factors

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

Warning Signs

School staff may become aware of warning signs which indicate a student is experiencing difficulties that may lead to thoughts of self-harm or suicide. These warning signs should **always** be taken seriously. Staff observing these warning signs should make a written referral to the Guidance Counsellor/Principal/Deputy Principal or contact a member of the Pastoral Care Team as soon as possible.

Possible warning signs include:

- Changes in eating / sleeping habits (e.g. student may appear overly-tired if not sleeping well, tearfulness, tense/uptight or decline in interest in appearance).
- 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/ lack of motivation/interest.
- Talking or joking about self-harm or suicide.
- Abusing drugs or alcohol, engaging in risk taking behaviour.
- Expressing feelings of failure, uselessness or loss of hope.
- Changes in clothing/inappropriate clothing e.g. really covered up in hot weather etc.
- Avoiding changing for PE or avoiding PE/physical activity altogether
- Bald patches in their hair

Suicide

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

Staff Roles in working with students 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 a student disclosing such information, 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, open and gentle attitude – a student who has chosen to discuss their concerns with a member of school staff is showing a considerable amount of courage and trust.

Listen carefully to the student.

Do not ask to see the injuries.

Record what has been said.

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 student engaging in or suspected to be at risk of engaging in self-harm should consult the Guidance Counsellor/Principal/D.P. or a member of the Pastoral Care Team (pass on written recorded notes and always give as much information as possible).

Following the report, the Pastoral Care Team will decide on the appropriate course of action. This may include:

- Contacting Parents / Guardians to make them aware of concerns
- Arranging an appointment with the School Counsellor.
- Immediately removing the student from class if their remaining in class is likely to cause further distress to themselves or their peers
- In the case of an acutely distressed student, the immediate safety of the student is paramount and an adult should remain with the student at all times
- If a student has self-harmed in school a staff member qualified in First Aid should be called for immediately.



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Further Considerations

Any meetings with a student, their parents or their peers regarding self-harm should be recorded in writing including:

- Dates and times
- Concerns raised
- Details of anyone else who has been informed
- An Action Plan

The information should be stored in the Deputy Principal's office.

All students must be encouraged to let Teachers 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 and being a good friend. They should also be aware that their friend will be treated in a caring and supportive manner i.e. this is not a discipline issue.

The peer group of a young person 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 the Principal/Guidance Counsellor.

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 there is a contagion element to self-harm.

Parents

All Parents are encouraged to endorse the School's approach to Self-Harm education and Pastoral Care and work in partnership with the School.

SPHE

All Teachers of SPHE are asked to discuss the points below with their class at least once each year during their work on Mental Health and Wellbeing. Teachers may also be asked to cover this periodically if deemed necessary by the Pastoral Care Team.

1. This policy was adopted by the Board of Management on _____(date).
2. This policy has been made available to school personnel and has been published on the school website.
3. This policy and its implementation will be reviewed by the Board of Management regularly.

Approved by BoM on 22nd October 2018



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Self-Harm Policy Appendix

Mental Health and Wellbeing

Self-Harm: Points to be covered in SPHE.

Whether you or someone you know is involved in self-harm please consider the following points;

- Ensure all wounds are cared for and bandaged appropriately. Do not display fresh or open wounds in School.
- When speaking about self-harm focus on the emotional reasons behind the distress and not on the injury itself.
- Avoid talking graphically about your injuries to other students or describing the methods you use.
- Never encourage anyone to try self-harming for themselves.
- When under emotional distress, or feeling the urge to self-harm in school, speak to a teacher/staff member as soon as possible.
- Discuss with the Guidance Counsellor/staff member any additional support you feel you may need while you are going through emotional distress.
- Be aware that every staff member in Loreto College is here to support you. The more you can talk to them the better able they will be to give you the support and help you need.
- Endeavour to seek fun and laughter every day.
- If you are worried that a friend may be self-harming, talk to a teacher/staff member for support and guidance.
- If you are concerned that a friend may be suicidal, or has mentioned suicide, then alert a teacher/staff member straight away.