

Section 9 Multi-agency self-harm decision-making guidance 'do's and don'ts' /information for practitioners/Important contacts

Protective and supportive action is the general approach to be taken.

What matters for many young people is having someone to talk to, a trusted adult, who will take them seriously. Previous studies have found that most people want to be able to talk about self-harm and help young people but do not have the language/vocabulary to communicate effectively.

A supportive response demonstrates respect and understanding together with a non-judgmental stance, focusing on the person, not what they have said or done. Try to find out about not only the risks and vulnerabilities but also about any particular strengths and protective factors (see Section 1 of the Toolkit).

Remember, most young people who self-harm do not have mental health problems – they are feeling overwhelmed. They have no other means of managing their emotions. They also feel shame and stigma – it may not be easy for them to talk about it.

Do	Don't
Listen and care. This is the most important thing you can do. It might not seem much, but showing that you want to know and understand can make a lot of difference. They may find it more helpful if you focus on their feelings, and this shows that you understand that, at that time, self-harm works for them when nothing else can.	Tell them off (e.g. this behaviour is wrong') or punish them in some way. This can make the person feel even worse, so could lead to more self-injury.
Accept mixed feelings. They might hate their self-harm, even though they might need it. It helps if you accept all of these changing and conflicting feelings.	Jump in with assumptions about why they are self-harming. Different people have different reasons, and it's best to let them tell you why they do it.
Help them find further support. They may need help in addition to what you can give - you can support and encourage them in finding this.	Blame them for your shock and/or upset. You have a right to feel these things, but it will not help if you make them feel guilty about it.
Show concern for their injuries. If the person shows you a fresh injury, offer the appropriate help in the same way as if it was an accident. Don't overreact just because it is self-inflicted.	Treat them as mad or incapable. This takes away their self-respect and ignores their capabilities and strengths.
Voice any concerns you have. Make sure you also listen to their feelings about what they want to happen. Work out together a way of taking care of their health and safety.	Try to force them to stop self-harming. Doing things like hiding razor blades or constantly watching them doesn't work and is likely to lead to harming in secret, which can be more dangerous.
Recognise how hard it may be for them to talk to you. It may take a lot of courage for them to discuss their self-harm and feelings, and it may be difficult for them to put things into words. Gentle, patient encouragement can help.	Panic and overreact. This can be very frightening for the person. It is better to try and stay calm and take time to discuss with them what they would like you to do for them or the next steps they'd like to take.



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Help them find alternatives to self-harm (there are lots of distracting techniques in section 4 of the Toolkit)	Avoid talking about self-harm. It won't make it go away but will leave them feeling very alone
	Ask them to promise not to self-harm. This will not work but is likely to put a lot of emotional pressure and can set them up to feel guilty.

Simple things you can say:

'I've noticed that you seem bothered/worried/preoccupied/ troubled. What has happened?'

'I've noticed that you have been hurting yourself. What has happened to you?'

Conversation prompts	
Topic	Possible prompt questions
Confidentiality	"I appreciate that you may tell me this in confidence, but it's important that I let you know that your safety will always be more important than confidentiality. If I am sufficiently worried that you may be feeling unsafe or at risk of hurting yourself, part of my job is to let other people who can help you know what's going on, but I will always have that discussion with you before and let you know what the options are so that we can make these decisions together."
Starting the conversation/ establishing rapport	"Let's see how we can work this out together. I may not have the skills to give you the help you need, but we can find that help for you together if you would like." Use active listening - for example: "Can I just check with you that I have understood that correctly?"
The nature of the self-harm	"Where on your body do you usually self-harm?" "What are you using to self-harm?" "Have you ever hurt yourself more than you meant to?" "What do you do to care for the wounds?" "Have your wounds ever become infected?" "Have you ever seen a doctor because you were worried about a wound?"
Reasons for self-harm	"I wonder if anything specific has happened to make you feel like this or whether there are several things that are going on at the moment? Can you tell me a little more?" For example, peer relationships, bullying, exam pressure, difficulties at home, relationship break-up or substance misuse or abuse.
Coping strategies and support	"Is there anything that you find helpful to distract you when you are feeling like self-harming? Perhaps listening to music, playing on your phone, texting a friend, spending time with your family, reading or going for a walk?"



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	<p>"I can see that things feel very difficult for you at the moment, and I'm glad that you have felt able to talk to me. Is there anyone else that you have found helpful to talk to before, or is there anyone you think may be good to talk to? How would you feel about letting them know what's going on for you at the moment?"</p> <p>"How could we make things easier for you at school?"</p> <p>"What feels like it is causing you the most stress at the moment?"</p> <p>"What do you think would be most helpful?"</p>
Speaking to parents (where appropriate)	<p>"I understand that it feels really hard to think about telling your parents, but I am really concerned about your safety, and this is important. Would it help if we did this together? Do you have any thoughts about what could make it easier to talk to your parents?"</p>
Ongoing support	<p>"Why don't we write down a plan that we have agreed together? Then you will always have a copy that you can look at if you need to remind yourself about anything. Sometimes when you are feeling low or really want to self-harm, it is difficult to remember the things you have put in place - this can help remind you".</p>

Overall, the [ROAR Response](#) needs to be at the forefront when supporting children and young people:

Recognising the signs and symptoms,
 Asking **O**pen questions (try to spot the **B**IG thought),
 Access support, services and self-care, and
 Building **R**esilience.



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Decision-making guidance

Remember: No two people self-harming are the same. Everyone self-harms for different reasons and with different intent. Most people who self-harm are not suicidal or a risk to other people. Every episode of self-harm should be treated individually.

If you come into contact with someone you know is, or believe to be self-harming...

Take advice from your manager and adopt a 'Team Around the Child' approach if:

- They do not appear distressed.
- They are cooperative, communicative and making good eye contact.
- Have a supportive, non-judgmental social network.
- They are talking positively about the future and have things they are looking forward to
- There was no suicidal intent behind the act of self-harm.

This would include completing an Early Help Assessment Tool (EHAT), which would then identify the child's needs and facilitate referral to any support services.

Get advice from a GP

- If you are in doubt about physical health needs as a result of self-harm.

Get advice from CAMHS (freephone 08081 963 550 or 0151 293 3577) if:

- You believe the child/young person was attempting to complete suicide.
- The child or young person thought the act of self-harm would result in serious injury.
- There has been an escalation in method from previous self-harm, i.e. cutting on a forearm has moved to cutting near arteries.
- You believe a child or young person has a plan in place to end their life, and there is a possibility they could act on this.

Refer to Children's Social Care if:

- The child and/or family have serious or complex social needs which need further assessment or intervention.
- There is an indication or suspicion that abuse or exploitation may be present.
- Support around the child and family is failing to reduce the risk for the child.

Take to A&E or call an ambulance if:

- It is reported to you, or you have observed a child overdosing or ligaturing.
- You believe the child/young person requires medical attention due to uncontrollable bleeding.
- You believe there is a possible risk to life as a result of self-harm.
- You believe a child or young person has a plan in place to end their life, and there is a likelihood they will act on this.

Call the police if:

- You think a child or young person is at imminent risk of suicide.

If ever you are in doubt, you have a duty to safeguard the young person, and CAMHS are there to give you support and advice. This does not mean they will assess every young person face to face but will support you in decision making where required.



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Important Local Contacts

SCHOOL/ AEP/ ORGANISATION SAFEGUARDING LEAD	Please update with local numbers here
School nurse (usually contactable through school or college)	
Education Mental Health Team (schools only)	Contact YPAS clinical admin 0151 707 1025, or you can contact your MHST Lead/EMHP (primary schools)/Wellbeing clinic practitioner (secondary schools) directly
CAMHS Single Point of Access/24/7 Crisis Line	Freephone 08081 963 550 or 0151 293 3577
Mersey Care 24/7 Crisis Line	Freephone 0800 145 6570
Young Persons Advisory Service YPAS	0151 707 1025
Gay Youth Project GYRO	0151 707 1025
Careline Children's Services	0151 233 3700
Merseyside Police	Non-urgent 101 Emergency 999
Health	Non-urgent 111 Emergency 999
Liverpool Safeguarding Children Partnership (LSCP) https://liverpoolscp.org.uk/scp	Local procedures, including: Responding to Need Guidance and Multi-Agency referral Form MARF
Own agency useful contacts:	

