



SELF-HARM POLICY

Introduction

Recent research in the UK 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 pupils, peers and parents of pupils currently engaging in self-harm.

What is Self Harm?

Self-harm is any deliberate, non-suicidal behaviour that inflicts physical harm on someone's own body and is aimed at relieving emotional distress. Suicidal behaviour is covered in ECiM's Suicide Prevention policy. Although self-harm often lacks suicidal intent, youth who engage in self-harm are more likely to attempt suicide.

This may include:

- Cutting, scratching, scraping or picking skin
- Swallowing inedible objects
- Taking an overdose of prescription or non-prescription drugs (without suicidal intent)
- Swallowing hazardous materials or substances
- Burning or scalding
- Hair-pulling
- Banging or hitting the head or other parts of the body
- Deliberate bone-breaking/spraining
- Scouring or scrubbing the body excessively

Purpose

This policy aims to address the issue of self-harm, in particular how:

- to increase understanding and awareness of self-harm;
- to alert staff to warning signs and risk factors;
- to deal with pupils who self-harm and how to offer support in the short and long-term;
- to provide support to parents/guardians depending upon the individual needs of the pupil;

- to help all pupils improve their self-esteem and emotional well-being;
- how to support staff members who come into contact with people who self-injure and to prevent self-harm from spreading within the school;
- to have clear guidelines for staff – who needs to be informed, when do parents need to be informed and outside agencies; and
- to education about self-harm for pupils and staff through the PSD programme.

Epsom College in Malaysia:

- recognizes that physical, behavioural, and emotional health is an integral component of a pupil's educational outcomes, overall development and success;
- has an ethical responsibility to take a proactive approach in preventing self-harm by providing a safe and supportive environment for pupils, and
- is committed to take an active role in early recognition of self-harm by providing staff training on knowledge, facts and procedures.

Toward this end, the policy is meant to be applied and interpreted within the context of other policies supporting the emotional, mental and behavioural health of pupils, in particular the Child Protection, Health and Safety and Behaviour Policies.

Creating an Environment which reduces Self-harm

ECiM is committed to the creation of a school environment that helps to build protective factors within our pupils and school community that will reduce the risk of a pupil resorting to self-harm. This includes activities, policies and programs that help to build:

- connectedness - a sense of belonging with others and connectedness to our school;
- resilience - the development of capacities within a person that promote positive outcomes, including personal coping skills and strategies for dealing with adversity, such as problem- solving, communication and social skills, optimistic thinking and help seeking.; and
- a sense of personal safety and belonging - through the implementation of our Anti-Bullying Policy.

Knowledge & Awareness of Suicidal Behaviour and Prevention

ECiM is committed to training ECiM staff to build and maintain awareness and knowledge on self-harm:

- ECiM provides internal basic training to staff on warning signs, protective factors, response procedures and after-care. Staff members are encouraged to actively observe and keep an eye out for warning signs;
- staff members are informed on/have access to the Self-Harm procedures at ECiM: and
- procedures are in place for medical emergency treatment. Medical staff is trained to recognize warning-signs, act on these in a calm and non-judgemental matter and provide basic medical emergency treatment and aftercare in case of self-harm.

Risk Factors

The following risk factors, particularly in combination, may make a young person particularly vulnerable to self-harm:

- mental health disorders including depression and eating disorders;
- drug/alcohol abuse, and other risk-taking behaviour;
- recent trauma e.g. death of relative, parental divorce;
- negative thought patterns, anxiety and low self-esteem;
- bullying Abuse – sexual, physical and emotional;
- social factors – loneliness, difficulty in making relationships;
family factors – unreasonable expectations, neglect or abuse, poor relationships or a history of self-harm/suicide in the family; and
- sudden changes in behaviour and academic performance.

Warning Signs

School staff may become aware of warning signs which indicate a pupil is experiencing difficulties that may lead to thoughts of self-harm. These warning signs should **always** be taken seriously and staff observing any of these warning signs should seek further advice from the *College Counsellor*. Possible warning signs include:

- regular bandaged wrists or arms , regular use of cardigans, jackets to cover up or refusal to use PE shorts / withdrawal from swimming;
- obvious cuts, burns or scratches (that don't look like accidents).

other signs to watch out for are:

- changes in eating / sleeping habits (e.g. pupil may appear overly tired);
- 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; and
- a change in physical appearance e.g. less groomed.

Roles and responsibilities of staff and governors:

The Headmaster will:

- appoint a designated teacher to be responsible for self-harm matters, and liaise with them. This person is the Deputy Head (Pastoral) or equivalent;
- ensure that the designated person(s) receive appropriate training about self-harm. Ensure that the self-harm policy is followed by all members of staff.

The Governing body will:

- decide whether self-harm education should be in the school curriculum, and how it should be addressed;
- ensure that education about self-harm neither promotes nor stigmatises;
- look at provisions for people who self-harm, such as long-sleeved uniforms and PE kits, and time out of lessons when under intense stress.

The College Nurses will:

College Nurses are trained on warning signs and procedures and are expected to:

- watch for signs of self-harm during regular medical check-ups, respond in a calm and non-judgmental matter and follow ECiM self-harm procedures.
- follow up according to ECiM Self-harm procedure.

College Counsellors:

College Counsellors are expected to:

- provide yearly training on self-harm and emotional management skills to staff members;
- promote and teach use of emotional management skills to pupils in counselling; and
- provide self-harm and suicide risk assessment when self-harm is expected.

All staff and teachers are expected to:

- listen to pupils in emotional distress calmly and in a non-judgmental way;
- report self-harm to the pupil's HMM/Head of Prep and the Deputy Head Pastoral;
- be clear of the timescale in which this is expected;
- not make promises (e.g. assuring confidentiality) which can't be kept;
- reassure pupils that in order to seek health and happiness people need to know about their problems so that they can help;
- guide pupils towards seeking health and happiness;
- promote problem-solving techniques and non-harmful ways to deal with emotional distress;
- enable pupils to find places for help and support and provide accurate information about self-harm;
- widen their own knowledge about self-harm and mental health disorders;
- in the case of an acutely distressed pupil, the immediate safety of the pupil is paramount and an adult should remain with the pupil at all times.
- be aware of health and safety issues such as first-aid and clearing up if a self-injury incident take place at the College:
- be aware of their legal responsibilities – when they can help, and when they cannot.

The designated staff member(s) will:

- keep records of self-injury incidents and concerns and liaise closely with the Medical Centre health professionals, including a record of dates and times, an action plan, concerns raised and details of anyone else who has been informed;

- follow the procedures in place for a pupil who is expressing suicidal thoughts/feelings;
- liaise with multi-agencies about help available for people who self-harm;
- keep up-to-date with information about self-harm;
- liaise with the Headmaster and Designated Safeguarding Lead;
- contact parent and arrange a suitable meeting, involve the pupil in this process;
- inform the parent(s) about appropriate help and support for their child which is available;
- monitor the pupil's progress following an incident;
- know when people other than parents (e.g. social workers, educational psychologists) need to be informed;
- know when to seek help to deal with their own feelings and distress.

Pupils will be encouraged to:

- be aware of another pupil self-harming. The earlier this behaviour is identified and a responsible adult is made aware, the better. Even reporting any minor self-harming behaviour anonymously may be helpful;
- not display open wounds/injuries. These must be dressed appropriately;
- talk to the appropriate staff member if they are in emotional distress;
- take an active role in engaging an adult staff member whom they trust when recognizing signs of mental distress in peers.

Parents will be encouraged to:

- endorse the school's approach to self-harm education and pastoral care;
- work in partnership with the College;
- work with the College Medical Centre and external agencies involved in order to support the child by informing the *Medical health coordinator or HMM* if their child is (at risk of) self-harming, is currently self-harming or has engaged in self-harm in the past. This enables parents and ECiM to collaborate and decide upon the appropriate care needed;
- listen to their children in emotional distress calmly and in a non-judgmental way.
- enable their child to receive appropriate physical and mental health care needed. if parents refuse to engage the required treatment (medical or psychological), or there is any doubt regarding the pupils' safety, Epsom College in Malaysia will involve the *Child protection officer* and treat the situation as a child protection case.

Procedure following the reporting of a pupil self-harming:

The HMM will follow the appropriate course of action. This will include:

- if a pupil has self-harmed in school a School nurse will be called for immediate help;
- pupil will be immediately removed from lessons / activities if their remaining in class / activity is likely to cause further distress to themselves or their peers;
- after-care for pupils / friends / peers, involving Tutors and HMMs who witnessed a self-harm event or who are otherwise distressed by the event. The College counsellor and involved staff will decide the appropriate course of action;

- An appointment with the College Counsellor or an external mental health professional is arranged asap to assess severity and risk of self-injurious behaviour and a suicide risk assessment is performed;
- If the assessment of the College Counsellor or mental health professional shows that the pupil might be in danger of harming him-or-herself in the future, parents are notified and invited in for a meeting with the HMM and College Counsellor. The aims are the provision of knowledge and understanding of self-harm, and to discuss how to create and maintain a supportive, appropriate environment for the pupil. Parents will be informed of their child's self-harm, unless there are significant reasons not to do so. When it is decided that parents cannot be informed about a child's self-harming because it will cause more harm to the welfare of the child then this could now become a child protection issue in which case it has to be documented and followed up by the child protection team as well as the counsellor working with the child. In general, in the event parents are not notified the reasons are documented in College counsellors' case notes and shared with College Counsellor / Deputy Head Pastoral during the weekly meeting. When the pupils engage in severe self-injury and require urgent medical attention, parents and emergency services are contacted immediately.
- The College Counsellor will set up a personal action plan to help the pupil identify and develop more adaptive coping strategies. HMM, College Counsellor and /or College Nurses will monitor pupil behavior for a brief time following a self-injury event. Physical wounds will be monitored by the College nurse.

Actions / procedure in the case of comments on self-harm (no actual self-harm):

- HMM informs Risk Response team
- HMM provides support to pupil and keeps an eye on pupil
- HMM possibility to see the College Counsellor with pupil
- HMM keeps College Counsellor informed of the pupil's wellbeing

Prevention of Contamination

Social contagion refers to the way in which a behavior such as self-injury can spread among members of a group. Social contagion is a possibility any time that other pupils become aware that someone among them is injuring.

To prevent social contagion:

- staff must reduce communication around self-injury. Pupils who self-injure should be advised not to explicitly talk with other pupils about engaging in the behavior;
- Staff should help self-injuring pupils to manage scars and wounds. Visible scars, wounds and cuts should be discouraged; and
- Pupils must not be given explicit details about self-injury. Staff members are encouraged to educate pupils about signs of distress in themselves and others, as well as teaching the use of positive coping skills.