



**HEDINGHAM SCHOOL  
AND SIXTH FORM**

# **A Parent's Guide What is Self-Harm?**



**The guidance contained in this leaflet is based on advice given on several respected websites and the Essex Safeguarding Children's Board.**

**If your child is at significant risk of harming themselves, you must contact professionals. The school can support you in doing this or you can self-refer. Either way, please keep your child's Head of House and Safeguarding Lead informed at the school.**

## **If your child is at immediate, significant risk:**

- Phone 999.
- Take Your Child to Accident & Emergency at your nearest hospital.

## **If your child is at risk:**

- Take your child to your GP.
- Phone Emotional Wellbeing and Mental Health Service. (EWMHS) 0300 300 1600 *option 4*
- Out of hours 03005551201.
- You can also contact EWMHS via email at EWMHS@nelft.nhs.uk.

## **Useful Websites**

<http://www.nelft.nhs.uk/services-ewmhs>

Young Minds – 0808 – 5544 [www.youngminds.org.uk](http://www.youngminds.org.uk) .

Google Search – Childline Self-Harm.

Samaritans – Call 116 123

## **Support for Parents**

The school has summarised advice and guidance from leading websites on self-harm to support you and your child. However, the school are not experts in mental health and if in doubt, please contact EWMHS.

## **Why do people self-harm?**

- To deal with distressing experiences and difficult emotions. Young people self-harm when they feel overwhelmed, exposed, anxious, stressed, angry or unable to cope.
- To enlist help or concern.
- Self-harm is a way of expressing their distress non-verbally.
- To keep people away by making themselves unattractive to others.

## **How Do I Spot The Signs?**

*Self-harm may begin in response to a range of issues including the below:*

- Family relationship difficulties (the most common trigger for younger adolescents).
- Difficulties with peer relationships e.g. break-up of relationship (the most common trigger for older adolescents).
- Bullying.
- Significant trauma e.g. bereavement.
- Self-harm behaviour in other young people (contagion effect).
- Self-harm portrayed or reported in the media.
- Difficult times of the year e.g. anniversaries.
- Exam pressure.
- Times of change e.g. parental separation/divorce.

## Things to look out for:

It may be hard to know if someone is self-harming as there may not be any warning signs. However, some changes in behaviour that could occur include:

- Changes in eating/sleeping habits.
- Increased isolation from friends/family.
- Changes in activity and mood e.g. more aggressive than usual.
- Lowering of academic grades.
- Talking about self-harming.
- Expressing feelings of failure, uselessness or loss of hope.
- Giving away possessions.
- Risk taking behaviour (substance misuse, smoking, on-line activity, sexual acts).

## You and Your Child

It may sound obvious, but make sure your child knows you love them and are proud of them. Even when things are busy or stressful, and it feels like you are in survival mode, a word or a hug can reassure them a huge amount. Praise them for what they do well, and encourage them to try new things.

Be honest about your feelings - you don't have to be perfect. We all get things wrong and shout or say unkind things from time to time. If this happens, say sorry to your child afterwards and explain why it happened. They will learn from you that it's OK to make mistakes and that it doesn't make you a bad person.

Be clear about what is and isn't acceptable - and tell them why. Children need to know what is OK and what isn't, and what will happen if they cross the line. Follow through on what you say as otherwise they may get confused or stop respecting the boundaries.

Own your own role - you are the parent, so don't be afraid to take tough decisions. If your child sees you are scared of their reaction and always give in to them, it can make them feel very powerful, which can be frightening. Children need to know that you are there to keep them safe.

## Helping Your Child

Worrying or difficult behaviour might be short-lived, so give it some time. All children go through stages of feeling anxious or angry and they can show this in lots of ways, for example, tantrums, crying, sleeping problems or fighting with friends or siblings. They might be adapting to a change in the family or in their school life, or just trying out new emotions, and will generally grow out of worrying behaviour on their own or with family support.

Talk to your child: Even young children can understand about feelings and behaviour if you give them a chance to talk about it. Take it gently and give them examples of what you mean, for example, 'When you said you hated Molly, you looked really angry. What was making you so cross?' or 'When you can't get to sleep, is there

### **Helping Your Child cont..**

anything in your mind making you worried?’

With older children, they might not want to talk at first. Let them know you are concerned about them, and are there if they need you. Sending an email or a text can work better if this is the way your child likes to communicate.

Ask your child what they think would help - they often have good ideas about solving their own problems.

If you can, talk to your child's other parent about your worries, when the child is not around. They might have a different take on what is going on. Try to sort out how to deal with the behaviour together so you are using the same approach, and can back each other up. Children are quick to spot if parents disagree, and can try to use this to get their own way.

The young person may wish to have new strategies to manage some of their difficult feelings. Talking to someone or distracting themselves e.g. by listening to music, writing in a diary or using ice cubes are common strategies.

### **Safety Advice**

- Be cool, calm and collective in the face of any risky talk, risky information or risky acts to encourage sharing and increasing the ability to take proactive action.
- Hide or lock away any dangerous objects e.g. sharps/ tablets/ ropes/ toxic substances or liquids etc.
- Have a low threshold for calling the ambulance/ police if necessary.
- Take to A&E for assessment at any time if you can't safely and confidently manage at home.
- All social media should be supervised through tracking software, sharing passwords and not allowing phones in the room. There are some very influential and dangerous sites in the cyber world which your child should not be accessing.

**If in doubt, seek advice from your school and your GP. Find out more about self-harm on the websites listed on this leaflet. Contact Emotional Wellbeing and Mental Health Service. (EWMHS) or Essex Children's Safeguarding Board  
0345 603 7627**