

# Apple Trees Club

## Self Harm and Eating Disorder Policy and Guidance

### Introduction

Recent research 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. Apple Trees Club staff can play an important role in preventing self-harm and also in supporting children, peers and parents of students currently engaging in self-harm.

### Scope

This document describes the Apple Trees Club approach to self-harm. This policy is intended as guidance for all 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 children who self-harm
- To provide support to children who self-harm and their peers and parents/carers

### Definition of Self-Harm

Self-harm is any behaviour where the intent is to deliberately cause harm to one's own body for example:

- 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 child or young person particularly vulnerable to self-harm:

- Depression / anxiety
- Poor communication skills

- Low self-esteem
- Poor problem-solving skills
- Hopelessness
- Impulsivity
- Drug or alcohol abuse
- Family Factors
- Unreasonable expectations
- Neglect or physical, sexual or emotional abuse
- Poor parental relationships and arguments
- Depression, self-harm or suicide in the family
- Social Factors
- Difficulty in making relationships / loneliness
- Being bullied or rejected by peers

### **Warning Signs**

Apple Trees Club staff may become aware of warning signs which indicate a child is experiencing difficulties that may lead to thoughts of self-harm or suicide. These warning signs should always be taken seriously and staff observing any of these warning signs should seek further advice from the Designated Safeguarding Officer (Debs Powell). Possible warning signs include:

- Changes in eating / sleeping habits (e.g. a child may appear overly tired if not sleeping well)
- Increased isolation from friends or family, becoming socially withdrawn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
- Changes in clothing or dress style

## **Staff Roles in working with a child who self-harms**

A child may choose to confide in a member of Apple Trees staff if they are concerned about their own welfare, or that of a peer. Staff may experience a range of feelings in response to self-harm in a student such as anger, sadness, shock, disbelief, guilt, helplessness, disgust and rejection. However, in order to offer the best possible help to a child it is important to try and maintain a supportive and open attitude – a child who has chosen to discuss their concerns with a member of Apple Trees staff is showing a considerable amount of courage and trust. The child needs to be made aware that it may not be possible for staff to offer complete confidentiality. If you consider a child 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 child puts pressure on you to do so. Any member of staff who is aware of a child engaging in or suspected to be at risk of engaging in self-harm should consult the Designated Safeguarding Officer (Debs Powell).

Following the report, the Designated Safeguarding Officer will decide on the appropriate course of action. This may include:

- Contacting parents / carers
- Arranging professional assistance e.g. doctor, nurse, social services
- Arranging an appointment with a counsellor
- Immediately removing the child from the play room if their remaining is likely to cause further distress to themselves or their peers
- In the case of an acutely distressed child, the immediate safety of the child is paramount and an adult should remain with the child at all times
- If a child has self-harmed at Apple Trees Club, a first aider should be called for immediate help

## **Further Considerations**

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

- Dates and times
- An action plan
- Concerns raised
- Details of anyone else who has been informed. This information should be stored in the Children's Records.

It is important to encourage children to let you 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 & being a good friend. They should also be aware that their friend will be treated in a caring and supportive manner. The peer group of a child or 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 Designated Safeguarding Officer. When a child or young person is self-harming it is important to be vigilant in case close contacts with the individual are also self-harming.

## Useful Resources and Helplines

**Childline** – 24 helpline for children and young people. 0800 1111 (free phone from landlines) or 0800 400 222 (text phone). [www.childline.org.uk](http://www.childline.org.uk)

**Young Minds** – national charity committed to improving the mental health of children and young people. Interactive website for advice and information. [www.youngminds.org.uk](http://www.youngminds.org.uk)

**Recover Your Life** – Self-harm support community providing support and advice to those seeking to recover from self-harm. [www.recoveryourlife.com](http://www.recoveryourlife.com)

**National self-harm network** – support for individuals who self-harm, friends and family. 0800 622 6000 (Thursday – Saturday 7 p.m. – 11 p.m., Sunday 6.30 p.m. – 10.30 p.m.) [www.nshn.co.uk](http://www.nshn.co.uk)

**Substance Advice Service (SAS)** – provides confidential advice and support to young people who are concerned about their alcohol or drug use. 01275 888 360 59-61 Oxford Street, Weston-Super-Mare, BS23 1TR.

This policy was adopted by:	Date: November 2019
To be reviewed:	Signed: