

GUIDELINES FOR COPING WITH SELF-HARM AT SCHOOL

These guidelines follow the school pedagogical project **8 Life Skills**, which aspires to provide students not just with academic skills but also life skills to employ throughout their lives. It encourages a way of life characterized by being considerate, cooperative, honest, hopeful, self-controlled, perseverant, critically-minded and tolerant. The key word is TRUST. Trust in handling also difficult issues, trust in our approach, trust in finding help when needed.

Key facts about self-harm

Self-harm means when somebody intentionally damages or injures their body, usually by scratching, cutting, bruising, or burning the skin. It is a sign of mental distress and often an attempt to cope with emotional pain. It usually starts in teenage years and decreases towards adulthood. It is estimated that worldwide about 10 to 20 % of people engage in self-harm during their lifetime. Although most of the self-harming persons have no suicidal intentions, there is evidence of an increased suicide risk among the people who self-harm. Self-harm can also be related to other mental disorders.

Guidelines to follow

With students who self-harm it is essential to find the right support and treatment to help them deal with the primary cause of their emotional distress in a healthier way. Early intervention can help solve the problems and prevent things from getting worse.

Dealing with self-harm in a school setting is a delicate issue that requires sensitivity, empathy, and knowledge of appropriate procedures. Here are some general guidelines to follow:

For students who self-harm

- **Talk to someone** you trust to find support and understanding: a family member, a friend, a teacher, educational adviser, guidance team member...
- **Seek for professional help**: the school nurses and the school psychologists are there to help you. Specialised medical and psychotherapeutic care are available outside school. Talk to your parents about your needs.
- If you need instant **medical care** for your injuries, do not hesitate to go to the infirmary.
- Remember that **you are not alone** with your problems and that things will get better with appropriate care and time.
- **Look for healthy coping strategies** to replace self-harm behavior: this could be things like exercise, art, music, writing or spending time with your friends and family.

- **Take care of yourself:** get enough sleep, eat well, and engage in activities that bring you joy.

For students who encounter a self-harming schoolmate

- **Listen to them calmly** without anger or moral judgement.
- **Give them your time** and show that you **care**.
- Help them to think about their self-harm not as a shameful secret but as **a problem to be sorted out together**.
- Help and **encourage them to get support** and talk to a trusted adult: school nurse, teacher, adviser, Guidance Team member..., propose to go with them to see someone.
- As a friend, **do not take it all on your shoulders, talk to a trusted adult who can help:** educational adviser, teacher, Guidance Team member... Be aware that you cannot solve it alone. Your friend needs professional help.
- **Keep confidentiality**, respect the student's privacy, and trust the follow-up to adults and professionals.
- Make sure you **get some support for yourself**.

For staff members

1. **Recognize the signs:** unexplained cuts, bruises, or burns, wearing clothing that covers the arms or legs even in warm weather, change of mood or increased anxiety, frequent or sudden absences from school, sometimes carrying sharp objects with them.

2. **Approach the student and listen actively:** if you suspect that a student is engaging in self-harm, approach the student in a non-judgmental and caring manner. The student should be given the opportunity to talk about their feelings and concerns in a safe and supportive environment. Acknowledge their feelings without judgement. Avoid blaming or shaming the student, and instead focus on expressing empathy and concern.

3. **Assess the urgency:**

a) **If first aid is needed** (bleeding or infected injuries) or if there is an elevated risk of a new act of self-harm, bring the student to the infirmary.

b) **Refer to the school psychologist** who can help them get appropriate treatment and support. This referral should be made in a timely manner and with the student's consent.

4. **Informing parent(s)/guardian(s):** they need to know, and their cooperation is needed to organise support and external help for the child. The school nurses, the psychologists or the educational advisers will invite the parent(s)/guardian(s) to school to inform them of the situation and involve them in the support plan.

5. **Be transparent:** tell the student in advance with whom you need to talk about the issue.
6. **Contact the Care Team, they will develop a support plan.** Once the student is receiving treatment outside the school, the school psychologist stays connected with the mental health professional to help the student.

7. **Maintain confidentiality** throughout the process. The student's privacy should be respected, and information should only be shared with the Care Team and other trusted people involved. However, it is also important to balance confidentiality with the need to ensure the student's safety and well-being.

Disciplinary notice

Separate from the primary support and care, sometimes disciplinary actions also need to be taken parallelly. Bringing sharp objects to school is, for example, not allowed. It might lead to disciplinary sanction.

Contacts at EEB2

Nurses: WOL-INFIRMERIE@eursc.eu, tel. 02 774 22 15

School psychologists:

- Anne Delorme: anne.delorme@eursc.eu, tel. 02 774 22 33
- Simina Turcu: simina.turcu@eursc.eu, tel. 02 774 22 62

Educational advisers:

- S1 02 774 22 71
- S2 02 774 22 72
- S3 02 774 22 73
- S4 02 774 22 74
- S5 02 774 22 75
- S6 02 774 22 76
- S7 02 774 22 77

Guidance Team:

Group of voluntary teachers and educational advisers who are skilled in coaching and listening to students in each linguistic section. See members in posters at school or on the school website or contact WOL-GUIDANCE@eursc.eu.

Contacts outside school

Cliniques universitaires Saint-Luc, Avenue Hippocrate 10, 1200 Brussels

- Emergencies: Tel. (24h/24): 02 764 16 02
- Child and adolescent psychiatry department: Tel. 02 764 20 30

CHU Saint-Pierre

- Emergencies: rue Haute 290, 1000 Brussels. Tel. 02 535 36 39
- Child psychiatry, 105 rue aux Laines Porte de Hal, 1000 Brussels. Tel. 02 535 45 26

103 – Ecoute Enfants (for children, youth, and parents) 7/7 (10:00-24:00)

02 648 40 14 - Community Help Centre Helpline 24/7

0800 32 123 – Centre de prévention du suicide 24/7

1813 - Zelfmoordlijn 24/7

112 - Emergency number

Students can also upload on their phone an app called Calm Harm. It helps young people to manage or resist the urge to self-harm. More information on the website: <https://calmharm.co.uk/>

Further reading

<https://www.nhs.uk/mental-health/feelings-symptoms-behaviours/behaviours/self-harm/why-people-self-harm/>

<https://www.crisistextline.org/topics/self-harm/#how-to-deal-with-self-harm-4>

<https://thewishcentre.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2020/09/Self-Harm-Dos-Donts.pdf>

<https://www.mind.org.uk/information-support/types-of-mental-health-problems/self-harm/helping-yourself-now/>