**39. Self harm and Suicide**

**What is Self-harm?**

Self-harm is when you hurt yourself on purpose. You usually do it because something else feels wrong. It seems like the only way to let those feelings out.

The overall aim of PlayStation Nursery is to ensure that staff are able to recognise and act swiftly and appropriately to any cases of self-harm with the children under our provision

**Staff will be trained to:**

• Recognise any form of self-harm or mutilation

• Understand that self-harming is almost always a symptom of some underlying emotional or psychological issue

• Put in place a framework for intervention

• Be alert to the possibility that self-harm may arise from a history of abuse.

**What is self-harm?**

Self-harm is any deliberate behaviour that inflicts physical harm on someone’s own body and is aimed at relieving emotional distress. Self-harm can include:

• cutting themselves

• scratching themselves

• burning or scalding their body

• banging and bruising themselves

• scrubbing or scouring their body

• deliberate bone-breaking

• punching themselves

• sticking things into their body

• taking too many tablets (overdose)

• excessively biting themselves

• pulling their hair or eye lashes out

**Less obvious self-harm behaviours include:**

• controlled eating patterns – anorexia, bulimia, over-eating

• getting into fights

Warning signs Self-harm may present as visible or invisible signs. The latter can include ingested materials or cuts/ bruises under the clothing. Staff and parents may become aware of warning signs that might indicate that a child is experiencing difficulties that my lead to self-harm or suicide. These warning signs should always be taken seriously and anyone observing any of these should seek further advice from the Designated Person for Child Protection. Warning signs may include:

• visible signs of injury (e.g. scarring)

• a change in dress habit that may be intended to disguise injuries (e.g. an unexpected / sudden change to wearing long sleeved tops)

• changes in eating or sleeping habits

• increased isolation from friends or family; becoming socially withdrawn

• changes in activity or mood (e.g. becoming more introverted or withdrawn)

• talking or joking about self-harm or suicide

• expressing feelings of failure, uselessness or loss of hope

• changes in clothing/image

**Links to emotional distress (including abuse)**

Those who self-harm are usually suffering emotional or psychological distress and it is vital that all such distress is taken seriously to assist in alleviating that distress or to minimise the risk of increasing distress and potentially suicide. Any young person who suggests they are experiencing suicidal feelings must be taken extremely seriously and safeguarding procedures put in place immediately; a young person showing this level of distress must NOT be left unattended. Emotional/psychological risk factors associated with self-harm can be:

• recent trauma e.g. death of a friend or relative, parental divorce

• negative thought patterns and low self-esteem

• bullying

• abuse – sexual, physical, emotional or through neglect

• sudden changes in behaviour and/or academic performance

• relationship difficulties (with family or friends)

• learning difficulties

• issues around sexuality

Other causal or risk factors

• inappropriate advice or encouragement from internet websites or chat-rooms

• experimentation, ‘dares’ or bravado, ‘copycat behaviour’

• a history of abuse of self-harming in the family

• parental separation

• domestic abuse and/or substance misuse in the home

• issues surrounding religious or cultural identity

All practitioners are confidential listeners who will not judge children or their families. All information shared by a child will be documented; each individual case and approach needs to be handled carefully and sympathetically to support the wellbeing of the young person. The decision about involving parents/guardians should be taken in consultation with the child protection officer. In the case of severe self-harm requiring medical intervention/A&E, parents will be informed immediately. In a situation in which it is disclosed that self-harm is symptomatic of abuse in the home, the Designated Person may take the decision to make a referral directly to the appropriate authority without informing the parents. Where parents are informed, they will be encouraged to work in partnership with PlayStation and the supporting outside agencies in supporting the child through this difficult time.

In some cases, self-harm may raise safeguarding issues in which case the procedures laid down in the nursery’s *Safeguarding and Child Protection Policy* must be followed.

If any member of staff has any concerns about confidentiality issues they should take advice from the manager or deputy manager if she is unavailable. As stated in the Safeguarding and Child Protection Policy, staff must not promise confidentiality, but reassure the child that only those people who need to know will be informed for their safety.

If physical self-harm has occurred within the setting the child’s parents will be contacted to gain medical advice (In an emergency an ambulance must be called).

Matters of self-harm / mutilation may be raised by any member of staff and could be referred in the first instance to a room leader or house leader. However, it is that person’s responsibility to refer the matter to the manager or Deputy manager

If a member of staff becomes aware of or is alerted to a self-harming issue, or a child discloses self-harm, s/he is advised to treat the matter as a safeguarding and child protection issue in the first instance and follow the procedures set out in the Safeguarding and Child Protection Policy. It is safer to do this, including making a written report, even if the incident eventually turns out to be an isolated one that was not indicative of a serious underling emotional or abusive cause.

**Advice to parents**

Parents should not feel isolated if they know or suspect that their child (or one of their child’s friends) is at risk or is actually self-harming. The advice contained within this policy provides a first source of useful information and guidance. If a parent has any concerns they should contact the Nursery immediately for help, support and advice. A child’s Key person, room leader, house leader or managers may be approached, or the Nursery’s Designated Person for Child Protection (Ruth).

**Self-harm and suicide in practitioners, apprentices, students, parents**

**Students**

In the event of a student attending the setting and concerns arising over their safety and welfare in the matter of self-harming or mutilation, the school will be contacted. Confidentiality of the situation will be upheld and it will not be discussed within the team of staff at PlayStation. The situation will be followed up to ensure that the student is getting the required support or help.

**Staff/parents**

In the event of a staff member or parent disclosing actual self-harm or suicidal thoughts a manager or trusted superior to the person will arrange a meeting, the staff member/parent will be advised that they can bring anyone they wish to the meeting for support or they can come alone. Ideally, actions will be agreed between you, but there may be occasions where concern over welfare dictates and we must act without the employee/parent’s agreement. ART would be contacted to gain advice on further actions. This may include calling an ambulance for an employee/parent displaying active suicidal behaviour or if there is evidence that a suicidal act (e.g. overdose) has already been carried out. In the event of voiced intent to cause physical harm to another, the police should be called.

**Additional signs to be aware of**

• Changes in a person’s usual behaviour (this may include withdrawal from colleagues, and evidence of preoccupation)

• Irritability (for example with you or colleagues)

• Evidence of alcohol or illicit drug use inside or outside work

• Tearfulness

• Rapid changes of emotion

• Terminating an unwanted pregnancy, by means of self-harm

• The person expresses thoughts about ending their life or harming themselves or others

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