



WARMINSTER & DISTRICT AMATEUR SWIMMING CLUB

Guidance on self-harm concerns

The ASA is grateful to the expertise of selfharmUK and Dr Adam Connor in assisting with the following guidance.

What is self-harm? Self-harm is a term used to describe a wide range of behaviours where individuals intentionally hurt themselves; it is often seen as a physical response to an emotional pain and can be very addictive.

The following is a list of possible types of self-harm but is not an exhaustive list:

- Scratching and pinching.
- Hitting objects, including punching and head banging.
- Cutting.
- Ripping skin.
- Carving.
- Interfering with healing.
- Burning.
- Rubbing/scraping the skin with sharp objects.
- Hair-pulling (and then potentially hair-eating).
- Abusing drugs and alcohol.
- Eating disorders.
- Poisoning or overdosing.

It is often more helpful to focus on how someone is feeling rather than what they are actually doing to themselves.

Who and why does someone self-harm?

Self-harm can affect people of all ages and from all walks of life. A young person is not necessarily more likely to self-harm if they come from a deprived background or if their parents are separated. Young people growing up in care are not more or less likely to self-harm than teenagers who live with their families. It really can, and does, affect anyone.

It is thought that around 13% of young people aged 11-16 will self-harm at some point. Research suggests that children exposed to others who self-harm may be more likely to begin harming themselves, so it's important that siblings and friends

receive support to understand self-harm as much as the person affected.

The trigger for someone to hurt themselves for the first time will be different for each person. Self-harm can be used as a coping mechanism to deal with emotions that have become difficult to manage although sometimes it may be a sign of an underlying mental health issue.

There are many reasons why a young person may be self-harming. These could include:

- Feeling unhappy.
- Experiencing low self-esteem.
- Suffering from bullying or discrimination.
- Coming to terms with their sexual orientation.
- Having problems at school.
- Experiencing negative life events or family issues.
- Losing someone close to them such as a parent, grandparent, sibling or friend.
- Lacking love and affection or being neglected by parents or carers.
- Experiencing physical or sexual abuse.
- Undergoing other psychiatric and/or psychological factors.

Please note that this list provides examples only and is not exhaustive.

Talking about it

Self-harm can be very difficult to talk about. Sufferers may feel scared or ashamed, or they may think they will get into trouble for self-harming. They may also have difficulty in explaining to others how they feel and why they are hurting themselves.

Parents of sufferers will find it equally difficult to talk about and/or deal with the emotions of what is happening to their child. They may not understand self-harm, want to block it out or simply be at a complete loss of what to do to help their child.

Being the person who has noticed signs of self-harm or who has had an incident of self-harming disclosed to them by a young



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person can be very distressed and may find it challenging trying to find ways to help the young person and their family.

Support and guidance on how to deal with self-harm is available from the ASA Child Safeguarding Team, and in some cases the ASA Doctor under the Medical Protocol as required.

What can the organisation do?

Unfortunately, referrals of self-harm to the ASA Child Safeguarding Team have greatly increased and many officers, coaches and teachers have contacted the ASA after noticing concerning marks on a young person's body, or after a disclosure from the young person or their friends.

It is important that any concerns of this nature are referred to the welfare officer and to the ASA Child Safeguarding Team so appropriate advice can be provided.

In most cases, the organisation would discuss the concerns with the child together with their parents to establish that the parent(s) are aware and that the young person is receiving appropriate professional support. In some cases, parents may already be aware but simply don't know where to turn to for help. Many of our organisations have been able to support young people and their families in providing appropriate signposting to the professional help available.

In cases where it is felt that the self-harm may be due to an issue at home and where it is felt that talking to the parent(s) could make the situation much worse for the young person concerned, a referral can be made to Children's Services in order to take further advice.

In some cases, the organisation may be concerned that the young person is unfit to continue with aquatics due to the self-harm. In cases of this nature, assistance can be sought from the ASA Doctor under the Medical Protocol. Under this protocol

the doctor can be asked to speak to the young person's GP or consultant to discuss this further. The ASA Doctor will require the written consent from the parents of the young person concerned, if appropriate, and the name and contact details of the medical professional charged with the young person's care. The ASA Doctor may request further information from the parent or the organisation. Such requests will always be advised on a case-by-case basis.

Following this referral process, the ASA Doctor is able to confirm whether or not the young person is fit enough to continue participating and whether any additional support can be given by the organisation. Case studies undertaken by the ASA in this area show that medical professionals predominantly regard aquatics as a very positive and enjoyable experience for a young person. In most cases, medical advice encourages the young person to continue their involvement in the sport due to the positive mental and physical benefits.

It is important to remember that officers, coaching staff, other employees or volunteers of the organisation and the ASA Child Safeguarding Team, are not trained professionals in the field of self-harm and there is no expectation on individuals to provide counselling services to either the young person or to their family. Self-harm is a highly complex area and requires appropriately qualified medical practitioners to support the young person and their family.

In all cases, the ASA Child Safeguarding Team will support and provide guidance to any organisation or individual with a concern of this nature.

Who can help?

In most cases the young person and their family may find help and support through their GP. The GP may then refer the young person to specialist mental health



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services depending on availability. Service provision varies across the UK and waiting lists can be long.

The GP may refer the young person to the Child and Adolescent Mental Health Services (CAMHS) instead. CAMHS provide specialist NHS mental health services to children and young people.

Referrals to CAMHS can also be accessed through the young person's school. If the family is receiving support through Children's Services they may also be able to access CAMHS through their family worker.

There are private clinical psychologists and psychotherapists who may offer specialist support for families but these can be costly and the families would need to ensure that the practitioner is recognised by a professional body.

In addition to the above, there are a number of organisations that can provide advice and support and the details are provided at the end of this guidance.

Will the self-harm continue?

Not everyone who hurts themselves will continue to do this for months or years to come. For some it may only happen for a short period of time, possibly during a time of stress such as exams.

It is important to remember that self-harm won't stop automatically when you approach a young person to discuss what you have seen, or because they have felt able to tell you that they are self-harming. Some individuals will find the process of self-harm addictive and some may become dependent on it. Just telling somebody to stop is unlikely to work and could push the young person to self-harm secretly due to the fear of being found out again.

Recovery can often be a long process and professional support will often provide young people with the opportunity to talk

about how they feel, and to look at new ways of coping.

Organisations that support and provide advice on self-harm

YoungMinds

YoungMinds is the UK's leading charity committed to improving the emotional wellbeing and mental health of children and young people.

They have a parent helpline on 0808 802 5544

www.youngminds.org.uk/

selfharmUK

selfharmUK is a project dedicated to supporting young people who are impacted by self-harm, providing a safe space for them to talk or ask questions, and to be honest about what's going on in their lives.

selfharmUK is part of Youthscape, a registered UK charity that's been working to support young people since 1993.

www.selfharm.co.uk

Harmless

Harmless was established at the beginning of October 2007. It is a national voluntary organisation for people who self-harm, as well as for their friends and families and for professionals.

www.harmless.org.uk/

ChildLine

ChildLine is a private and confidential service for children and young people up to 19 years of age. Contact can be made with a ChildLine counsellor about anything, Calls are free on 0800 1111.

www.childline.org.uk/Explore/Self-harm/Pages/about-self-harm.aspx

NSPCC



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Calls can be made to the NSPCC Helpline on **0808 800 5000** trained counsellors are used to dealing with the effects of self-harm and calls can be made anonymously.

www.nspcc.org.uk/preventing-abuse/keepingchildren-safe/self-harm/

Kooth.com

Free online support for young people. Kooth is a service from Xenzone, leaders of online counselling. Online counsellors are available on Monday-Friday from 12pm-10pm and at the weekends from 6pm-10pm.

www.kooth.com

Mind

Provide advice and support to empower anyone experiencing a mental health problem. They campaign to improve services, raise awareness and promote understanding.

You can call them on 0300 123 3393 (Monday-Friday, 9am-6pm, except bank holidays) or text them on 86463.

www.mind.org.uk

Samaritans

Confidential support for people experiencing feelings of distress or despair. Call their free 24-hour, 365-days-a-year helpline on 116 123.

www.samaritans.org.uk

NHS information on self-harm

Information from the NHS about self-harm, along with some more helpful links.

www.nhs.uk/conditions/self-injury/Pages/Introduction.aspx

This is not an exhaustive list. Families can also speak to their GP and child's school to enquire about local advice and services that may be available.