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- **Speaking to parents-** *"I understand that it feels really hard to think about telling your parents, but I am really concerned about your safety and this is important. Would it help if we did this together?", "Do you have any thoughts on what could make it easier to talk to your parents?" and "Are there any reasons why you think we should not tell your parents?".* When deciding whether to tell parents or not it is important to keep the risk of the young person at the forefront of the discussion and be open and honest with the student about this. Although it is generally considered those over the age of sixteen can give consent for themselves, informed consent is very individual and depends on a young person's specific circumstances, family background and whether things would be made worse for the young person by telling their parents.
- **Closing -** *"I am here for you and I want to get you the right help", "Is there anything you can think of that might help you?" and "I want you to know that there is support out there for you".* Clearly explain to the young person at the end of the conversation what is going to happen, after asking the student what they would like to happen. *"Why don't we write down what we have agreed on a plan together then you will always have a copy that you can look at to remind yourself about anything" and "Sometimes when you are feeling low or really want to self-harm, it is difficult to remember the things that you have put in place- writing things down can help to remind you".* Ensure you signpost the young person to useful sources of support online.



Never underestimate the impact you can have on a young person's journey: believing in them and simply being nice to them can have a very positive impact.

Self-Harming Behaviour in *Students*

Conversation Prompts for Students Who Self-Harm

Talking about self-harm is not easy and the language, choice of questions asked and general approach to the conversation may need to be adjusted according to the age, understanding, and special educational needs of the young person.

If staff feel confident talking about self-harm, more students may feel able to speak out. If possible, try to have the conversation with the young person somewhere private and where you will not be disturbed. Be aware of your body language and try not to display any negative reactions, as this will often determine whether the young person chooses to be open with you or not about their self-harming behaviour.

CONVERSATION PROMPTS:

- **Starting the conversation-** *"You look upset/sad/angry etc., is there something which is bothering you?", "I know some young people use self-harm as a way of coping, is this something that you are doing?", "Let's see how we can work this out together. I may not have the skills to give you the specialist help you need, but we can find help for you together if you would like?" or "I don't know exactly what you've gone through, but I've also had my crap days and used different ways to cope". Use active listening, for example "Can I just check with you that I have understood that correctly?". If someone does not respond the first time when you ask them how they are feeling, remember to ask them twice. This shows that you are interested in what they say and that it is a safe place to talk.*
- **Acknowledging:** Acknowledge the courage and how hard it must be for the student to talk about their self-harm, as well as recognise how distressed they must be feeling: *"Thank you for telling me as I know it must have been difficult", "It takes a lot of courage to tell me what you've done but it is important to talk to someone" and "I'd really help to try and support and understand you more".* Accept that the self-harm is currently serving a purpose for this young person, therefore do not make demands on them or force them to stop.

- **Confidentiality-** *"I am not going to share what you tell me unless you want me to or unless I think you or another person is at risk" or "I appreciate that you may tell me this in confidence, however it is important that I let you know that your safety will always be more important than confidentiality. If I am worried you may be unsafe or at risk of hurting yourself or others, part of my job is to let other people know but I will always keep you informed so you are aware of what's going on".*
- **Exploring (reasons for self-harm and triggers)-** *"What was it that made you want to tell me this today and what are your hopes after telling me?", "What else can you do to help you get through the day?", and "This is the first step in getting the support you need".* Also, questions exploring why the young person is self-harming, such as *"I wonder if there is anything specific that has happened to make you feel like this, or whether there are several things going on at the moment?"* and *"What do you think is causing you the most stress at the moment?"*.
- **Coping strategies and support-** *"Is there anything you find helpful to distract yourself when you feel like self-harming?", "I can see that things feel very difficult for you at the moment and I am glad you have felt able to talk to me. Is there anyone else that you have found helpful to talk to before or is there anyone you think may be good to talk to?", "How could we make things easier for you at college?", "What do you think would be most helpful?", or "What could you do to minimise risk and make things safer for you?".* Encourage collaboration with the student around any support they would like to help them with their self-harming behaviour.
- **Assessing injury-** *"Where on your body do you usually self-harm?", "What do you normally use to self-harm?", "Have you ever hurt yourself more than you meant to?", "What do you do to care for your wounds?", "Have your wounds ever become infected?" and "Have you ever seen a doctor because you were worried about a wound?"*.

