

Be You In Focus

*Self-harm in the
school setting*

Be You In Focus Webinar Handout

Thank you for your participation in the Be You In Focus Webinar **Self-harm in the school setting** on Wednesday 28th April, 2021.

This resource contains:

- A quick summary of key concepts.
- Links to resources.
- Attendee Questions and panel answer responses.
- In Practice reflective questions.

Quick summary of key concepts and messages

- Self-harm does not mean a suicide attempt, however any act of self-harm should be taken seriously
- Reframe Self-harm from attention seeking to seeking connection.
- It can be distressing for adults to acknowledge and discuss self-harm, however, try and remain calm and non-judgmental and seek guidance and assistance from internal and external resources as necessary.
- "respectfully curious" - this is a key way to approaching this topic with children or young people. Seek to understand their perspective and what is going on for them.

Links to resources:

Please find below a selection of resources either shared during the webinar or used in preparation for the webinar.

Be You Resources

- Professional Learning: Be You Early Support (Notice, Inquire, Provide modules):
<https://beyou.edu.au/learn/early-support>
- Be You Mentally Health Continuum and BETLS* tool:
<https://beyou.edu.au/resources/mental-health-continuum>

*BETLS is an acronym for behaviour, emotions, thoughts, learning and social relationships.

- Be You Wellbeing Tools for You (staff):
<https://beyou.edu.au/resources/tools-and-guides/wellbeing-tools-for-you>
- Wellbeing Tools for Students
<https://beyou.edu.au/resources/tools-and-guides/wellbeing-tools-for-students>
- Be You fact sheets
<https://beyou.edu.au/fact-sheets>

- Be You Self-harm information
<https://beyou.edu.au/resources/suicide-prevention-and-response/suicide-prevention/self-harm>
- Help seeking and recommending additional support
<https://beyou.edu.au/fact-sheets/mental-health-support>
- Be You Grief, Trauma and Critical Incidents fact sheets:
<https://beyou.edu.au/fact-sheets/grief-trauma-and-critical-incidents>
- Be You Evidence base
<https://beyou.edu.au/about-be-you/evidence-base>
- Professional Learning: Be You Early Support (Notice, Inquire, Provide modules)
<https://beyou.edu.au/learn/early-support>

Other References

- SAFEminds
<https://safeminds.org.au/schools>
- SAFEminds Self harm resource
<https://safeminds.org.au/resources/self-harm-flowchart/>
- Orygen resource Self-harm Sorting fact from fiction
https://www.orygen.org.au/Training/Resources/Self-harm-and-suicide-prevention/Mythbusters/Self-Harm/Orygen_Self_Harm_Mythbuster?ext-
- Coping with Self Harm guide for Parents and Carers
<https://www.orygen.org.au/Training/Resources/Self-harm-and-suicide-prevention/Guidelines/Coping-with-Self-Harm-Guide-for-Parents-and-Carers>
- Calm harm app
<https://kidshelpline.com.au/tools/apps/calm-harm>
- Kids Helpline Parent Portal
<https://kidshelpline.com.au/parents>
- Understanding self-harm for young people (headspace)
<https://headspace.org.au/young-people/understanding-self-harm-for-young-people/>
- Beyond Blue's Healthy 'Mental health and parenting' page
<https://www.beyondblue.org.au/mental-health/parenting>
- Tips to get back into life during COVID-19 (headspace)
<https://headspace.org.au/covid-19/>
- Coronavirus: resources for anxiety and stress (Black dog Institute)
<https://www.blackdoginstitute.org.au/resources-support/coronavirus-resources-for-anxiety-stress/>

Attendee questions and panel answer responses

What is self-harm and what do we know about why young people self-harm?

Self-harm is when a person deliberately causes pain or hurts themselves – usually as a means of coping with difficult emotions when they feel under pressure or distressed. It is really important to remember that self-harm is most often not associated with the desire to die or suicidal intent but is a coping behaviour for managing a variety of issues like emotional distress but can also be a form of self-punishment. The Be You factsheet on Self harm provides some additional information: <https://beyou.edu.au/resources/suicide-prevention-and-response/suicide-prevention/self-harm>

If you notice marks on a child, would you speak with the child by yourself or involve another party as well?

This will depend on a few factors. As an educator consider whether you are comfortable to have this conversation with the child or young person. Are you their regular teacher or is it more appropriate for someone else to initiate the conversation based on their relationship with the child or young person? Consider where you have the conversation. In the middle of a busy lesson surrounded by other students is not ideal. Try and remind yourself to remain curious about what the marks are and gently ask the child or young person if it's appropriate to do so. If you are unsure whether to ask, speak with a member of your wellbeing or leadership team and come up with a plan.

Can you give ask direct questions as a teacher? e.g. do you want to kill yourself?

When directly asking about risk, it is important to ask direct questions and not speak in euphemisms ie: don't ask "do you want to stop the pain?". It is important to remember that you won't put the idea of suicide into their minds but that it is in most cases a huge relief for a young person to be able to speak about their distress. Again, we want to highlight that self-harm is does not mean an intent to die but it can increase a young person's risk. Working in partnership with healthcare professionals can make addressing self-harm and suicidal behaviour more manageable for schools and provide clearer understandings of roles and responsibilities. It's also important to maintain your own wellbeing and to seek support from leadership and wellbeing staff if needed.

What strategies are useful in managing self-harming behaviour?

This can depend on what has been put into place for the young person. If you are aware that they have a safety plan, look to that to guide what strategies might be appropriate i.e.: checking in with a wellbeing coordinator. If they don't have a safety plan, are you aware of what your school's internal escalation procedure is? It is important to know how you can refer a young person within the school but also who you need to alert if you are concerned about a young person. As an educator, you are well placed to notice changes in young people, but it can be daunting to know what the next steps are. The Early Support module on the Be You website can help build the capacity of educators to gently inquire and then provide the most relevant support, which may be an internal referral <https://beyou.edu.au/learn/early-support>. Remember, you don't have to step outside the boundaries of your role or manage the behaviour alone. Seek help from colleagues and promote help seeking.

What is the role of the educator in managing/supporting a student who self-harms?

Educators have an important role in supporting students, but theirs isn't the only role in supporting a young person who is self-harming. It's important that the educator is working with parents/carers and a qualified mental health practitioner, and that there are clear expectations around sharing relevant information, and consent on information sharing between these groups.

Educators are uniquely placed to notice what's happening for young people, and most of the day is spent in school, so quite often an educator may be the first to notice self-harm, or to notice changes in behaviour

which may indicate self-harm. It's important that educators document and report any concerns they have, or disclosures of self-harm by a young person, to the school's leadership, straight away.

If a young person has a management plan set up by their parents/carers and clinician, it is worth the educator being aware of their role, who they touch base with, if there are concerns or further self-harm, and what the plan is for helping the young person to find alternate coping strategies. Educators can plan an important role in helping identify what young people may find useful, or have previously used to distract or regulate themselves, such as listening to music, having time out, drawing or accessing the school wellbeing supports.

As with any concern in a school, it's crucial that educators are aware of their Mandatory Reporting and Duty of Care responsibilities and follow them immediately. It's also important that educators find out what the school's policies are about self-harm, and who the main contact person is, in the school, if there are concerns about self-harm. You may also find it useful to explore what professional learning there is available, to continue to understand self-harm. Be You has a number of [Sessions and events](#) on a variety of topics, and there is more information on self-harm [here](#).

What is the role of parent/carers in supporting their child? How do we encourage parents to help-see?

Parents/carers play an important part in supporting their young person, in helping them to access supports, and to provide consent for the school to speak to the mental health practitioner supporting the young person. We know that parents/carers can have a variety of reactions when their young person has self-harmed. This may be completely new information to them, and they may have any number of reactions: they may be shocked, or angry, or distressed. Some parent/carers may feel shame or embarrassment about it. Some parent/carers may already be aware of their young person self-harming. Whichever is the case, it's important to work with the parent/carer to help support the young person and to encourage them to access mental health supports for their child.

It can be very difficult if the parent/carer is refusing to engage in support for their young person or the parent/carer is the source of the distress. Keep encouraging the young person to seek support from any other wellbeing supports. You may be able to help them identify who else they can talk to or receive help from. Depending on the age of the young person, they may be able to seek supports independently from their parent/carer. You may be required to make a mandatory notification if the parent/carer is not actively supporting the young person or child to access support, especially if there are concerns about risk and the safety of the young person/child.

How can we support young people who are exposed to self-harm in peers?

It is important to take rumours of self-harm seriously and this also includes those who may be a witness to it or aware of it, so that there can be appropriate supports put in place for them. Make your wellbeing and leadership team aware of any potential exposure so they can map any vulnerable or at-risk young people. Promoting universal help seeking messages is a great step in the continual management of young people's mental health and wellbeing. There may be some young people who require targeted intervention because of the exposure to the self-harm. Be You has some helpful resources for young people in supporting their wellbeing: <https://beyou.edu.au/resources/tools-and-guides/wellbeing-tools-for-students>

How can educators take care of themselves when dealing with self-harm?

It's very important that educators take care of themselves when they are dealing with issues of self-harm. It can be hard to see young people in distress, or who have hurt themselves, and it may bring up different reactions for different people. There isn't one "right" way to feel, and it's important that you take time away from the situation to check in with yourself about how you are feeling. You may find that speaking to a trusted colleague, a loved one, or a mental health professional is useful. Take time to find out what the Employee Assistance Program (EAP) arrangements are for your workplace and think about whether speaking to someone in a confidential environment may help. In addition to accessing support, educators

should take time to enact their own self-care plan. Don't worry that this must be something formal – it's about thinking about the things that you do to recharge, or which help you relax or bring you joy. These can include hobbies but can also be about thinking about scheduling time after school or on weekends where you aren't doing marking or school preparation. It could be saying "no" to things that you are too busy for. If you are unsure about how to start developing your self-care plan, a useful resource is the [Be You Wellbeing Plan For Educators](#).

Another strategy is to place limits to your availability – it's not your role to support a young person outside of school hours. In being part of the support plan for the young person, educators need to make sure they are clear on when they are and aren't available.

If you are struggling, please reach out for support. In this document, we have included the contact numbers for a range of Mental Health Services and supports.

How do we contact our Be You Consultant?

If you are a participating Be You school or service and you would like to get in contact with your Be You Consultant, visit <https://beyou.edu.au/>. Log in to your account, then click on 'My Learning Community'. Click on 'Supports' and you will find your Be You Consultant listed there if you are an Action Team leader. If you are not a participating school, then please complete [this web form](#) and we will get back to you. The following subject line should be selected: Find out more about Be You for Schools.

Reflective questions to utilise in Action Team meetings and/or other relevant school meetings:

- What is your current school policy regarding students presenting with self-harming behaviours?
- How does this align with your Education Department/Governing body/Professional association's policies in relation to managing self-harming behaviours? How does this complement your existing policies regarding generalised mental health concerns and risk management policies?
- What is your schools internal process for referral to student services/wellbeing team, if an educator suspects a student may be engaging in self-harming behaviours? Whom can staff go to within the school if they have questions or wish to access further support?
- Whom do families go to within the school if they have concerns about their young person and/or wish to discuss their young person's self-harming behaviours?
- What preventative approaches currently exist in your school regarding mental health? How does our school currently promote help seeking for mental health challenges from a whole school approach? This could include help seeking messages for students, educators, families?
- How does your school currently approach improving the mental health literacy of students – particularly guidance around peer-to-peer disclosures of mental health concerns (including self-harm)?
- What external mental health agencies does your school have relationships with? What are the referral processes for these agencies? Are families aware of local mental health service providers?



Mental Health Services and Support

Beyond Blue

24/7 mental health support service

1300 22 4636
beyondblue.org.au

headspace

Online support and counselling to young people aged 12 to 25

1800 650 890 (9am–1am daily)
For webchat, visit: headspace.org.au/eheadspace

Kids Helpline

24/7 crisis support and suicide prevention services for children and young people aged 5 to 25

1800 55 1800
kidshelpline.com.au

1800RESPECT

24/7 support for people impacted by sexual assault, domestic violence and abuse

1800 737 732
1800respect.org.au

Lifeline

24/7 crisis support and suicide prevention services

13 11 14
lifeline.org.au

Suicide Call Back

24/7 crisis support and counselling service for people affected by suicide

1300 659 467
suicidecallbackservice.org.au

Mensline

24/7 counselling service for men

1300 78 99 78
mensline.org.au

QLife

LGBTI peer support and referral

1800 184 527 (6pm–10pm daily)
qlife.org.au (online chat 3pm–12am daily)

If you are concerned about someone at risk of immediate harm, call 000 or go to your nearest hospital emergency department.



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