



CAMDEN SCHOOL FOR GIRLS

Frances Mary Buss Foundation

Headteacher: Elizabeth Kitcatt
Sandall Road, London NW5 2DB
Tel: 020 7485 3414
Website: www.camdengirls.camden.sch.uk

Main School
Email: csg@camdengirls.camden.sch.uk
Sixth Form
Email: sixth@camdengirls.camden.sch.uk

Friday 5 June 2015

Dear Parents / Carers,

We are increasingly concerned that some students are starting to self-harm. It can be difficult to find out that someone you care about is harming herself. As a parent / carer you may feel angry, shocked, guilty and upset. These reactions are normal, but what the person you care about really needs, is support from you. They need you to stay calm and to listen to them. The reason someone self-harms is to help them cope with very difficult feelings that build up and which they cannot express. They need to find a less harmful way of coping.

What is self-harm?

Self-harm is any behaviour such as self-cutting, swallowing objects, taking an overdose, over/under eating etc. where the intent is to deliberately cause harm to self.

Is it just attention seeking?

Some people who self-harm have a desire to kill themselves. However, there are many other factors which lead people to self-harm, including a desire to escape, to reduce tension, to express hostility, to make someone feel guilty or to increase caring from others. Even if the young person does not intend to commit suicide, self-harming behaviour may express a strong sense of despair and needs to be taken seriously. It is not just attention seeking behaviour.

Why do young people harm themselves?

All sorts of upsetting events can trigger self-harm. Examples include: arguments with family members, break up of a relationship, failure in exams or bullying at school. Sometimes several stresses occur over a short period of time and one more incident can be the final straw.

Young people who have emotional or behavioural problems or low self-esteem can be particularly at risk from self-harm. Suffering a bereavement or serious rejection can also increase the risk. Sometimes young people try to escape their problems by taking drugs or alcohol. This often only makes the situation worse. For some people self-harm is a desperate attempt to show others that something is wrong in their lives.

How do you recognise self-harm?

The most common type of self-harm involves scratches or cuts on the arms, legs and abdomen. Other signs could be over/under eating, scratching or picking skin, scouring/scrubbing body excessively, hitting, punching self, pulling out hair, burning or scalding the body.

As most self-harm is privately or secretly carried out it can be hard to notice that a young person is self-harming but some signs to look out for are:

- Changes in clothing to cover parts of the body, e.g. wearing long sleeved tops
- Reluctance to participate in previously enjoyed physical activities, particularly those that involve wearing shorts or swimsuits, for example
- Changes in eating and/or sleeping habits
- Changes in consumption of drugs/alcohol
- Changes in levels of activity or mood
- Increasing isolation from friends/family

What can you do to help?

Initially, we recommend that you make an appointment with your GP as soon as possible and ask for a referral to CAMHS. Please do let us know, in school, if you think your daughter is self-harming. We can also offer support via our Learning Mentors, who are all trained in working with students that are self-harming however this does not replace the help and support that your daughter would receive through CAMHS.

Some useful websites to get further information are on the school website (select Main School Information then Curriculum then PSHE).

Another useful source is a blog written by Dr Pooky Knightsmith, an expert in child and adolescent mental health. <http://www.inourhands.com/blog/>

Try to:

- Go with them to get the right kind of help as quickly as possible
- Keep an open mind
- Make the time to listen
- Help them find different ways of coping

Many thanks for your support with these issues. Please do not hesitate to contact us (kderrar@camdengirls.camden.sch.uk or eperry@camdengirls.camden.sch.uk) or any of the form tutors if you have any specific concerns or want to discuss strategies to help deal with the issues above.

Yours faithfully,



Kathia Derrar – Deputy Head



Emma Perry – PSHE co-ordinator