



Coláiste na Rinne

Polasaí maidir le Féin-ghorthú **GUIDELINES FOR THE MANAGEMENT OF SELF-** **HARM** **Policy & Procedures**

Leagan 1 - Bealtine 2023

1. RATIONALE

We aim to provide a positive, safe, caring environment at Coláiste na Rinne. For the Coláiste to respond effectively to self-harm, a systematic approach is needed. This document is intended to act as a guideline for such response. Each incident will be managed based on the specific concerns of the individual case.

2. PURPOSE

The purpose of this policy is to further our aim to provide a secure, safe, healthy and stimulating environment for all students, staff and visitors to Coláiste na Rinne.

3. UNDERSTANDING SELF INJURY

a) What is Self-harm?

Self-harm is a direct and deliberate form of bodily harm which is intentional but not life-threatening and often repetitive in its nature. Self-harm is complex and many biological, environmental and psychological factors combine to produce this behaviour. Treatment of self-harm usually takes time and staff should not expect a quick fix or rapid extinction of the behaviour.

Self-harm can include body cutting on the wrists, arms or body, as well as self-scratching, self-burning, self-hitting, picking of wounds, crude self-inflicted tattoos or disfiguring hair-pulling and removal. Self-harm can also include deliberately making oneself sick or restricting food or fluids.

b) Why do students self-Injure?

A common myth is that people who self-injure are "attention seeking". While a small minority of young people may hope to communicate their needs and influence others in this way, most people who self-injure do so in private and often hide their scars.

There are many reasons why people self-injure, including:

- To ease tension and anxiety.
- To escape feelings of depression and emptiness.
- To escape feelings of numbness.
- To relieve anger and frustration.
- To relieve intense emotional pain.
- To regain control over one's body.
- To maintain a sense of security.
- As a continuation of previous abusive patterns.
- To obtain a feeling of euphoria.
- To express coping with feelings of alienation.
- As a response to self-hatred or guilt.



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c) Which factors may contribute to tendency to Self-Injure?

Self-harm is a coping mechanism and it is important to recognise the underlying reasons behind a person's self-harm. Risk factors include, but are not limited to:

- Low self-esteem.
- Perfectionism.
- Mental health issues such as depression and anxiety.
- Onset of a more complicated mental illness such as schizophrenia, bipolar disorder, or a personality disorder.
- Problems at home or in Coláiste.
- Physical, emotional or sexual abuse.

It is important to recognise that none of these risk factors may appear to be present. Sometimes it is the outwardly happy, high-achieving person with a stable background who is suffering internally and hurting themselves in order to cope.

d) Is there a connection between Self-harm and Ideation about taking own life?

The underlying characteristics of deliberate self-harming behaviour and suicidal behaviour differ in their intention, method, potential to be fatal and the frequency with which the behaviour manifests itself.

Injuries linked to self-harm are generally not suicidal in intent and are normally unlikely to result in death. However, they can indicate serious psychological distress requiring urgent professional assessment and treatment.

e) How does Self-harm impact on other students?

Educational establishments face a common problem in dealing with epidemics or continuing episodes of self-harm. In these situations, multiple students appear to be communicating frequently about self-harm which maintains the behaviour. This can be particularly risky in a boarding facility setting. Therefore, it is important to remove this risk as quickly as possible for the care and well-being of all students.

4. COLÁISTE CÓNAITHE RESPONSE

a) What is the role of Staff?

All boarding facility staff should contact the Bainisteoir Feidhme, Coláiste Nurse or department Supervisor immediately if a student presents with any instances of self-harm. Staff should respond to self-harm in a low-key and neutral manner. The behaviour should not be responded to with strong emotion, neither should it be dismissed, minimised, or normalised. A calm approach is always essential.

It is very unlikely that a student will engage in self-harming behaviour in a public place. It is more likely that staff will see injuries which they suspect are deliberate or receive information from other students indicating a student may be engaging in this behaviour. The procedures listed below should be followed:



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B) Response of staff to Self-harm noted or reported

If a student engages in self-injury while attending Coláiste na Rinne and a staff member is notified by other students or finds them self-harming, they should:

- Always remain calm and non-judgemental.
- If it is safe to do so remove the object/implement, being careful to avoid any body fluids coming into contact with your or others.
- Remove the student from a situation where they might attract unnecessary attention.
- Aim to respond in a matter of fact, "neutral" and calm manner.
- Avoid being angry or punishing as this can reinforce the behaviour, as can being overly caring or concerned. Avoid asking questions as to how it happened or why it happened.
- Accompany or have another staff member accompany the student to the Nurse's Office. Do not leave the student unattended. Ask the Nurse on duty to contact the Bainisteoir Feidhme immediately.
- If necessary, organise for any body fluids to be safely cleared. Minimise the impact on and disruption to other students by remaining calm and encouraging them to continue with their work. Do not allow other students to become overly involved
- If the student returns to class or activities continue to respond in a neutral manner. Encourage them to continue with their work and impress on the students not to discuss the incident.
- Monitor the reactions of other pupils who know about the self-harm.
- As soon as possible, document what you have seen, heard and done, including the date and time. Give this documentation (signed) to the Bainisteoir Feidhme or department Supervisor, who will share this information with the Coláiste Director. Planning will take place to decide the most appropriate response.

C) If a staff member suspects a student of engaging in self-injury, but there are no visible wounds, staff should:

- Document their concerns and observations, including date and time. Give the documentation to the Bainisteoir Feidhme or Department Supervisor and nurse.
- If a student discloses self-harm to you, do not promise that you will keep this secret as you have a duty of care to the student. You need to document the disclosure and give it to the Bainisteoir Feidhme or department Supervisor, who will immediately share this information with the Director. Planning will take place to decide the most appropriate response.

D) If a staff member views an injury that they suspect is the result of self-harm, they should:

- Always remain calm and non-judgemental.
- Report concerns to the Bainisteoir Feidhme or Department Supervisor and nurse immediately. This information will be shared with the Director. Planning will take place to decide the most appropriate response.



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E) On Coláiste trips and excursions

- For suspected self-harm, document your observations and report to the Bainisteoir Feidhme and the Coláiste Nurse as soon as possible.
- For serious self-harm (e.g., requiring stitches or bleeding which cannot be stopped) the Cinnire in charge should contact the emergency services or take the student to the nearest emergency department and contact the Bainisteoir Feidhme. The Bainisteoir Feidhme will immediately contact the student's parent(s) or guardian(s). Planning will take place to decide the most appropriate response.

F) The role of staff in addressing exhibition of scars and contagion

Pupils should be monitored as they are expected :

- Not to display open wounds/injuries. These must be dressed appropriately by the Coláiste nurse.
- Talk to the appropriate staff member if they are in emotional distress.
- Alert a senior member of staff if they suspect a fellow-pupil of being suicidal or at serious risk of harm to themselves and know when confidentiality must be broken.

G) Contagion

Relevant staff, including the Cinnirí will work to minimise the risk of contagion by:

- Reducing communication about self-harm among members of the peer group.
- Reducing the public exhibition of scars or wounds in the boarding situation.

H) Reducing communication about Self-harm

- Students talking to each other about self-harm, generally, has a strong triggering effect. If this is occurring, an appropriate staff member, generally, the Bainisteoir Feidhme or Coláiste Nurse will explain to individual students and their parent(s) or guardian(s) that communicating about self-harm has a negative effect on peers and makes self-harm much more likely in others. If the student continues to discuss their self-harm and put other students at risk, then additional responses will be needed – please refer to below *'Response of staff to Self-harm noted in Coláiste na Rinne boarding setting'*.

I) Managing students who exhibit their scars or wounds

- A related problem is where students openly show their scars or wounds within the boarding Coláiste setting. Viewing these scars or wounds can be triggering for other vulnerable students. The Bainisteoir Feidhme and Coláiste nurse will discuss with the student and their parent(s) or guardian(s) and make a request that the scar is covered appropriately when in Coláiste na Rinne.
- If the student does not respond appropriately or continues to exhibit their scars or wounds to other students, then additional responses will be needed - please refer to below *'Response of staff to self-harm noted in Coláiste na Rinne boarding setting'*.



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5. Response of staff to self-harm noted in Coláiste na Rinne boarding setting.

A Coláiste Boarding House is a unique entity as students reside together and interactions concerning self-harm and the effects of such interactions need to be managed differently from those of a normal day-Coláiste and also those of a household setting. Self-harm in a boarding facility context has the potential to create significant risk for other students. A distressed student who is self-injuring has the potential to negatively impact their peers. Communication and exhibition of scars must not be allowed in a boarding facility context as this creates a potentially serious risk of harm to other students. It is, therefore, important to support individual students, while simultaneously being mindful of the needs of the boarding Coláiste community.

Incidences of self-harming in the boarding facility should be reported to the Bainisteoir Feidhme so that support can be provided. Each case will be managed individually. However, in general:

- a. The Bainisteoir Feidhme or Parent Liaison will inform parent(s) or guardian(s) of Self-harm and it will be recommended that the student be collected and brought home at least overnight. This will provide the parent(s) or guardian(s) an opportunity to discuss the incident with their child. It will also allow the parent(s) or guardian(s) time to receive professional advice from a counsellor or GP that it is safe for the student to return to a boarding Coláiste environment. Written confirmation of the above will be required. External counselling may also be discussed, if necessary, and suitable arrangements facilitated.
- b. The Bainisteoir Feidhme will explain procedures i.e. if counselling support is not accessed, or the self-harm behaviour continues and impacts on others then it is unlikely the student will be able to continue boarding until the self-harm is managed appropriately. Ongoing self-harm cases will need to be assessed by Coláiste na Rinne's Child Welfare Committee, in conjunction with prents/guardians. Ultimately the Coláiste Management Committee will decide, based on the evidence provided, on whether the boarding environment of Coláiste na Rinne is suitable or unsuitable for the student. Each case of self-harm is treated on a case by case basis depending on circumstances and risks involved. Parent(s) and/or guardian(s) will have a right to appeal any decision made. Coláiste na Rinne may also engage, at any time, with TUSLA, CAMHS, Psychological Services, Rainbow for advice on how best to care for a child who is self-harming. This is to ensure that the Coláiste can meet the student's welfare needs within a boarding setting and that of the other students whilst the student is in the care of Coláiste na Rinne. All of the above factors contribute to a decision being made on whether Coláiste na Rinne's boarding environment is suitable for the student. The student will not be permitted to stay in the boarding setting whilst their case is being dealt with if the Coláiste feels there is a risk to their safety or wellbeing or that of other students. The Coláiste will place no impediment on the child attending school. This procedure is to ensure the safety and well-being of the pupil and that of all students whilst a care plan is being discussed and put in place.



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- c. Counselling support will generally involve external professionals subject to parental consent.

Role of Executive in responding to Self-harm

Outcome 1

If the incident is deemed to be an emergency or crisis involving imminent risk, the student will be screened at the appropriate facility, usually University Hospital Waterford. The Coláiste Nurse(s) will be involved in the assessment about whether or not medical attention is immediately required.

In such circumstances, parent(s) or guardian(s) will be informed of the situation as soon as possible. Ideally, parent(s) and/or guardian(s) will transport the child to seek medical help, although, this may not always be possible.

Outcome 2

The student's parent(s) or guardian(s) will be called by the appropriate staff member. Whenever possible, the student will be advised in advance that his/ her parent(s) or guardian(s) will be contacted. The purpose of the call will be explained ensuring that the student has adequate support, protection and assistance

The parent(s) or guardian(s) will be asked to pursue possible options to assist the student:

- Recommending the student be collected and brought home. This will afford parent(s) /guardian(s) the opportunity to discuss the incident with their child and to receive professional advice from a counsellor or GP as to whether or not it is safe for the student to return to the boarding facility in the Coláiste environment. External counselling may also be recommended. If necessary a care plan will be put in place as discussed between management and parent(s) or guardian(s) to ensure the student's safety and well-being before the student returns.
- Initiating out-patient counselling for the child and/or family, if necessary.
- Agreeing to the child receiving additional counselling support, as necessary.

Once the senior staff member, in consultation with the Coláiste nurse, has made the recommendation for professional help, he or she will contact the parent(s) or guardian(s) within one week to ascertain whether the referral has been pursued. Depending on the individual circumstances a professional meeting and ongoing support from parent(s) or guardian(s) and staff may be enough to make the student feel supported enough so as not to repeat self-harming behaviour and to talk to a member of staff they feel comfortable with should they struggle again. When this is the case students can continue their Coláiste year as normal and avail of extra support when needed. When this is not the case, further decisions will need to be made, Please refer to the above 'Response of staff to Self-harm noted in Coláiste na Rinne boarding setting

Sínte:

(Cathaoirleach)

Dáta:

27/05/23

Síniú:

(Stiúrthóir)

Dáta:

27/05/23



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FÉIN-GHORTU – Cuntas ar Eachtra

Uimhir thagartha an pháiste: _____

Am agus dáta a tharla an eachtra: _____ / _____ / _____

Cur síos ar an eachtra: _____

Sínithe: _____ Dáta: _____

Céim(eanna) tógtha ag pearsanra an Choláiste: _____

Moladh / Moltaí: _____

Iarchúram: _____
