



Horserenity CIC

Self-Harm Policy

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1. Introduction

Horserenity CIC is committed to providing a safe, supportive, and trauma-informed environment for children, young people, and vulnerable adults who may experience emotional distress or self-harm. Our equine-facilitated learning approach prioritises wellbeing, early identification of concerns, and appropriate safeguarding responses.

This policy outlines how staff and volunteers will recognise, respond to, record, and escalate concerns relating to self-harm while maintaining the safety of individuals, staff, volunteers, and horses.

2. Purpose of the Policy

The aims of this policy are to:

- Safeguard children, young people, and vulnerable adults who may be at risk of self-harm.
- Provide clear guidance for staff and volunteers on recognising and responding to concerns.
- Ensure consistent and trauma-informed practice.
- Promote emotional wellbeing and early intervention.
- Ensure compliance with UK safeguarding legislation and local authority procedures.
- Clarify boundaries of our responsibilities as a community interest company, not a clinical service.

3. Scope

This policy applies to:

- Staff (paid or unpaid)
- Volunteers
- Directors
- Contractors
- Children, young people, and adult participants

It covers:

- Disclosure of self-harm or suicidal thoughts
- Observed signs of self-harm
- Suspected self-harm
- Self-injurious behaviour linked to distress or trauma
- Online behaviours related to self-harm
- Incidents of self-harm on site

4. Definitions

Self-harm refers to any intentional act that causes harm or injury to oneself, regardless of motivation. This may include emotional, psychological, or physical harm.

This policy does NOT include any graphic descriptions, methods, or instructions.

Self-harm behaviour may relate to:

- Coping with emotional stress
- Anxiety, trauma, or distress
- Mental health difficulties
- Low self-esteem
- Attempts to regulate emotions
- Suicidal thoughts (which require *immediate* safeguarding response)

5. Principles

Horserenity CIC is committed to:

- **Non-judgmental, compassionate practice**
- **Prioritising safety** for individuals, others present, and animals
- **Clear professional boundaries**
- **Trauma-informed communication**
- **Confidentiality within safeguarding guidelines**
- **Early intervention and timely referral**
- **Working in partnership** with families and professionals

- **Recognising the limits** of our role as a non-clinical service

6. Recognising Signs of Self-Harm

Staff and volunteers are not expected to diagnose self-harm but should be alert to **possible indicators**, including:

- Expressing thoughts of self-harm or hopelessness
- Visible injuries that raise concern
- Behaviour that suggests emotional distress or withdrawal
- Changes in mood, behaviour, or engagement
- Talking or writing about feeling overwhelmed
- Parental or peer concern

These signs may indicate risk and should be taken seriously.

7. Responding to Concerns

7.1 Immediate Safety

If a participant appears at **immediate risk of harm**:

1. Ensure **your own safety** and the safety of others, including horses.
2. Stay calm and offer reassurance.
3. Never leave the individual alone.
4. Contact the **Designated Safeguarding Lead (DSL)** immediately.
5. If necessary, call **999** and follow emergency services guidance.

7.2 Listening and Supporting

When a participant discloses self-harm or distress:

- Remain calm, compassionate, and non-judgmental.
- Listen actively without pressing for details.
- Validate their feelings: *“Thank you for telling me—you’re okay and we want to help keep you safe.”*
- Do not promise absolute confidentiality.
- Explain that you must pass on information to keep them safe.

7.3 Actions Staff Must NOT Take

Staff and volunteers must never:

- Offer counselling or therapy beyond their training
- Minimise or dismiss concerns

- Engage in physical restraint unless absolutely necessary to prevent immediate harm
- Promise to keep self-harm secret
- Provide advice on methods, alternatives, or coping techniques outside professional scope
- Remove clothing or examine injuries

8. Reporting and Recording

All concerns relating to self-harm must be:

1. Reported immediately to the **Designated Safeguarding Lead (DSL)**
2. Recorded in a timely, factual, objective, and confidential manner
3. Logged in the safeguarding register
4. Shared with other agencies where required under safeguarding guidance

Records must include:

- Date, time, and location
- What was observed or disclosed
- The exact words used by the participant, where appropriate
- Who was present
- Actions taken
- Next steps and referral details

Records will be kept securely in line with UK GDPR.

9. Roles and Responsibilities

9.1 Designated Safeguarding Lead (DSL)

Sarah Vivian

The DSL is responsible for:

- Assessing risk
- Making safeguarding referrals
- Contacting parents/carers where appropriate
- Liaising with external agencies
- Maintaining records
- Supporting staff involved in incidents

9.2 Staff and Volunteers

All staff must:

- Attend safeguarding and mental health awareness training
- Follow this policy

- Raise concerns immediately
- Maintain appropriate boundaries

10. Working with Parents/Carers

Unless doing so places the child at greater risk, the DSL will:

- Inform parents/carers of concerns
- Encourage open communication
- Provide information on available support services
- Work collaboratively to support the child or young person

11. Referral to External Services

The DSL may refer to:

- Dorset Children's Services
- GP, CAMHS, or mental health services
- Social Care
- Emergency services (if immediate danger)
- School safeguarding teams
- Early Help services

Horserenity CIC does **not** diagnose mental health conditions or provide therapeutic recommendations outside professional remit.

12. Self-Harm on Site

If self-harm occurs during a session:

1. Prioritise immediate safety
2. Remove potential hazards where safe
3. Seek help from the DSL
4. Initiate emergency procedures if required
5. Ensure animals are safely handled and removed from risk

No first aid beyond **basic first response** should be administered unless required for immediate safety and within training.

13. Emotional Wellbeing Support (Non-Clinical)

Horserenity CIC offers:

- A supportive environment

- Horse-led activities that promote regulation and resilience
- Positive relationships with trusted adults
- Skills in self-awareness, communication, and emotional safety

These are **not** replacements for clinical or therapeutic interventions.

14. Staff Training

All staff and volunteers will receive training in:

- Safeguarding and child protection
- Recognising signs of self-harm
- Trauma-informed practice
- Working safely with distressed individuals
- Incident reporting procedures

15. Confidentiality

Information is shared **only on a need-to-know basis** and in line with safeguarding law.

If a child is at risk of significant harm, confidentiality **must be broken** and the DSL informed.

16. Policy Breaches

Failure to follow this policy may result in:

- Additional training
- Removal from certain duties
- Disciplinary action
- Reporting to relevant authorities

17. Review of Policy

This policy will be reviewed annually or earlier if:

- New legislation arises
- Safeguarding guidance changes
- Any serious incident requires review of procedures