



Helping young people understand self-harm

What is self-harm?

Self-harm is where someone does something to deliberately hurt themselves. This may include cutting parts of the body, burning, hitting or taking an overdose.

How many young people self-harm?

A study in Scotland, published in 2008, found that about 10 per cent of 15-16 year olds had self-harmed in the previous 12 months.

Why do young people self-harm?

Self-harm is often a way of trying to cope with painful and confusing feelings. Difficult things that people who self-harm talk about include:

- Feeling sad or feeling worried
- Feeling numb
- Punishment
- Difficulty managing emotions
- Not feeling very good or confident about themselves
- Being hurt by others: physically, sexually or emotionally
- Feeling under a lot of pressure at school or at home
- Losing someone close, such as someone dying or leaving.

When difficult or stressful things happen in a person's life, it can trigger self-harm. Upsetting events that might lead to self-harm include:

- Arguments with family or friend
- Break-up of a relationship
- Failing, or thinking you are going to fail
- Being bullied.

Often, these things build up until the young person feels they cannot cope anymore.

Self-harm can be a way of trying to deal with, or escaping from these difficult feelings. It can also be a way of the person showing other people that something is wrong in their life.

How can you cope with self-harm?

Replacing the self-harm with other, safer, coping strategies can be a positive and more helpful way of dealing with difficult things in your life. Helpful strategies can include:

- Finding someone to talk to about your feelings, such as a friend or family member
- Talking to someone on the phone – for example, you might want to call a helpline
- Writing and drawing about your feelings, because sometimes it can be hard to talk about feelings
- Scribbling on and/or ripping up paper
- Listening to music
- Going for a walk, run or other kind of exercise
- Getting out of the house and going somewhere where there are other people
- Keeping a diary
- Having a bath and/or using relaxing oils – for example, lavender
- Hitting a pillow or other soft object
- Watching a favourite film.

Children and young people involved in self-harm and suicide

Getting help

In the longer term, it is important that you learn to understand and deal with the causes of stress that you feel. The support of someone who understands and will listen to you can be very helpful in facing difficult feelings:

- At home: parents, brother/sister or another family member you trust
- In school: pastoral care teacher or another member of staff, but remember they may need to seek guidance from a senior member of staff
- GP: you can talk to your family doctor (GP) about your difficulties and they can make a referral for further help.

Useful helplines and websites:

• Breathing Space

Breathing Space is a free, confidential phone helpline for those experiencing low mood or depression.

Website: www.breathingspacescotland.co.uk

Telephone: 0800 83 85 87

(Available Monday to Thursday from 6pm – 2 am & Friday to Monday 6pm – 6am)

- **Childline**

Childline is a UK confidential helpline for children and young people (available 24 hours a day).

Website: www.childline.org.uk

Telephone: 0800 11 11

- **Samaritans**

Samaritans provide a 24 hour confidential helpline for those in crisis who need to talk.

Website: www.samaritans.org

Telephone: 08457 90 90 90

- **Young Minds**

Young Minds is an organisation providing information and advice about young people's mental health.

Website: www.youngminds.org.uk

Telephone: 0808 802 5544 (Parents' helpline)

- **Mental Health Foundation**

This is a link to a free to download booklet about self-harm.

<http://www.mentalhealth.org.uk/publications/truth-self-harm/>

- **NSPCC**

You can contact trained NSPCC helpline counsellors for 24/7 help, advice and support.

Website: www.nspcc.org.uk/

Telephone: 0808 800 5000

- **See Me Scotland**

'See me' is Scotland's national campaign to end the stigma and discrimination of mental ill-health. They are an alliance of five mental health organisations and fully funded by the Scottish Government.

www.seemescotland.org.uk/aboutmentalhealthproblemsandstigma/selfharm

- **Young Scot**

The 'Young Scot' website provides Scottish youth information for 11 – 26 year olds.

www.youngscot.org/info/453-self-harm-getting-help

- **The site.org**

'TheSite.org' is the online guide to life for 16-25 year-olds in the UK.

www.thesite.org/healthandwellbeing/mentalhealth/selfharm