

Self-harm

What is self-harm?

Self-harm is a behaviour and not an illness. People self-harm to cope with emotional distress or to communicate that they are distressed.

It includes self-poisoning and overdoses, minor injury, as well as potentially dangerous and life-threatening forms of injury. It does not mean body piercing, getting a tattoo, unusual sex or the recreational use of drugs and alcohol. Some people who self-harm are suicidal at the time; others report never feeling suicidal.

It is important to acknowledge that for some people, especially those who have been abused as children, acts of self-harm occur seemingly out of the person's control or even awareness, during 'trance like', or dissociative states. Therefore the term 'self-harm' is used rather than 'deliberate self-harm'.

Self-harm is sometimes misunderstood amongst professionals who may not know how to respond and might react inappropriately, making children reluctant to seek help.

Examples of self-harming behaviour

- Cutting
- Branding (burning, friction burn)
- Picking at skin or re-opening wounds
- Hair pulling (trichotillomania)
- Hitting, bone breaking, punching walls, head banging, provoking fights
- Multiple piercing or tattooing may also be a type of self-injury, especially if pain or stress relief is a factor
- Drinking harmful chemicals, swallowing objects other than food and drink
- Taking personal risks

Using alcohol or drugs increases the risk of self-harm.

Possible warning signs of self-harm

- Unexplained accidents or injuries of cuts, bruises or cigarette burns, on wrists, arms, thighs and chest
- Keeping fully covered, even in warm weather. Avoidance of situations where revealing clothing is expected
- Sharp objects or cutting instruments amongst a person's belongings. Blood stains on clothing, towels, or bedding; blood soaked tissues
- Relationship issues, changes in socialising, sleeping and eating patterns. A breakdown in typical communication
- Low self-esteem, isolation, irritability and mood changes
- Poor performance or results at school
- Loss of interest in favourite hobbies or sports

Helpful Resources:

Self-harm support organisations

Self-Injury Support

(formerly Bristol Crisis Service for Women) www.selfinjurysupport.org.uk

TESS - Text and Email Support Service.

(Sunday - Thursday 19:00 - 21:00) TESS text support - 0780 047 2908 Email through website:

www.selfinjurysupport.org.uk/tessform

For girls and young women up to 24 years in the UK affected by self-harm.

National Self-Harm Network www.nshn.co.uk

Monitored forums supporting individuals who self-harm to reduce emotional distress and improve their quality of life.

Harmless www.harmless.org.uk Email: info@harmless.org.uk

Address: PO Box 10136, Nottingham, NG1 9HL Harmless is a user-led organisation that provides a range of services about self-harm including support, information, training and consultancy to people who self-harm, their friends, families and professionals.

Lifesigns www.lifesigns.org.uk

This user-led charity aims to guide people who hurt themselves towards new ways of coping when they're ready for the journey. Lots of helpful resources and strategies to minimise harm.

selfharmuk www.selfharm.co.uk

A national project dedicated to supporting young people impacted by self-harm, providing a safe space to talk, ask any questions and be honest about what's going on in their life. Selfharmuk is part of Youthscape, a registered UK charity that's been working to support young people aged 11 to 19 since 1993.

Useful information

Self-harm statistics

Adolescent self-harm AYPH Research Summary No 13,

March 2013. Good overview of self-harm and lists of papers and data/stats:

<http://webarchive.nationalarchives.gov.uk/20170302100842/>

<http://www.chimat.org.uk/youngpeople/research> <http://www.chimat.org.uk/youngpeople/research>
(old address)

The Multicentre Study of Self-harm in England

<http://cebmh.warne.ox.ac.uk/csr/mcm>

This project is collecting data on national and regional trends in self-harm presenting to health services, including data on methods of self-harm, how self-harm is managed, compliance with national guidance, and self-harm in young people and in different ethnic groups. The study is also able to collect important data on outcomes (including suicide), and risk factors.

NICE Guidance

Self-harm (CG16)2004 NICE clinical guidelines Self-harm (longer term management) (CG133)2011 NICE clinical guidelines.

Useful publications

By Their Own Young Hand: Deliberate Self Harm and

Suicidal Ideas in Adolescents, Hawton & Rodham, (2006) Practical advice for teachers, social workers and mental health professionals.

Dancing in the Rain: The Final Cut, Tara L Nicole, (2006). The author tells the story of her adolescence and coping with depression and self-harm.

Healing The Hurt Within: Understand Self-injury And Selfharm, And Heal The Emotional Wounds, Jan Sutton, (2005) A comprehensive resource guide with case studies, expert testimonies, and practical self-help activities.

Life After Self Harm: A Guide To The Future, Ulrike Schmidt & Kate Davidson, (2004)

A guide for individuals who have deliberately harmed themselves.

Red Tears, Joanna Kenrick, (2007)

A bold and candid novel about a girl who self-harms. Scarred: How One Girl Triumphed Over Shocking Abuse and Self-harm, Sophie Andrews, (2008)

A personal account of overcoming abuse and self-harm.

The Rainbow Journal, Catherine Lucas, (2003) (free to under 18's) Aimed at helping young people move from self-harm to self-care.

The Self-Harm Help Book, Lois Arnold & Anne Magill, (1998) an information booklet on self-harm.

The Parent's Guide to Self Harm What Parents Need to Know Jane Smith, (2012, Lion Hudson)

Useful Apps: Self-harm

Calm Harm <http://www.stem4.org.uk/calmharm/>

App based around principles of dialectical behavioural therapy (DBT), developed by a clinical psychologist. Aims to help young people resist the urge to self-harm by using four task categories which reflect the reasons why many people choose to self-harm: distract, comfort, express or release. Won Digital Innovation award category at the National Positive Practice in Mental Health Awards 2016.

Self-Heal

<http://www.self-healapp.co.uk/Home/>

Uses DBT principles to help users resist the urge to self-harm. Also uses an image library for distraction and to promote recovery.

Alumina <http://alumina.selfharm.co.uk/>

Not an app, but a website: This online course by self-harm.co.uk for young people aged 14-18 helps them find other ways of dealing with the ups and downs of life.