

Self-Harm Bitesize Information Sheet

What is self-harm?

- Self-harm is 'self-poisoning or self-injury, irrespective of the motivation or apparent purpose of the act and is an expression of emotional distress (NICE, 2023).
- Self-harm is a behaviour which can be an individual's way of communicating something.

What ways can people self-harm?

Individuals can self-harm in multiple different ways, some examples include:

Cutting yourself, poisoning yourself, overeating or undereating, exercising excessively, biting yourself, picking or scratching at your skin, burning your skin, inserting objects into your body, hitting yourself or walls, misusing alcohol, prescription, and recreational drugs, pulling your hair, having unsafe sex, getting into fights where you know you will get hurt.

Why do people self-harm?

Pressures at school or work, bullying, money worries, sexual, physical, or emotional abuse, bereavement, LGBTQ+, breakdown of a relationship, loss of a job, an illness or health problem, low self-esteem, stress, depression, anxiety, anger or numbness, ACES, self-expression, to care for themselves.

Self-Harm and Suicide

It is important to be aware that some people who self-harm are at high risk of suicide however many who do self-harm do not want to end their lives, they do it in order to live. It is the way many cope with emotional distress, so they don't feel the need to take their own lives (NHS).

However, there is a relationship as there is a high prevalence with suicide and self-harm.

- 50% of those who die by suicide have previously self-harmed.
- 1 in 50 attending A&E with self-harm have died within a year.

(Louis Appleby, 2019).

Self-Harm Cycle



Strategies

Distress Tolerance Skills:

- **Activities-** Enjoyable and/or distracting activities
- **Contributing-** Contributing and doing things for others
- **Comparisons-** Comparisons with other's suffering or own past suffering for perspective
- **Emotions-** Activities that induce different emotions from the current one (s)
- **Pushing away** – Pushing away by mentally leaving the current situation and blocking related thoughts
- **Thoughts-** Occupying and diverting attention with other thoughts, such as by doing a puzzle
- **Senses-** Stimulating physical sensations using multiple senses, such as taking a hot/cold shower

Self- Harm management tips to address different needs:

If you self-harm to express pain and intense emotions, you could:

- Paint, draw, or scribble on a big piece of paper with red pen
- Start a journal in which to express your feelings
- Compose a poem or song to say what you feel
- Write down any negative feelings and then rip the paper up
- Listen to music that expresses what you're feeling

If you self-harm to release tension or vent anger, you could:

- Exercise vigorously—run, dance, jump rope
- Punch a cushion or mattress or scream into your pillow
- Squeeze a stress ball or squish Play-Doh or clay
- Rip something up (sheets of paper, a magazine)
- Make some noise (play an instrument, bang on pots and pans)

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If you self-harm to calm and soothe yourself, you could:

- Take a bath or hot shower
- Pet or cuddle with a dog or cat
- Wrap yourself in a warm blanket
- Massage your neck, hands, and feet
- Listen to calming music

If you self-harm because you feel disconnected or numb, you could:

- Call a friend (you don't have to talk about self-harm)
- Take a cold shower
- Run cold water on your wrists.
- Submerge your face in cold water.
- Hold an ice cube in the crook of your arm or leg
- Chew something with a very strong taste
- Go online to a self-help website

How to respond to self-harm:

Do's:

- Clarify whether there are immediate needs for medical attention.
- Stay calm and try not to be shocked as you will add shame to the person.
- Let the person know that you are there for them
- Actively listen
- Encourage them to talk about their feelings.
- Have empathy and show interest in their distress.
- Let them be in control of their decisions by giving them a voice and a choice.
- Remind them of their positive qualities.
- Thank them for telling you.

Dont's:

- Trying to force change by telling them to stop doing it. "Promise me you won't do that again"
- Telling them off and shaming them e.g "what did you do that for?" "Oh don't be silly"
- Blame the person for your own shock.
- Panic or try quick solutions.
- Either ignoring their injuries or overly focusing on them.
- Labelling self-harm as 'attention seeking'.
- Believe that a young person who has threatened to harm themselves in the past will not carry it out in the future.