

Section 5: Information on self-harm for young people

What is self-harm?

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

How many young people self-harm?

A large study in the UK found that about 7 per cent (i.e. 7 out of every 100 people) of 15- to 16- year-olds had self-harmed in the past year.

Why do young people self-harm?

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

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

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 friends.	Failing, or thinking you are going to fail exams.
Break-up of a relationship.	Being bullied.

Often, these things can build up until the young person feels he or she 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 that person showing other people that something is wrong in his or her life.



Section 5: Information on self-harm for young people

How can you cope with self-harm?

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

Helpful strategies can include:

Finding someone to talk to about your feelings, such as a friend or family member.	Going for a walk, run or another kind of exercise.	Hitting a pillow or other soft object.
Talking to someone on the phone, e.g. you might want to ring a helpline.	Getting out of the house and going somewhere where there are other people.	Watching a favourite film.
Scribbling on and/or ripping up paper.	Listening to music.	Keeping a diary.
Writing and drawing about your feelings, because sometimes it can be hard to talk about their feelings.	Having a bath/using relaxing oils, e.g. lavender.	Online support, supportive online groups or healthy chat rooms, messaging people that you know are supportive and helpful.

Getting help

In the longer term, it is important that the young person learns to understand and deal with the causes of stress that he or she feels. 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 trusted family member	In school: school counsellor, school nurse, teacher, teaching assistant or another member of staff	GP: You can talk to your GP about your difficulties, and he or she can make a referral for counselling or Child & Adolescent Mental Health Services Support (CAMHS)
Another trusted adult	You can contact a helpline or online service such as Kooth	You can self-refer for counselling to CAMHS by calling 0151 293 3662
Liverpool CAMHS Partnership website for information and advice: Liverpool CAMHS		
Liverpool Early Help Directory offers a wide range of services to support children, young people and families: Liverpool Early Help Directory		



Section 5: Information on self-harm for young people

My friend has a problem: how can I help?

You can really help by just being there, listening and giving support.	The problem may change your friendship. You may feel bad that you can't help your friend enough or guilty if you have had to tell other people. These feelings are common and don't mean that you have done something wrong or not done enough.
Be open and honest. If you are worried about your friend's safety, you should tell an adult. Let your friend know that you will do this and you are doing it because you care about him or her.	Your friend may get angry with you or tell you that you don't understand. It is essential to try not to take this personally. Often, when people feel bad about themselves, they get angry with the people they are closest to.
Encourage your friend to get help. You can go with your friend or tell someone that he or she wants to know about it.	It can be challenging to look after someone who is having difficulties. It is important for you to talk to an adult who can support you. You may not always be able to be there for your friend, and that's ok.
Get information from telephone helplines, websites, a library, etc. This can help you understand what your friend is experiencing.	Remember, you didn't cause it, you can't control it, and you can't cure it.



Section 5: Information on self-harm for young people

Tips for reducing self-harm

Successful distraction techniques (taken from The Mix) include:

Using a creative outlet, e.g. writing poetry & songs, drawing, collage or artwork and talking about feelings.	Making lots of noise, either with a musical instrument or just banging on pots and pans.	Getting out of the house and going to a public place, e.g. a cinema.
Using stress-management techniques, such as guided relaxation or meditation.	Going online and looking at self-help websites or ringing a helpline.	Going into a field and screaming.
Putting elastic bands on wrists and flicking them instead of cutting.	Using a red water-soluble felt tip pen to mark instead of cut (<i>the butterfly project</i>).	Talking to a friend (not necessarily about self-harm).
Reading a book.	Looking after an animal.	Listening to loud music.
Scribbling on a large piece of paper with a red crayon or pen.	Hitting a punch bag to vent anger and frustration.	Physical exercise or going for a walk/run.
Writing a diary or journal.	Rubbing ice instead of cutting.	Having a bath.
Writing negative feelings on a piece of paper and then ripping it up.	Try waiting before self-harming, walk away from the situation and distract yourself. The more times you postpone self-harm, the distress will start to come down naturally by itself.	



Section 5: Information on self-harm for young people

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

- Paint, draw or scribble on a big piece of paper with a red pen.
- Start a journal in which you 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 your feeling.

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

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

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

- Exercise vigorously – run, dance, jump with a skipping 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).

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.
- 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.

Video links:

www.youtube.com/watch?v=gTrqehIFz1w&t=6s – A young person's journey

www.youtube.com/watch?v=b4cPCcJ6o88 – A parent's journey

www.youtube.com/watch?v=uKGciUB8OSg – Responding to self-harm

www.youtube.com/watch?v=kT5cr-HTTEQ – Things can change

www.youtube.com/watch?v=8U8HyftKH1Q – Russell brand

Helpful websites:

www.harmless.org.uk

www.mind.org.uk

www.selfinjurysupport.org.uk

www.elefriends.org.uk

www.helpguide.org/articles/anxiety/cutting-and-self-harm.htm

