

Self-harm – Support for Parents and Carers

Self-Harm support	
https://harmless.org.uk/	Offer online support for young people and families experiencing self-harm concerns.
https://calmharm.co.uk/#row1	Online App which provides tasks to help resist or manage the urge to self-harm.
Alumina Selfharm	Free online self-harm support for 14-19's Offers a free, online 7-week course for young people struggling with self-harm.
NSHN -- Downloads	Support and information for individuals who self-harm and their family and carers.

Links to other useful support documents:

'Coping with self-harm' - A Guide for Parents and Carers (link below)

[copy of coping-with-self-harm-brochure final copyright.pdf \(oxfordhealth.nhs.uk\)](#)

The Truth about self-harm (link below)

[The truth about self-harm | Mental Health Foundation](#)

What is self harm?

Self harm is the term used to describe when someone deliberately hurts themselves as a way of dealing with their emotions. They may do this in a number of ways, including:

- Cutting or scratching
- Burning with a flame or something hot
- Causing bruising to the body
- Taking overdoses of tablets or medication
- Inserting objects into the body
- Hair pulling (also known as trichotillomania)

This is by no means an exhaustive list.

Why do people self harm?

Self harm is a coping strategy that helps people to manage their emotional hurt or stress. It is important to remember that it is not attempted suicide, but it is something that people do in order to survive. Often people self harm to try and feel as if they have more control over their emotions, or to get immediate relief from high levels of distress. Sometimes people harm themselves because of self hate, or because they want to punish themselves.

Who self harms?

There is no straight forward answer to this. The truth is - anyone is at risk from self harming at some point in his or her life depending on the experiences they have and the way they feel about these experiences. People self harm for a variety of reasons and in a variety of ways, and what can cause one person to harm themselves, may not create the same level of distress in another person.

What causes people to self harm?

There are many things that can cause distress in someone that can in turn lead them to harm themselves. Such issues that may trigger the onset or a period of self harm might be bullying, trauma, abuse, school or work pressures, bereavement and difficult relationships but no experience can be disregarded. There doesn't always need to be a triggering event in someone's life that **makes them turn to self harm, sometimes individuals just experience a period of decreased self-esteem or increased distress that leads them to harm themselves.**

Self harm is NOT...

- Attention seeking or manipulative
- A mental illness; it is a symptom of internal stress or distress
- A young person's problem
- A suicide attempt, but is about staying alive.
- The problem, but would suggest that the person is struggling with something else
- A problem that can't be solved

People self harm for the respite from Their emotions that they gain from harming, not for the pain of the harm. People who self harm are not a danger to others. The severity of self harm is not directly related to the level of distress that the individual is feeling. The fact that someone has harmed themselves is what is significant, not what they did or how severe their harm was.

How can I help someone who self

The main piece of advice that we give carers/ supporters of people who self harm is that they **MUST** make time for themselves. Supporting someone who self harms does take a lot of strength at times and it is important to recognise your own needs, so that you have resources left for yourself and to enable you to continue to support the individual.

The main thing to understand is that self harm is not about the person harming themselves; it is about the internal pain they are experiencing that causes them to self harm. Self harm is a reaction to distress, it is a form of expression and the best way to help someone who is harming themselves, is to help them deal with the issues that are driving the harm. Try not to focus on the self harm, but on **the distress, and help them to try and identify the driving forces behind their harming, and the feelings that they are experiencing.**

Remember that the individual you are supporting is in distress, their actions are not intended to make you suffer. Try to imagine how desperate you would have to be feeling to cause actual physical harm to yourself.

Many people who self harm feel completely ashamed and isolated by their difficulties. The best source of support you can give is to reduce this shame and isolation by providing an unconditional relationship. Allow the person to express their feelings whatever these may be as this might be fundamental to their recovery.

The language that we use...

It is advisable not to describe the person who self harms as a 'self harmer', as this defines the individual only in terms of their self harm, and leaves little room for other areas of their personality to be described or explored.

