

Understanding Self-Harm

Factsheet for young people



Washington Mind

Washington Mind provide services for those aged 11 years and upwards. We work with young people and adults who self-harm now and those who have self-harmed in the past. We view self-harming behaviours as a coping mechanism.

We encourage individuals to explore and understand their self-harm with the aim of identifying alternative and healthier options moving forward. For young people, who would like to access support, Washington Mind can be contacted on 0191 417 8043 or: ypp@washingtonmind.org.uk.

Young people can refer directly or can be referred by a family member or professional.

What is self-harm?

Self-harm can affect us all in lots of different ways.

Self-harm can be hard to talk about because it can be linked to emotions we don't know how to voice. But it doesn't have to be that way.

Self-harm involves emotionally or physically hurting yourself on purpose. You may also hear it being called:

- 'self-injury'
- 'cutting'
- 'self-violence'
- 'non-suicidal self-injury'
- 'self-injurious behaviour'

Self-harm is often misunderstood.

Why do people self-harm?

People might self-harm because they are dealing with something difficult that is happening, or that happened in the past, or they might not know why they are hurting themselves. Some reasons people self-harm include:

- living with health problems
- living with conditions like ADHD or autism
- stressful or upsetting experiences
- intrusive thoughts
- problems with how you feel about yourself
- questioning your sexuality or identity
- having low self-esteem or body image worries
- self-harm feeling 'normal' among your peers
- seeing images of self-harm online
- drinking alcohol or taking drugs

What do people get out of self-harming?

- show how they feel without speaking
- be distracted from how they're feeling
- cope with, or escape from, painful feelings, thoughts or memories
- punish themselves for something
- stop feeling disconnected from themselves or the world
- create a reason to look after themselves, like caring for wounds
- manage thoughts of suicide

How can I get help?

Finding other ways to cope with life situations is a process, it doesn't happen overnight, be patient with yourself. Managing your self-harm, and finding other ways to cope, is easier when you have the support of the people around you. Some people you could speak to include:

- Your doctor
- Your teacher
- A therapist
- A family member or friend

Helping a friend

It can be hard to know what to do if a friend tells you they are self-harming. You might be feeling scared or overwhelmed, shocked or angry, confused or guilty but it is important to remember that you are not responsible for their actions. No two people's experiences of self-harm are the same.

It's important to know we aren't professionals – we can do as much as we can but we aren't responsible for what happens.

Top tips for having a conversation

- Stay calm and try not to panic
- Be non-judgemental
- Take what they say seriously
- Let them know you are there for them
- Share mutual experiences if you want to
- Offer to help them get support or talk to an adult
- If they don't want to talk right now, try not to be offended

If they feel like talking, you don't need to be the solution, just be there.

Other help

Speaking to an adult can help you get the support you need and there are other resources available to help you look after yourself:

- The NHS website recommends a number of websites and apps which you can use to look after yourself, visit: nhs.uk and search 'self-harm' for more information and to find out about useful resources.
- Childline provide free support 24/7 over the phone by calling: 08001111 and counsellor chat via their website at: childline.org.uk
- YoungMinds provide a range of resources on their website to help you access support and look after yourself, visit: youngminds.org.uk to access resources. They also provide a free text support service which can be accessed by texting: 'YM' to: 85258
- The Mind website provides a range of information and resources to help you access support and look after yourself, visit: mind.org.uk.

If you need in the moment advice, contact NHS 111. If in the case of any serious or life-threatening injuries, visit your local Accident and Emergency Department.