

Self-harm Resource

**For Parents
and Carers**

This booklet is designed to help parents and carers understand self-harm and why their child might engage with self-harm. This booklet highlights what to do if someone discloses self-harm to you and what the signs are.

It also sign-posts other services and informational websites for parents and carers to direct children and young people to if they need more support regarding their self-harm.

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What is self-harm?

Self-harm is when someone hurts themselves on purpose to cope with difficult feelings, memories,

or overwhelming situations. People may self-harm as a way to express these difficult experiences or even when they are feeling numb as a way to feel something.

People may self-harm in various ways:

- Cutting, scratching, and picking at skin
- Burning and scalding
- Misusing recreational or prescription drugs and/or alcohol
- Hitting yourself or hitting walls
- Over-eating or under-eating
- Biting yourself
- Hair pulling
- Swallowing objects
- Inserting objects into the body
- Having unsafe sex

What are the signs that my child may be self-harming?

Your child may:

- Keep themselves fully covered at all times, even in hot weather
- Have unexplained cuts, bruises or burn marks on their body or any other signs of self-inflicted injuries
- Have outbursts of anger or argumentativeness
- Become withdrawn and not speak to many people
- Display low mood, tearfulness or a lack of motivation
- Show signs of low self-esteem and speak negatively about themselves

How do I respond if my child tells me that they have been self-harming?

It can be difficult to know what to say whether someone tells you they are hurting themselves or you suspect that they may be. You may feel a variety of emotions in response to being told such as shock, sadness, helpless or even responsible.

Try not to overreact or panic. The way you respond when someone tells you they have been self-harming may influence how comfortable they feel speaking to you and others in the future about their self-harm.

What helps?

- Being non-judgemental
- Letting your child know you are there for them
- Try to understand their experiences and emotions, rather than focusing on their self-harm
- Offer to help them find support
- Offering to make a self-soothing box with your child
- Speak to your child about their positive qualities and remind them of what they are doing well
- Let your child be in control of their decisions, but get them medical attention if needed
- Helping your child to look after any injuries they may have as a result of self-harm for example providing sterile bandages and plasters or offering soothing creams

It is important to note that if you feel your child's health is in immediate danger following self-harm to seek urgent medical care by either calling 999 or taking your child to your nearest Accident and Emergency Department

What doesn't help?

Even when approaching situations with the best intentions, there are some reactions that aren't helpful after learning that your child is self-harming:

- Trying to force your child to change what they are doing
- Ignoring their injuries or overly focusing on them
- Communicating or acting in a way that threatens to take control away from your child
- Labelling your child's self-harm as attention seeking

In few instances, someone may use self-harm as a way of asking for support or attention, especially if your child's distress gets in the way of their ability to communicate directly with you. If this is the case, it is important to remind yourself and your child that there is nothing wrong with wanting support and care.

How to look after yourself

Supporting someone who self-harms can take a lot of time and strength and it is important to be mindful of your own needs so that you can rely on your own resources to enable you to continue supporting your child.

Things to consider for yourself may be:

- Having clear boundaries of what kind and how much support and help you can offer
- Getting support and information for yourself (Contacts listed in following section)
- Taking breaks and making time for yourself and your wellbeing through self-care
- Seeking further support for yourself either from your GP or relevant organisations

Websites and contacts for support and information

- **YoungMinds**: Parent Helpline offering support and advice for parents of young people under the age of 25
Call 0808 802 5544 – 09:30am to 4:30pm Monday to Friday
Website: <https://www.youngminds.org.uk/parent/>
- **CALM**: Helpline for men of all ages
Call 0800 58 58 58 – 4pm to midnight
Website: thecalmzone.net
- **Sane**: Helpline offering support, information and guidance to those affected by mental health including parents and carers. Text and email support is also available
Call: 0300 304 7000 – 4pm to 10pm every day of the year
Website: <https://www.sane.org.uk/>
- **Self-Injury Support**: For Women of any age affected by self-injury
Call 0808 800 8088
Website: <https://www.selfinjurysupport.org.uk/>
- **LifeSIGNS**: <https://www.lifesigns.org.uk/>

Apps that you could introduce to your child:

- **CalmHarm**: Available on IOS and Android Devices – provides distractions, games, tasks and exercises for when you feel like harming yourself
- **distrACT**: For 17 years old and above – Available on IOS and Android Devices – offers tips, advice and distractions as well as a calm zone, support and emergency contacts
- **Stress and Anxiety Companion**: Available on IOS and Android Devices - Provides exercises and information