

Self-Harm Resources

For Children
and Young
People

This booklet is designed to help children and young people understand self-harm and why someone might engage with self-harm. This booklet highlights alternatives to self-harm such as expressing emotions, distractions, and grounding techniques.

It is also signposts how therapy could help and where else you can turn for support.

Safety Warning: This page contains information about self-harm that may cause difficult feelings and be triggering to read. Please be advised to view this information when it feels safe to do so.

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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

Why do people self-harm?

There are many reasons why you may self-harm and these reasons may change over time. The reason why someone may self-harm can vary and be different for every individual. You may self-harm to:

- Cope with difficult and intense emotions
- Find a sense of relief or feel calm when feeling distressed
- Feel more real and alive if you are feeling numb and disconnected from yourself or your surroundings
- Express feelings that have become too overwhelming
- Distract yourself from your feelings
- Punish yourself if you believe you have done something wrong or are experiencing feelings of guilt and shame

After self-harming you may experience a sense of release that is short-term, however often it is likely that the underlying cause or reason for the self-harm has not gone away.

Self-harming itself can cause you to feel difficult emotions such as guilt and shame which may stop you from wanting to reach out for support.

Even though it may feel that self-harm is helpful in the short-term, in the long-term you may find yourself feeling reliant on self-harm and may find it difficult to stop self-harming which may prevent you from learning how to manage intense feelings in different ways.

What causes people to self-harm?

Any difficult situation or experience may lead someone to self-harm and the reasons can vary greatly as what may feel difficult and distressing for one person may not have the same impact on another person. Some causes may be:

- Experiencing a traumatic incident
- Bullying
- Experiencing abuse
- Family problems such as divorce
- Feeling pressure or stress from school, college or work
- Loneliness
- Low self-esteem
- Difficulties with body confidence and body image
- A breakdown of a relationship
- Experiencing discrimination and/or abuse due to your sexual orientation, gender identity, ethnicity, race, religion, spirituality and beliefs
- Experiencing difficult feelings that may feel overwhelming or unmanageable (depression, anxiety, anger, numbness etc)

What can I do as an alternative if feel like self-harming?

When thinking about alternative ways to manage when you are wanting to self-harm, the tools, and tips that you may look towards can depend on the reason or cause behind your self-harm.

You may feel that you need a distraction, a different way to express your feelings, or a way to ground yourself and feel more connected and present. Below are some different coping strategies broken down into sections.

Section 1

Expressing Emotions

Some different ideas that you can use to express difficult emotions when they become overwhelming could be:

- **Using art materials:** Scribble or doodle on a piece of paper using whatever colours you are drawn to. Try to see how it feels to add more pressure, then less pressure when pressing the pencil to the paper. If you could picture what you are feeling in your head, what might it look like? Do you have any spare bits of newspaper or coloured paper lying around? Why not try making a collage to express whatever it is that you are feeling. Are there different colours, symbols or images that can help to express the emotions you are feeling?
- Writing down everything that you are feeling then rip it up and put it in the bin
- Punching a pillow or something soft
- Speaking to someone you trust about what you are feeling
- Writing a letter with the aim of expressing how you are feeling and give it to someone you trust
- **Using play dough or modelling clay:** Stretch and squeeze it to relieve any tension that you may be feeling as a result of intense emotions

Section 2

Distractions

At times it can be helpful to find things that distract you when you have thoughts of wanting to hurt yourself so that you can focus and concentrate on something else.

Possible ideas for distractions are:

- **Going for a walk:** Can you try to notice how your feet feel pressing into the ground? Try to notice what you can see around you. What does the sky look like today? Can you see any shapes in the clouds? What can you hear? Can you hear the breeze of the wind or feel it on your face? Are there any colourful flowers nearby? What can you smell? Is someone cooking from their home, and you can smell it as you pass by? Can you smell any freshly cut grass?
- Dancing or singing along to music
- **Exercising:** Is there a type of exercise that you like to do? Getting your body moving and active can encourage you to focus on something else and is also beneficial to physical and mental health
- Stroking or cuddling with a pet
- **Engaging with a hobby:** Is there a hobby or interest you have that you could do? Some examples may be playing an instrument, reading, playing a game or doing arts and crafts.
- Watch funny videos on YouTube
- Watch your favourite childhood film
- **Having a bath:** You could listen to relaxing music or an audiobook in the bath. Adding Epsom salts could also help to soothe any aching muscles to help you feel even more relaxed
- **Rearranging your bedroom:** Giving your room a tidy or rearranging how your room is set up can give you a chance to declutter and make your private space feel comfier as well as giving you a task to focus on

- **Listening to music:** Do you have a favourite song that makes you feel happy, uplifted, relaxed or calm? Try making a playlist of songs that you can use when you are feeling distressed. You can practice listening mindfully to music by singling out an instrument of your choice and focus on listening to only that instrument throughout the song

Section 3

Grounding Techniques

Grounding techniques can help you to feel calmer and more relaxed if you are feeling distressed. They can also be used to bring more awareness to yourself and your senses if you are feeling disconnected or numb. Some different grounding techniques are:

- **The 54321 technique:** Find and focus on **5 things you can see** (what colours, textures and shapes can you notice? What can you see inside and outside?), **4 things you can touch or feel** (Can you feel your feet against the floor? Is there a surface you can press your hands down on? Is there anything soft or textured that you could hold or squeeze?), **3 things you can hear** (Are there any birds singing or dogs barking outside? Can you hear cars driving by outside or someone speaking?), **2 things you can smell** (Are there any scented soaps or sprays that you like the smell of? If you are outside, can you pick up and smell any flowers or notice any other smells? Essential oils can be used to provide a comforting scent and can kept in your bag or pocket) and **1 thing you can taste** (Can you taste toothpaste from brushing your teeth? Is there a favourite food or drink that you can have and focus on what you can taste?).
- **Squeezing some ice cubes**
- **Progressive Muscle Relaxation:** Practice tensing then relaxing different muscles in your body. An example could be clenching and unclenching your fists. See if you can feel your muscles relaxing every time you untense them
- **Deep breathing and meditation:** Take deep breaths through your nose with your hands rested on your stomach. Can you feel your belly moving under your hands when you breathe in? Focus on feeling the air go through your nostrils and down your throat. Then take a long breath out through puckered lips. YouTube, Headspace and the Calm Harm App also have various guides to meditation and breathing exercises to encourage a feeling of calm and relaxation.
- **Eating something spicy or sour:** Bite into a slice of lemon, a piece of ginger or a chilli depending on what flavours you prefer. If you have any sour

or fizzy sweets, eating them can bring more sensation and awareness to your senses.

- **Having a hot drink:** With your drink in a mug, notice how it feels in your hands. Can you feel the heat warming your hands? What does your drink smell like? Try to concentrate on how it tastes and feels in your mouth whilst you are drinking it.

It is important to remember that different alternatives and strategies for when you feel like self-harming work differently for everyone. It is okay if you try something, and it doesn't seem to work. Sometimes it might take some time to figure out what is the most helpful for you and also what fits with your interests the most.

Reducing Harm

Although there is always a risk when someone self-harms, there are ways to reduce harm to keep as safe as possible. To avoid infection or worsening of injuries, try to clean any wounds that have been caused by self-harm with running cold water. Use sterile bandages or plasters to aid the healing of your wounds.

If you have an injury that is worrying you, it is important to seek medical attention as soon as possible. You can do this by speaking to a trusted adult, a GP, a trusted member of staff at school or by going to the A&E department. If you feel you are in immediate danger or that your injury could be life threatening, you should call 999 as soon as possible or reach out to a trusted adult who can call for emergency help on your behalf.

When using the internet, there are many websites offering support for self-harm. However, some social media websites, apps and platforms can contain triggering content that may cause you to feel like self-harming even more. Where possible, try to look towards websites offering tools, tips and links for support.

What can I do if I want to tell someone about my self-harm?

Telling someone that you are self-harming can often be the first step to getting support. If talking about it feels scary, you could always write a letter, a text, or an email. Decide who you want to speak to. Is there someone that makes you feel comfortable and safe? You could talk to:

- A family member or trusted friend
- Your GP
- A teacher that makes you feel safe at school or college.
- An emotional support line or website

It may help to think about what you want to say before you tell someone or even practice how you might say it if you are unsure. If it is possible, try to find a time to speak to a trusted person when they aren't distracted with something else so that they can be fully focused whilst you speak with them. You may want to choose a private space to speak to someone that feels comfortable for you both. The person you tell may have questions or even struggle to understand at first what you are telling them, but that doesn't mean that they don't care. Remember that you don't have to share or say anything that you are not comfortable with.

How could therapy help?

A Creative Arts Therapist could provide a safe and non-judgemental space where you can creatively express yourself and your emotions through using arts, play, dance, movement, and drama. A therapist can offer different ways to think about how you are feeling to get a better understanding of how and why you experience the feelings you do.

Seeing a therapist and coming to therapy could help you to recognise and understand any patterns or triggers that may cause you to want to harm yourself, give you a space to think about different alternative coping mechanisms and think about tools and techniques that are specific to your needs and interests.

Where can I turn to for more support?

Websites and Contacts:

- **Mind:** For everyone
Call 0300 123 3393 – 9am to 6pm Monday to Friday
Website: <https://www.mind.org.uk/>
- **Harmless:** <https://harmless.org.uk/>
- **Papyrus:** for people under 35
Call 0800 068 41 41 – 9am to midnight every day
Text 07860 039967
Website: <https://www.papyrus-uk.org/papyrus-hopelineuk/>
- **Battle Scars:** <https://www.battle-scars-self-harm.org.uk/>
- **LifeSIGNS:** <https://www.lifesigns.org.uk/>
- **The Mix:** Offers a variety of support and resources for under 25's
Website: <https://www.themix.org.uk/>
- **Sane:** For everyone
 - Call 0300 304 7000 – 4pm to 10pm everyday
Email Support: support@sane.org.uk
 - Website: <https://www.sane.org.uk/>
- **Samaritans:** For Everyone
Call 116 123 – 24 hours every day of the year
Email Support: jo@samaritans.org
Website: <https://www.samaritans.org/>
- **Childline:** For 18 and younger
Call 0800 1111 – 24 hours 7 days a week (there are not as many staff available after midnight)
- **YoungMinds:** For people under the age of 25
Text line: SHOUT – Available 24/7
Text YM to 85258
Website: <https://www.youngminds.org.uk/>
- **CALM:** Helpline for men of all ages
Call 0800 58 58 58 – 4pm to midnight
Website: thecalmzone.net

Apps:

- **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

