Safeguarding and Wellbeing

COPING WITH SELF-HARM

Start reading...

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What is Self-harm?

Self-harm is defined as intentional harmful behaviours used as an expression of personal distress. Self-harm can sometimes be a standalone behaviour, but it can also be an indicator of a further mental health condition.

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Types of Self-harm

- Cutting
- Burning
- Hair pulling (Trichotilomania)
- Self-injurious activity (such as punching or hitting oneself)
- Drinking harmful liquids
- Exercising too much
- Restricting oral intake
- Increasing oral intake
- Misusing alcohol or substances
- Having unsafe sex
- Getting into fights where you know you will get hurt
- gambling

Why do people self-harm?

People may self-harm to:

- Communicate something that is hard to put into words
- Turn invisible thoughts or feelings into something visible
- Change emotional pain into physical pain
- Reduce overwhelming emotional feelings or thoughts
- Have a sense of being in control
- Escape traumatic memories
- Have something in life that they can rely on
- Punish themselves for their feelings and experiences
- Stop feeling numb, disconnected, or dissociated
- Create a reason to physically care for themselves
- Express suicidal feelings and thoughts without taking their own life
- Coping strategy

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Signs of Self-harm

- Unexplained cuts, bruises or burns-often on their wrists, arms, thighs and chest
- Unlikely excuses for injuries
- Increased curiosity into risky behaviours
- Becoming withdrawn and wanting to spend more time alone
- Wearing extra clothing to cover skin
- Become more secretive
- Refusing to get to get changed in front of other people
- Signs they have been pulling their hair out
- Changes in usual behaviour
- Changes eating patterns/unexplained weight loss or gain
- Increase in alcohol or substance consumption
- Signs of becoming less confident and lower self-resteem

Framing conversations around self-harm act

Be direct – when speaking to someone who you believe is struggling with self-harm behaviours or thoughts.

Don't avoid the topic – this can make is harder for people experiencing these feelings to be open and feel understood.

Use open questions – such as 'How are you?' or 'I can see you've been distant recently, is there anything you would like to speak about'.

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Helpful thing to say

‘It is okay not to be okay?’
‘What can I do to support you?’
‘How do you think you and I can keep you safe?’
‘What can be put in place when you are feeling this way?’
‘What has been helpful or unhelpful for you in the past?’
‘Are you ready to get some support for this?’
‘Thank you for sharing this with me’
‘I may not completely understand but I am here to support you and listen.’
‘I have noticed you don’t seem yourself recently, is there anything that’s bothering you?’

Use language that displays hope and promotes a culture of recovery.

What not to say

‘You’re not thinking of doing something silly are you’
This can cause the person to stop confiding in others, and further isolation due to fear and judgement.
‘it’s not that serious’.
This downplays the seriousness of the situation.
‘This is attention seeking behaviour/ it is just a cry for help’
Yes, this person wants your attention, and this is the way they are seeking your help. If they share their feelings with you, it means they trust you. Telling the individual they are an ‘attention seeker’ only affirms their feelings of loneliness and inadequacy.
‘It’s not that bad’
‘Stay positive’
‘Others have it worse’
‘You’re being selfish’
This belittles and invalidates a person’s feelings and prevents them from expressing themselves.
‘You have a lot to live for’

The individual will either already know this or not feel like they do. This can lead to increase feelings of guilt and shame.

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Support for individuals who are struggling with self-harm

Calm Harm
Is a free app that helps you manage the urge to self-harm.
www.calmharm.co.uk

Harmless
www.harmless.org.uk

NSPCC
Preventing child self-harm and keeping them safe
www.nspcc.org.uk

Self-injury support
Offers useful information and signposting to UK support groups.
www.selfinjurysupport.org.uk

Mind
Quotes, Advice and Conversation starters for supporting loved ones with self-harm
www.mind.org.uk

Alumina

Alumina is a free online 7-week course for young people (aged 11-19) struggling with self-harm.

Each course has up to 14 young people, all accessing the sessions from their own phones, tablets, or laptops across the UK.

The courses take place on different evenings of the week and are run by friendly, trained counsellors and volunteer youth workers.

You don't need an adult to refer you or sign you up, and no-one will see or hear you during the sessions – you'll just join in via the chat box.

If you have any questions about Alumina or want some advice about supporting a young person, email helloalmina@youthscape.co.uk

Sign up at www.selfharm.co.uk