

# Self-Harm

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# What is Self-Harm?

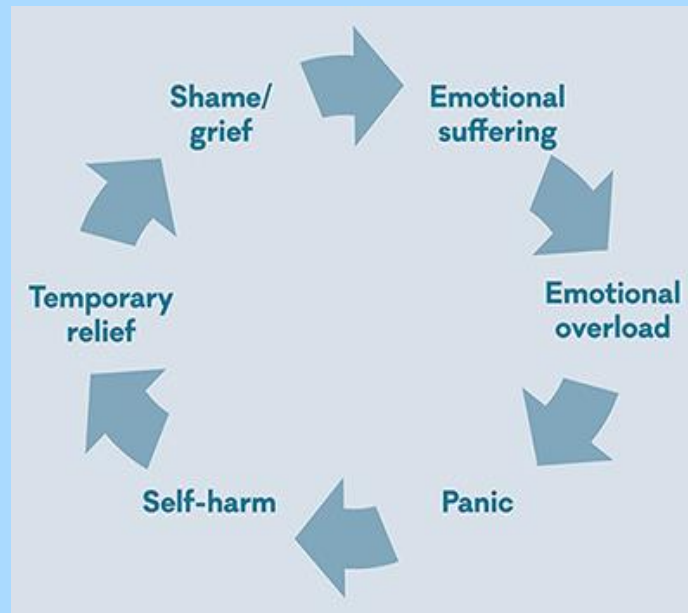
What is it?

What examples can you think of?

# What is Self-harm?

Self-harm describes any behaviour where someone causes harm to themselves, usually as a way to help cope with difficult or distressing thoughts and feelings.

## Self-harm cycle



# Examples of Self-Harm

- Cutting yourself
- Poisoning yourself
- Over-eating or under-eating
- Biting yourself
- Picking or scratching at your skin
- Burning your skin
- Inserting objects into your body
- Hitting yourself or walls
- Overdosing
- Exercising excessively
- Pulling your hair
- Getting into fights where you know you will get hurt.

# Understanding Self-Harm

Young people can self-harm for multiple reasons and usually it is better to focus on the emotions that lead to the self-harm rather than the acts itself. Young people stated that they turn to self harm as a way to:

- Express 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
  - Express suicidal feelings and thoughts without taking their own life. (not all self-harm behaviours mean there is suicidal ideation)
  - Punish yourself for your feelings and experiences
  - Stop feeling numb, disconnected or dissociated (see dissociative disorders)
  - Create a reason to physically care for themselves
- (Mind 2016)



It has also been found that the sight of blood can reduce blood pressure and create a calming effect (Glenn & Klonsky 2010)

# Understanding Self-Harm

Help the young person to realise their triggers and support them in working through those. Young people are often more vulnerable to self-harming if they are experiencing:

- Pressures at school
- Bullying
- Sexual, physical or emotional abuse
- Bereavement
- Confusion about your sexuality (see LGBTQ mental health)
- Breakdown of a relationship
- Illness or health problem
- Low self-esteem
- Difficult feelings, such as depression, anxiety, anger or numbness

(Mind 2016)

# Responding to Self-Harm

DBT (Dialectical Behaviour Therapy) is a therapy that was initially based on CBT (Cognitive Behavioural Therapy) and was created to support adults with personality disorders. However, it has proven useful for supporting adolescents who self-harm.

Two key aspects of DBT are validation and distress tolerance. Validating the feelings of young people is vital so that effective change can happen. Communication and having effective conversations with young people is key to supporting them understand, accept and change their self-harm behaviours. Discussions around Self-harm needs to be approached in a calm, supportive and non-judgmental manner. After this we can work with the young person to manage their distress levels by introducing more helpful coping mechanisms.

# Responding to Self-Harm

## Some key tips when supporting young people:

- Validation – show understanding of the choice to use self-harm as a coping strategy.
- Don't shame – young people will often already have experienced guilt for their self-harm.
- Explore emotions – help the young person make links to their emotions/triggers and their behaviours.
- Harm minimisation – offer first aid support if needed and educate about keeping wounds clean and preventing infection etc.
- Support parents- encourage parents to have conversations with their young person and have the same approach as listed above.
- Involve the right support – recommend other agencies and support for the young person and parent, if needed.



# What can help?

Encourage the young person to create a safety plan.

- Explore the different senses, support systems and environments that could support or distract them when they have an urge to self-harm.
- Create a toolkit with the different things discussed that is easily accessible (consider which things can be used where e.g. at school, at home)

Always start the plan with discussions around the current positives and past effective coping mechanisms and build on these to create a detailed and tailored plan.

**MindSpace** Safety Plan- Self harm

This plan has been created by the MindSpace practitioner but with full support from the young person.  
It is an active document to help the young person manage their feelings and keep themselves relaxed, calm and safe. The young person has identified things they need to do or need from areas to help them.

Self-harm

Name	
Expressing feelings (Physically)	
Working out how you feel	
Talking about it	
Creativity	
Comforting yourself	
Distracting yourself	

Safety Plan- Self harm

Getting out and about	
Being productive	

The following space is for any other activity or coping strategy which is new but is working for you.

# What can help?

Some alternative techniques are:

- Exercise or playing a sport
- Punching a pillow or cushion
- Listening to or making music
- Writing a diary
- Drawing, scribbling or doodling
- painting
- Using relaxation techniques
- Doing something fun or creative
- Squeezing an ice cube until it melts
- Eating a strong flavoured food
- Ripping up paper
- Having a cold shower
- Drawing on your skin with red paint or pen
- Flicking or snapping and elastic band or hair bobble on your wrist
- Arranging to meet friends

# Promoting Positive Mental Health

- Sleep – Create a healthy sleep routine. Adolescents should have around 8-10 hours of sleep a night.
- Diet – A balanced diet can help lift mood and increase energy levels.
- Exercise – Regular physical activity is associated with lower rates of depression and anxiety across all age groups.
- Hydration – drinking water can help fight fatigue and increase concentration.
- Relaxation – make time to destress from the day and have some quality ‘you’ time.
- Communicate – talk to someone about your thoughts and feelings. This can relieve negative emotions and create a positive support system.

# Remember...

These conversations are never easy to have and it is really important that you take care of your own emotional wellbeing.

Make sure you are making time to look after you or seek support from your colleagues.

# Helpful Links and Apps

- CalmHarm app
- What's up app
- DistrACT app
- Young Minds Website
- Mind website
- Barnardo's Website