

Self harm help sheet

Self harm involves deliberately causing harm to yourself through physical injury, self neglect or putting yourself into a dangerous position. It can be a means of communication that cannot be put into words or thoughts. It can be used as a distraction from life difficulties or as self punishment and as a coping strategy. For many people it is a survival tactic.

Self harm involves a range of activities including cutting, scratching, burning, drug overdose, swallowing or putting things inside yourself, hair pulling or deliberate hitting to cause pain.

Why people self harm

There are many situations that can lead to self harm and can be associated with low self esteem. Triggers for self harm could be a difficult experience as a child and self harm is a way of coping with the emotions. It can be planned or happen on the spur of the moment and may not have a specific trigger – just a period of distress or decreased self esteem.

Self harm can give a feeling on control and reduce feelings of tension and distress and as a way of coping with life.

Coping with someone you know

It can be difficult to put your own feelings aside – you may be angry, annoyed and upset. It is important that you are not judgemental and ensure that you can listen to the other person without reacting negatively. There are some helpful do's and don'ts to consider and you could also contact one of the organisations at the end of this help sheet for guidance.

Do

Take it seriously

Be available to talk to – no time constraints and a comfortable environment

Recognise that self harm is a symptom, not the problem

Listen and understand their feelings

Don't

Threaten or blame the individual

Panic if they want to show their scars

Threaten them with sanctions if they don't stop

Be the therapist – refer to support organisations/GP

Support organisations

Harmless – provides postal and email support

www.harmless.org.uk

National self harm network – online support forum and email support.

www.nshn.co.uk

The site – advice and support factsheets, support group information, guidance and discussion boards.

www.thesite.org/healthandwellbeing/mentalhealth/selfharm

NHS choices > health A to Z > self harm

www.nhs.uk

Investing in good health at work