

Self-Harm

What is it and why do young people do it?

Self-harm is when someone hurts themselves on purpose, with the aim of relieving difficult feelings. Between 10-20% of young people are thought to self-harm and most report that they started at around age 12.

It can take many different forms, which can include cutting, fighting, burning, non-lethal overdoses, over-exercising, gambling and changes in eating patterns amongst many others.

It usually starts as a way to relieve a build-up of pressure. It can give temporary emotional relief but sometimes, self-harming can lead to feelings of shame, which can mean that the circle of self-harm continues.



At risk groups

Anyone can be affected by self-harm, but some particularly at risk groups are:

- Those with a mental health disorder including depression and anxiety
- Young people in care
- Those in the LGBTQ+ community
- Those bereaved by suicide

What to look out for

- Unexplained cuts, bruises or burns, often on wrists, arms, thighs and chest
- Wearing long sleeves, and trousers or tights, even in hot weather
- Refusing to get changed in front of other people, for example for PE or in changing rooms
- Signs they have been pulling their hair out
- Changes in eating habits - over-eating or under-eating and /or exercising excessively

What can you do as a parent?

- If you become worried, talk to your child and ask them if they are having thoughts about self-harm
- Help them to identify and understand their potential triggers, so that you are all aware of them
- Discuss with them a signal they can give to you when they feel the urge to self-harm and ask them what would be helpful at that point
- If you have serious concerns, discuss the idea of visiting the GP together

Helpful websites:

- www.rethink.org
- www.harmless.org.uk
- www.youngminds.org.uk
- www.nspcc.org.uk
- <https://charliewaller.org/>