

SELF - HARMING

Self-harm is a way some people cope with overwhelming feelings of pain and distress. By hurting themselves they may feel better for a while and be more able to cope with their lives.

What sort of things do people do?

- Scratching, scraping or picking
- Cutting their arms or other parts of their body
- Banging or hitting their heads
- Hair pulling, scouring or scrubbing themselves

Self harm is more common than people think and is seen in schools universities youth clubs etc. Many different people self - harm, it is not confined to any particular social group. It is more common amongst women than men.

Quite often the harm done is not very severe. It is important to know that many (probably most) people do not usually self-harm so severely as to put their lives at risk.

Some people only self harm once or twice, or when stress levels build up. It can be helpful for people to be aware of when self- harm might get more frequent and arrange for support until the situation is eased.

People self-harm for various reasons:

Emotional pain, Anger, Self hatred, Fear & anxiety, Guilt or shame, Powerlessness, Emptiness, Feeling unreal, Desperation.

What can lead to these feelings?

Loss, Bullying or harassment, Physical illness, Stresses & strains, Abuse or ill treatment, Neglect.

How does self- harming work for people?

Expressing feelings, Distracting from feelings, Self punishment, Taking some control, Trying to communicate, A chance for comfort, Feeling real

What triggers a particular incident?

Vulnerable times; Difficult times of the year, Anniversaries of painful events, When tired or unwell, At times of change, When alone and there is not much support around, Exams

What can help people who self-harm?

- Understanding themselves - If people can begin to figure out the cause of their distress they can go on to tackle them.
- Sorting out issues from the past - It's not just as easy as not dwelling on the past. The feelings caused by these memories are in the present and need to be expressed and acknowledged.
- Changing things in their life now - stressful things need to be addressed
- Finding ways of dealing with their feelings - develop other strategies to cope with anxiety.
- Building up self-esteem - see good in themselves

- Learning to take care of themselves.
- Communicating with others - it is important that they are listened to and taken seriously.

Getting support:

Friends, partners and families

Advice and information - Health centres, young peoples counselling projects, Citizens' advice bureau, Health promotion, Counselling, Groups, GP's, Help Lines.

Supporting Someone Who Self- Harms

People may feel at a loss how to respond to someone who self -harms. A natural reactions is "I really want to help but sometimes I just want to yell at her to stop being so stupid."

Reactions to self-harm

Friends & family can often have an uncomfortable reaction and feel;

- Shocked & Frightened
- Upset
- Guilty
- Angry
- Helpless
- Hopeless and cynical

What should people do about their feelings & reactions to self-harm?

You have the right to tell the person how their self- harm affects you but not to blame or condemn. You might need support for your own feelings to help cope, friends and family can be good but you could also seek more professional help.

What is helpful?

- Recognising how hard it may be to talk about, Listening & Caring, Seeing the person behind the self-harm, Understanding that self-harm helps them to cope, Showing concern, Dealing with current injuries

What is unhelpful?

- Telling the person off, Blaming the person for your shock & upset, Just not talking about it, Jumping in with assumptions as to why, Trying to force them to stop, asking the person to promise not to self-harm, panicking or over-reacting.

Common Questions about self-harm

Is it a failed suicide attempt? - Not usually, quite the opposite normally

Do some people self- harm to copy others? - It can be possible; however, it is unlikely that a person would continue to do it for a long time. After all, it hurts.

Are people who self-harm mentally ill? No; it is a sign that someone is in great distress and has coped with it in a different way.

Isn't it attention seeking? This can be used as a way of dismissing self- harm but for many people who don't show or tell about their self-harm it doesn't make any sense. Instead of saying you're attention seeking a person could say "would you like to talk about how you feel, how can I help you?"

AN IN-DEPTH BOOKLET CAN BE OBTAINED FROM THE MEDICAL ROOM