

What is self-harm?

Self-harm is when you hurt yourself on purpose. Examples include cutting, burning, poisoning and bruising, but other forms might be more indirect such as self-neglect, excessive risk taking, sexual promiscuity, self-trolling, alcohol and substance misuse, or eating distress.

There are many reasons why someone may self-harm – it is often used as a way of coping with other problems – but it can relate to underlying issues with your mental health. Self-harm is not a positive way to deal with things and it can be difficult to stop, especially when you feel distressed or upset. If you don't feel you can stop right now, that's OK, but try to ensure you keep yourself safe.

Many people stop hurting themselves when the time is right for them. Everyone is different - try not to feel guilty – it is a way of getting through, and doing it now does NOT mean that you will have to do it forever to cope.



Why people self-harm

There is no one reason why people self-harm and it can affect anyone of any age. It can be a way of;

- relieving overwhelming thoughts and feelings that build up inside
- reducing tension and stress
- providing a feeling of physical pain to distract from emotional pain
- expressing emotions such as hurt, anger or frustration
- regaining control over feelings or problems



- Self-harm may be a way of coping with situations such as;
 - friendship or school problems, bullying, social media pressure, peer pressure, rejection
 - anxiety, depression, low self-esteem, poor body image, gender identity, sexuality, abuse
 - family problems such as separation or conflict, unrealistic expectations and bereavement.

Sometimes you might not know why you hurt yourself. There might not be obvious reasons. And that's OK, you can still get help.

Thoughts of suicide

Although the majority of people use self-harm as a way of dealing with life – not as a way of wanting to end their own life – people who have self-harmed are at more risk of taking their own life.

Many people will have thoughts of suicide, and they can feel really scary – but the vast majority don't go on to take these thoughts any further. If you are struggling with thoughts of suicide – please reach out and talk – there is help and support available.

There is hope.



What can I do?

Understanding and taking control of your self-harm can be challenging. You can help by;

- Developing distraction techniques and coping mechanisms
- Keeping a diary and look for patterns in your self-harm.
- Thinking about why you might self-harm and how it helps you cope
- Reaching out to someone you trust, a helpline or other forum to talk things through
- Seeking professional support
- Caring for your injuries with first-aid and accessing medical attention when needed

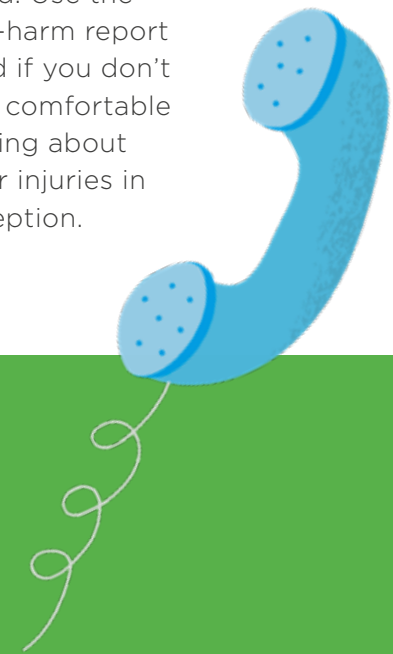


Look after yourself

If you are going to harm yourself:

- Ensure you know basic first aid so you can care for wounds to avoid infection, and to guide your decisions about when to seek medical help. Download the **Red Cross First Aid App**. **LifeSIGNS** website has information specifically on first aid for self-harm.
- Avoid using medicines as a way of self-harming. Remember there is no such thing as a safe overdose. **IF YOU HAVE TAKEN AN OVERDOSE YOU SHOULD ALWAYS SEEK MEDICAL ADVICE.**
- Make sure your tetanus vaccination is up to date

- Avoid alcohol and drugs. They can make you more likely to act impulsively or damage yourself more than you intended.
- Know where to get help if you need. If in any doubt ring NHS Direct on 111
- In an emergency ring 999 or go to A&E. Do not be afraid to do this – you will receive the help and support you need. Use the self-harm report card if you don't feel comfortable talking about your injuries in reception.



Support at a glance

24/7 Support:

Young Minds
Crisis Messenger:
Text YM to 85258
Samaritans 116 123
The Mix
0808 808 4994
Childline 0800 111

Local Support:

safa-selfharm.com
kooth.com
mindlinecumbria.org

National Support:

nshn.co.uk
selfharm.co.uk
selfinjurysupport.org.uk
lifesigns.org.uk
youngminds.org.uk

Recommended Apps:

Calm Harm
and DistrACT

NHS Mental Health Crisis Support:

North Cumbria
Universal Crisis Line
0800 652 2865

South Cumbria
and Lancs
Urgent Support
0800 953 0110



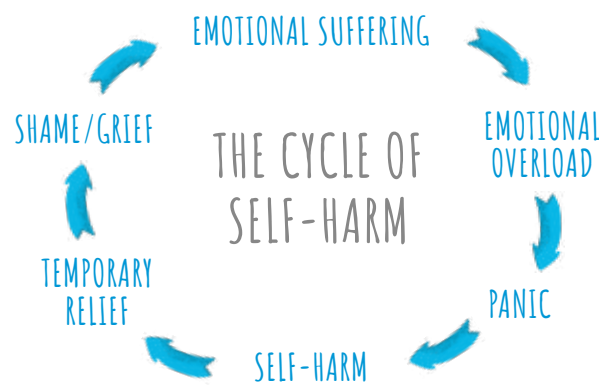
The cycle of self-harm

Learn to recognise triggers

'Triggers' are what creates the urge to hurt yourself. They usually involve some form of emotional suffering and can be situations, people, anniversaries or particular thoughts or feelings. Pay attention to what is happening in your life, your thoughts and your feelings before you get the urge to self-harm.

Become aware of the urge to self-harm

Triggers can lead to emotional overload and create urges to self-harm. These urges might include:



- Physical sensations like a racing heart or feelings of heaviness
- Strong emotions like sadness or anger
- A disconnection from yourself or a loss of sensation
- The main way in which people start to manage the urge to self-harm is through distractions.
- Repetitive thoughts about harming yourself, or how you might harm yourself
- The urge to self-harm can pass and it is thoughts that it is strongest for 5 - 15 minutes. Begin to identify ways you can distract yourself from the urge, or at least delay self-harming.
- Unhealthy decisions, like working too hard to avoid feelings.
- Taking alcohol or drugs can magnify urges and increase the likelihood of self-harming
- Start to notice what has and hasn't been working for you.

Don't be too hard on yourself. Recovery can be a bumpy journey, and you may have many ups and downs, that's normal. Be nice to yourself, it's OK, it will be worth it.



Distractions

When it comes to distractions – it's not a 'one size fits all.' Different distractions will work for different people and also different things may help at different times.

Distractions may be physical, comforting, zoning out, creative, constructive, solitary or in company.

For lots of inspiration about distractions have a look at two fabulous apps, Calm Harm & DistrACT.

Some ideas.....

If you're feeling SADNESS;

wrap a blanket around you, spend time with an animal, walk in nature, let yourself cry or sleep, listen to soothing music, try a breathing exercise.

If you feel ANGRY;

exercise, hit cushions or a punch bag, shout and dance, bite on bunched up material, tear something up into hundreds of pieces

If you feel you're LOSING CONTROL;

write lists; have a clear out; write a letter saying everything you are feeling, then tear it up, weed a garden, try a relaxation exercise.

If you are feeling NUMB or DISCONNECTED;

flick elastic bands on your wrists, hold ice cubes, smell something with strong odour, have a very cold shower.

If you're feeling SELF-HATRED;

write a letter from the part of you that feels the self-hatred, then write back with as much compassion and acceptance as you can, find creative ways to express the self-hatred, through writing songs or poetry, drawing, movement or singing, or do physical exercise.



Wait!

Another important technique is to wait before you self-harm. Five minutes if you can. This can feel difficult, so don't worry if you're not able to wait that long at first. If you can, slowly increase the time you wait and gradually build up the gaps between each time you self-harm.



Remember that the urge to self-harm is strongest for 5-15 minutes.



Keep a diary

One way to help yourself understand more about your self-harming behaviour is to keep a diary over a month or two of what happens before, during and after each time you self-harm so you can start to see patterns. This can be a distressing thing to do, so be nice to yourself after each time you do an entry, or get some support from a trusted person,



Where can I get help?

There are people you can talk to about what you are going through. It could be your parents, partner or friend, or there may be other trusted adults who could help such as wider family,

a teacher or youth worker.

You can also talk to your GP. They can arrange a referral to Child and Adolescent Mental Health Services or adult mental health support or let you know about other sources of local support.

There are also a range of helplines and online

support forums if you prefer talking to a stranger or someone else who might have been through a similar experience.

You can find out about a wide range of local and national advice, information and support available to you at www.every-life-matters.org.uk/get-help



Self-harm
What you need to know

Every life matters ...

Suicide Safer Cumbria
every-life-matters.org.uk
Charity No.1180815