# Self-harm support pack

Coping strategies for self-harm

Written & produced by

Every life matters

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Hello,

Firstly I would like to say that having this kit is a really important step in your recovery. I have been where you are before, and I would love to say, it absolutely does get better and I'm sitting here being over a year self-harm free.

I started self-harming when I was 14, and I wish somebody told me to open up and speak to someone about my self-harm. It's a very difficult subject to talk about, but with the right support and the right techniques, you will get the help you may need, but if that doesn't work, don't be afraid to keep trying new things, I found what works for me and you will too!

I just want you to know, it doesn't matter how long it takes to get there... you WILL get there!

Right now, it night not feel like things will get better, but they will. I believe in you, and you should believe in you, too.

Millie

# Introduction

This booklet is for people who self-harm. Reaching out for help is an important first step, and we are glad you have begun to look for help.

This pack is full of information, and contains things that you can use when you feel the urge to self-harm, or after you have self-harmed. We have provided envelopes for you to sort them into. Hopefully you will have read the booklet called 'Read First' to explain more.

**This pack is just the start of your road to recovery. It's designed for you, but you can use it however you wish.**

We have created digital versions of some of the re-usable resources so that you can print more when you need them. **Scan this QR code:**

# What is self-harm?

**Self-harm is when you hurt yourself on purpose.** Examples include cutting, burning, poisoning, banging your head, hair-pulling, skin-picking, biting, pinching or bruising. Other forms might be more indirect such as self-neglect, excessive risk taking, sexual promiscuity, self-trolling, alcohol and substance misuse.

Lots of people self-harm, you may have mixed feelings about your self-harming behaviour. But we know it is really difficult to stop, so please be kind to yourself. You have reached out for help, and that's a good place to begin.

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.

# Why do people self-harm?

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

- Relieving overwhelming thoughts
- Reducing tension and stress
- Expressing emotions such as hurt, anger or frustration
- Regaining control over feelings or problems
- To feel real, or experience a strong physical sensation

Not everyone self-harms because of difficult situations, or because they feel distressed. Some autistic people might self-harm for other reasons, such as:

- Sensory overload (too much noise, light, touch, crowds, etc)
- Sudden, unexpected change in routine
- Communication breakdown (they can't communicate what they need in the moment)
- Masking (or camouflaging) how you feel around others
- Burnout from navigating a neurotypical world
- Physical discomfort (too hot, hungry, irritable, or in pain, etc) that isn't identified or can't be expressed

Some autistic people don't pick up on body signals, such as hunger, feeling hot, or needing the loo. **Listening to body signals is called interoception**, and someone who has low interoception may not be able to spot the signals that relate to emotions.

They might not realise that when they feel sick or have a heaviness in the chest, it's because they are feeling anxious. **When interoception is low, crisis can build without warning**. This means that they might self-harm as a way of dealing with the overwhelming feelings.

Other people find it difficult to work out what emotion they are experiencing, and express it. This is called alexithymia. Half of all autistic people and 10% of neurotypical people have alexithymia. Having **alexithymia could increase the risk of self-harming**, as it can be **hard to identify and describe the emotions** you are experiencing before it gets to crisis point.

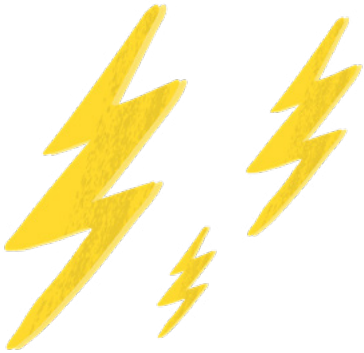
You might find it helpful to use a scale to identify how you are feeling. **We have a few different scales here**:

## Learn to recognise triggers

Triggers are what create the urge to hurt yourself. They usually involve some form of emotional suffering and can be situations, people, anniversaries or particular thoughts or feelings.

## The urge to self-harm

Triggers can lead to emotional overload and create urges to self-harm. Taking alcohol or drugs can magnify urges and increase the likelihood of self-harming, so avoid them if you can.



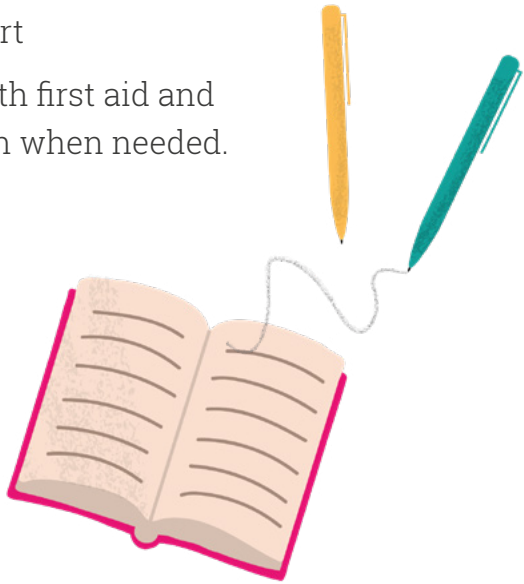
Sometimes you might not know why you hurt yourself. There might not be obvious reasons, and that's OK, you can still get help.

# What can I do?

Understanding and taking control of your self-harm can be challenging.

You can help by:

- Develop distraction techniques and coping mechanisms
- Keep a diary and look for patterns in your self-harm
- Think about why you might self-harm and how it helps you cope
- Reach out to someone you trust, a helpline or other forum to talk things through
- Seek professional support
- Care for your injuries with first aid and access medical attention when needed.



# Look after yourself

If you are going to harm yourself:

- 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 harm yourself more than you intended.
- Know where to get help if you need it. 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.
- Talk to someone you trust about it afterwards. You could do this by text if talking face to face is difficult.
- Be kind to yourself if you have self-harmed, and do something nice for yourself afterwards. It can be very hard to stop self-harming. Progress often goes up and down, and having setbacks is common.

# First Aid

## First aid for bleeding wounds

1. Apply gentle pressure with a clean cloth or gauze until the bleeding stops.
2. If the person feels faint, lay them down with their legs raised whilst you treat the wound.
3. Clean the wound with clean running water, gently washing it with soap. Dry it with a clean tea towel or face cloth.
4. Cover the wound once cleaned and dried with a sterile bandage to keep it clean and protected.
5. Watch for signs of infection, such as redness, swelling, warmth, or pus. It's important to keep the wound clean, so change the dressing if it gets wet, or dirty.

## When to visit A&E:

- If the wound is deep, or continues to bleed through the dressing;
- If the wound becomes infected.
- If the bleeding wound is on the scalp, cover with a bandage, and go to minor injuries or A&E for treatment.

**For more information on first aid, and information on other injuries such as a head injury, download the British Red Cross First Aid App.**

## First aid for burns

1. Hold the burn under cool running water for 20 minutes to reduce pain and swelling.
2. Once the burn is cooled, cover it with a dressing to protect it from infection.
3. If blisters form, don't burst the blisters; cover them with a dressing to protect the fragile skin.

## When to visit A&E:

- If the burn is blistered and larger than the palm of the hand;
- If the burn is deep, and looks waxy and white, or charred;
- If the burn affects a sensitive area of the body, such as the face, hands, feet, or genitals.
- If there is signs of infection, such as redness, swelling, warmth, or pus.

## Call 999 if:

- The wound is deep and/or large and bleeding heavily;
- The person loses consciousness or shows signs of shock, such as paleness, rapid breathing, or a weak pulse;
- The person is having difficulty breathing or experiencing chest pain;
- The person has ingested harmful substances or has taken an overdose;
- The person has a temperature, feels unwell, is drowsy or confused and has an infected wound;
- The person has tried to take their own life.
- The person has banged their head and has lost consciousness, vomits, or sees double.

Scan the QR code for an
**autism-adapted safety plan**:

# Your Safety Plan

Take these pages out of this booklet, fill it in and keep with you.

- Reasons for living
- Making my situation safer
- My warning signs
- Lifting my mood
- My informal support
- My distractions
- Professional support

## Reasons for Living

## Who will I share my plan with?

## Making my situation safer

## My warning signs

## Lifting my mood

## My informal support

**Samaritans**
Support 24/7
365 days.
Call 116 123

**CALM**
Helpline for all
5pm-12am
0800 58 58 58

**Papyrus Hopeline**
Helpline for young
people. 24/7
0800 068 4141

**SHOUT**
24hr Crisis Text
Service. Text
Shout to 85258

## My distractions

## My professional support

## In an emergency

- If you have already attempted suicide, taken an overdose or seriously harmed yourself **call 999 now**. Explain what is happening. You can stay on the phone until the ambulance arrives.
- If you are struggling to stay safe, or your thoughts of suicide are becoming too overwhelming then call NHS 111 or the NHS Universal Mental Health Crisis Line

**24hr NHS Mental Health Crisis Line**

Call 111, Option 2

Every
life
matters

www.every-life-matters.org.uk

Suicide Safer Communities, Training and
Suicide Bereavement Support in Cumbria
Charity No. 1180815

# Support at a glance

## 24/7 Support

**Samaritans** 116 123

**Childline** 0800 1111

**Shout** Text SHOUT to 85258

**Papyrus** 0800 068 4141

**NHS** Mental Health Crisis Line: 111 Option 2

## Recommended Apps

Red Cross First Aid

Calm Harm

DistrACT

TellMi

Stay Alive

## Useful websites

- selfharm.co.uk
- selfinjurysupport.org.uk
- lifesigns.org.uk
- youngminds.org.uk
- themix.org.uk

We have more information on our **Support Directory**, including websites and apps for autistic people too.

# 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 can be more vulnerable to 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 having thoughts of suicide – please reach out and talk. There is help and support available.**

# Where can I get help?

There are people you can talk to about what you are going through. It's important to talk to someone that you trust, that might include:

- Your parents
- Your partner
- A friend or colleague
- Wider family member
- A teacher or Youth Worker
- Your GP, who can refer you for talking therapy or mental health support, and tell you about other local support
- Helplines and online support forums (more details in the booklet)
- The Samaritans 116123

**There is hope**

# Distractions

**You can learn to manage the urge to self-harm through distractions.** The urge will pass, and it's strongest for a 5-15 minute period – do what you can to get through this time.

When it comes to distractions, experiment and find out what works best for you. It helps to have a few planned for when you need them. Circle a few in this book you'd like to try. Have a look at the Calm Harm and DistrACT apps for more ideas.

My counsellor came up with the idea of drawing around my own feet on a piece of card and when I felt like I needed to self-harm, I would step onto the feet and it would make me feel like I was standing in someone else's shoes for a while so I didn't have to deal with how I was feeling or what I was thinking.

Kirsty x

**What emotions are associated with your self-harm?**
For sadness try comforting yourself, for anger try something physical like hitting a pillow, if you are feeling out of control try being productive.

## Time with others

- Spend time with friends or family
- Talk to, or text, a trusted friend
- Ring a helpline
- Spend time on a supportive online forum

## Sensory Distractions

- Chew gum
- Strong smells (essential oils, perfume)
- Weighted blanket
- Spicy foods
- Hold an Ice cube tightly, or rub it on your skin
- Run your hands under cold water or splash it on your face
- Tear paper or fabric
- Touch something soft like a pet, fluffy cushion or a blanket
- Stimming

## Being productive

- Write a to do list
- Tidy your bedroom
- Clean the house
- Do the dishes
- Bake a cake
- Untangle necklaces or string

- Write a list of positive things in your life
- Write an A to Z of distractions that you could try
- Paint your nails
- Pluck your eyebrows

## Get physical

- Go for a run
- Do a workout
- Dance
- Have a pillow fight with the wall
- Play with a stress ball
- Pop bubble wrap
- Rip up paper into small pieces

**Fill a box with items that help you avoid the urge to self-harm.** Things you can touch, smell, look at, cuddle, listen to or watch, fiddle with or break into pieces.

## Lose yourself

- Watch your favourite film or box set
- Play a game on your phone
- Do a crossword, word search or Sudoku
- Play with a fidget or slinky
- Dress up, glamorous or silly
- Plan an imaginary party
- Count tiles on the floor, bricks on a wall, books on a shelf
- Try fidget toys
- Get stuck in to your special interests

## Find comfort

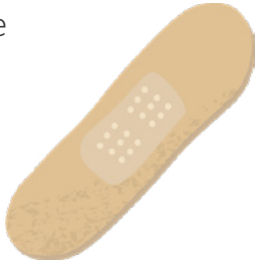
- Cuddle a soft toy/pillow
- Allow yourself to cry
- Sleep
- Have a hot bath
- Massage your hands
- Cuddle a pet
- Put your PJs on

## Be creative

- Draw or colour
- Play an instrument or sing
- Paint a picture
- Make a playlist
- Write a poem or blog
- Listen to music that lifts your mood
- Make an origami Red Box, to keep bandages etc. You can find one here:

## Other ideas

- Draw on yourself in red marker
- Squeeze an ice cube
- Snap an elastic band on your wrist
- Use red food colouring and gelatine
- Draw on yourself with red lipstick
- Grounding techniques (such as 5-4-3-2-1)
- Put plasters or bandages on where you want to self-harm



## Try delaying

Try delaying - even if you only delay for a minute or so – that is still an achievement. Next time try to delay for slightly longer.

It's Ok to feel emotions, It's Ok to cry. Everyone has different way of coping with things, How you're feeling now will pass.

Kirsty X

# Where to get more help

## 24/7 Support

**Shout** Text SHOUT to 85258

**Samaritans** 116 123

**Childline** 0800 1111

**Papyrus** 0800 068 4141

**NHS** 111 Option 2

## Online Support

**Side by Side** sidebyside.mind.org.uk
Mind's online community.

**Kooth** kooth.com
Online support including one to one, discussion and information. (Not available in all locations).

**Together All** Togetherall.com
A safe, anonymous online community accessible 24/7 with trained professionals available at all times.

## Local Support

Your GP, school or other support organisation can make a referral to local support, or Child and Adolescent NHS Mental Health Services. Self-referral is available in some areas.

## Resources and Apps

**Stem4** Apps and information to support young people and parents stem4.org.uk.

**DistrACT** A thorough app covering distraction techniques, self-help, and where to get help.

**Calm Harm** Free app to help you manage the urge to self-harm.

**First Aid** Download the Red Cross First Aid App.

**Tell Mi** Peer support via the app, pre-moderated by professionals.

"Friends who understood me made a big difference. They helped me see that what I was saying wasn't alien and I wasn't a burden. Suicidal thoughts and self-harm are serious and people do need support. But I found it really reassuring to find out that many people have these thoughts. I wasn't the only one."

**Ellie**

## National Support, Advice and Information

**Alumina** selfharm.co.uk Information, and a weekly online course for young people 11-19, running over 7 weeks.

**Beat Eating Disorders** beateatingdisorders.org.uk Information, advice, helpline and online support groups.

**Harmless** harmless.org.uk Information and support includes the Tomorrow Project.

**LifeSigns** lifesigns.org.uk Practical and real life Information, guidance and online support.

**The Mix** themix.org.uk Advice and support for under 25s on many issues including self-harm.

**Papyrus** 0800 068 4141 24/7 papyrus-uk.org Support for young people with thoughts of suicide.

**Recover Your Life** recoveryourlife.com Information, as well as support forums

**SANEline** sane.org.uk Out-of-hours mental health helpline including family, friends and carers. Support for 16+. 4pm-10pm on 0300 304 7000.

**Young Minds** 0808 802 5544 youngminds.org.uk Thorough and practical information and advice about young people's mental health includes information on medication and parent's helpline.

## Ideas for Distractions

**DistrACT** and **Calm Harm** two apps to help you manage the urge to self-harm.

**Wellbeing and Coping** wellbeingandcoping.net

Scan the QR codes to see more ideas here:

**Mind**

**Papyrus**

**Self Injury Support**

## Information and support for Parents and Carers

**Young Minds** Parents Helpline 0808 802 5544. Advice for parents and carers Monday to Friday 9.30-4.00pm.

**Anna Freud Centre** annafreud.org Information and resources for families on a variety of topics, including self-harm

**MindEd** mindedforfamilies.org.uk Free online courses for parents and carers on mental health issues, as well as lots of information and resources

We have created digital versions of some of the re-usable resources so that you can print more when you need them. **Scan this QR code:**

Every life matters

**www.every-life-matters.org.uk**

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