

Self-Harm

Self-harm is a term used when someone injures or harms themselves on purpose rather than by accident.

Common examples include overdosing (self-poisoning), hitting, cutting or burning oneself, pulling hair or picking skin, or self-strangulation. Self-harm is always a sign of something being seriously wrong.

Self-harm is a way of dealing with very difficult feelings that build up inside.

People say different things about why they do it. Some say that they have been feeling desperate about a problem and do not know where to turn for help. They feel trapped and helpless. Self-injury helps them to feel more in control. Some people talk of feelings of anger or tension that get bottled up inside, until they feel like exploding. Self-injury helps to relieve the tension that they feel. Feelings of guilt or shame may also become unbearable. Self-harm is a way of punishing oneself. Some people try to cope with very upsetting experiences, such as trauma or abuse, by convincing themselves that the upsetting event(s) never happened. These people sometimes suffer from feelings of 'numbness' or 'deadness'. They say that they feel detached from the world and their bodies, and that self-injury is a way of feeling more connected and alive.

A proportion of young people who self-harm do so because they feel so upset and overwhelmed by difficulties. At the time, many people just want their problems to disappear, and have no idea how to get help.

Possible signs of self harm:

Changes in behaviour that present as the young person being upset, withdrawn or irritable. Self-injury is often kept secret but there may be clues, such as refusing to wear short sleeves or to take off clothing for sports.

Young people should be encouraged to let parents know if one of their friends is in trouble, upset, or shows signs of harming themselves. Friends often worry about betraying a confidence, yet they appreciate that self-harm can endanger their lives and for this reason, it should never be kept secret.