

# Self Harm Support for Young People



Self harm is difficult to talk about but it's a common problem particularly among young people.

Unfortunately some young people use self harm as a way of trying to deal with very difficult feelings that build up inside.

This could be a minor injury such as hair pulling or more serious, sometimes even life threatening, which may include cutting parts of the body, burning, hitting, swallowing harmful substances or overdosing on medication.

Self-harm is always a sign of something being seriously wrong.

## Why do young people self-harm?

Self harm is often a way of trying to cope with painful or confused feelings, for example:

- Feeling sad, worried or angry,
- Not feeling very good or confident about themselves,
- Being hurt by others; physically, sexually or emotionally,
- Feeling under a lot of pressure at school or at home,
- Trying to fit in with a group of friends/acceptance,
- Losing someone close, such as dying or leaving.

When difficult or stressful things happen in a person's life, it can trigger self-harm. Upsetting events that may lead to self-harm include:

- Arguments with friends and family,
- Break-up of a relationship,
- Failing or thinking you're going to fail,

- Pressure of exams,
- Bullying.

## What can I do as a parent?

As a parent, it's really hard to cope with a child/young person with self-harming behaviour or who attempts suicide. It's natural to feel angry, frightened or guilty and even confused as to "why"?. It may also be difficult to take it seriously or know what to do for the best. Try to keep calm and remain caring, even if you feel cross or frightened; this will help your child/young person know you can manage their distress and they can come to you for help and support.

- Contact your child's school – they can refer to various services where applicable and offer advice and support.
- Make a GP appointment
- Attend A&E when an overdose or significant self harm has occurred
- Use online counselling support such as Kooth.com

## What can I do as a teacher or staff member?

If you are a teacher, it is important to encourage students to let you know if one of their friends is in trouble, upset, or shows signs of harming themselves. Friends often worry about betraying a confidence and you may need to explain that self-harm is very serious and can be life threatening. For this reason, it should never be kept secret. Teachers and staff should keep calm and professional, and ensure that the young person can come to you for help and support.

## Ways you can help

- Notice when the young person seems 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.
- Encourage them to talk about their worries and take them seriously. Show them you care by listening, offer sympathy and understanding, and help them to solve any problems.
- Buy blister packs of medicine in small amounts. This helps prevent impulsive overdoses. Getting pills out of a blister pack takes longer than swallowing them

straight from a bottle. It may be long enough to make someone stop and think about what they are doing.

- Keep medicines locked away.
- Keep sharps, knives, pencil sharpeners, razors out of reach/locked away of you child cuts.
- Get help if family problems or arguments keep upsetting you or the young person.
- If a young person has injured themselves, you can help practically by checking to see if injuries (cuts or burns for example) need hospital treatment and if not, by providing them with clean dressings to cover their wounds.
- Use ice cubes to hold in the hand to resist the urge to self harm with cuts
- Elastic bands at the wrists to 'ping' when you feel the urge to harm/cut.
- Trace red felt tip pens on areas you would cut – the imagery of red can represent blood to somebody who self harms but not cause the damage.
- Fiddle gadgets/toys