

Supporting a Young Person who Self-Harms

Self-harm is any non-accidental, non-suicidal behaviour which causes damage to a person's body with the intent of coping with emotional distress. Some examples of self-harm are cutting or burning oneself, or ingesting toxic substances or foreign objects.

Statistics:

Approximately 1 in 12 young people self-harm in the UK (Young Minds UK).

10 TOP TIPS for supporting a young person who self-harms:

- 1 Don't panic!** It's distressing to know a young person self-harms, but talking about self-harm won't encourage it more. Often simply being there to show you care is enough.
- 2 Offer to listen.** Take it seriously and invite them to tell you about the self-harm and any problems or worries. Be patient, non-judgemental and mindful of how difficult it can be to speak about self-harm. Encourage them to talk to and seek support from their parents.
- 3 Don't tell them to "just stop doing it".** Self-harm may feel like the only way to express and cope with difficult emotions - so just stopping might leave them more at risk.
- 4 Don't expect a quick fix.** Most people want help and support, however it can be hard to stop as self-harm may have become a long term coping strategy.
- 5 Harm minimisation.** Explore basic first aid and how to clean/care for injuries. If the self-harm has caused further health risks, support them to see their GP or to attend A&E.
- 6 Explore distraction techniques.** Sensitively encourage them to try using distraction techniques when they have the urge to self-harm. Suggestions could be flicking an elastic band on the wrist, or holding an ice cube on the skin.
- 7 Offer help to deal with stress.** Stress is one of the biggest triggers for self-harm. Talk about what might help reduce stress such as exercise, music, art or relaxation strategies.
- 8 Identify Triggers.** Help them explore and identify what might trigger the urge to self-harm. Encourage them to recognise their stress triggers by keeping a diary.
- 9 Seek professional help if needed.** Give reassurance and hope that things can improve. If needed, discuss with them a referral to a mental health professional for extra support.
- 10 Look after yourself.** Supporting someone who self-harms can be emotionally draining. Look after your own wellbeing, be kind to yourself and seek support too.

Self-help links:

- Moray guidance for people working with children and young people at risk of self-harm - www.moray.gov.uk/moray_standard/page_117484.html
- www.penumbra.org.uk/service-locations/west-area-services/ayrshire/self-harm-services
- www.virtual-college.co.uk/resources/free-courses/understanding-young-minds
- www.youngminds.org.uk/media/1519/youngminds-self-harm.pdf
- www.themix.org.uk/mental-health/self-harm
- www.lifesigns.org.uk
- www.nshn.co.uk
- www.calmharm.co.uk - App
- www.selfharm.co.uk

