

How can I help my child?

Self-harm, or self-injury, describes a wide range of things people deliberately do to themselves that appear to cause some kind of physical hurt. It can still be very hard for parents and carers to know about - or witness - self-harming behaviour in their children.

Cutting the arms or the back of the legs is the most common form of self-harm, but it can take many forms, including burning, biting, hitting oneself, banging head onto walls, pulling out hair (trichotillomania), inserting objects into the body or taking overdoses.

Some argue that risky behaviours such as smoking, drinking, taking drugs and having unprotected sex are also a form of self-harming.

Over time, self-harming can become a habit that is hard to stop

Reasons for self-harm...

A person may self-harm to help them cope with negative feelings and difficult experiences, to feel more in control, or to punish themselves. It can be a way of relieving overwhelming feelings that build up inside, to:

- reduce tension
- manage extreme emotional upset
- provide a feeling of physical pain to distract from emotional pain
- express emotions such as hurt, anger or frustration
- regain control over feelings or problems
- punish themselves or others

The feelings or experiences that might be connected to self-harm include anxiety, depression, low self-esteem, poor body image, gender identity, sexuality, abuse, school problems, bullying, social media pressure, family or friendship troubles and bereavement.

Is my child self-harming?

As a parent, you might suspect that your child is self-harming. If you are worried, keep an eye open for the following signs:

- unexplained cuts, burns, bite-marks, bruises or bald patches
- keeping themselves covered; avoiding swimming or changing clothes around others
- bloody tissues in waste bins
- being withdrawn or isolated from friends and family
- low mood, lack of interest in life, depression or outbursts of anger
- blaming themselves for problems or expressing feelings of failure, uselessness, or hopelessness



Where can I get help?

YoungMinds Parents Helpline
0808 802 5544 www.youngminds.org.uk

Harmless
info@harmless.org.uk

CALM (Campaign against Living Miserably)
0800 58 58 58

Childline
0800 1111

The Mix
0808 808 4994

Youth Wellbeing Directory
www.annafreud.co.uk

Youth Access
www.youthaccess.org.uk

MindEd
www.minded.org.uk

Selfharm.co.uk

“It gave me confidence that I could do this and really be there for my son” - Parent

It can be difficult to know what to do or how to react if you find out your child is self-harming. Here are some things that can really help:

1. Avoid asking lots of questions at once
2. Consider if your child's harming may be in areas you can see
3. Remember self-harming is a coping mechanism, it is a symptom of an underlying problem
4. Talk to your child but try not to get into a hostile confrontation
5. Seek professional help. Your child may need a risk assessment from a qualified mental health professional. Talk to your GP and explore whether your child can be referred to your local Child and Adolescent Mental Health Services (CAMHS).
6. Keep firm boundaries and don't be afraid of disciplining your child. It is helpful to keep a sense of normality.



Supporting
your child
who is
self-harming

