

SELF HARM

A mini-guide to help support yourself or anyone you know with self harm



Understanding self harm

It can be a very lonely place to be in when you're self harming, but it is **more common than you may realise**.

A lot of people think self harm is either cutting and/or overdosing but a lot of things done in **excess** could be seen as self harm. **Examples** of these are: getting drunk, doing drugs, smoking, purposely getting into fights and using the pain of tattoos or piercings as a coping mechanism for difficult emotions. There are also less obvious things such as rubbing skin, digging your nails into yourself or pinching yourself.

If you're concerned that any of the above applies to you, a friend or family member, **please don't panic!**

Self harm can be a strategy people use **to cope with what's going on in their life**. Self harm is especially common in young people which may be as a result of so much change going on physically / hormonally as well as all other changes young people are having to face.

When young people self harm it is **usually a sign that they are having a tough time and need support**. There are lots of services that can help (see our [Support Services](#) section.) Services won't force you to stop, but they will encourage and support you.

Tips for friends and family:

- Rather than trying to come up with a solution, it's more likely that they'll want you to **listen and support them** by letting them know it's okay to feel what they're feeling. Find more tips in our [Communicating](#) section.
- Focus on what's causing them to self harm rather than the self harm in itself, unless immediate medical attention is required: **How are they feeling? What's going on for them at the moment? Have there been any major changes in their life recently?**
- Trying to force someone to stop self harming can make them feel worse, as it can increase the emotions they're already trying to cope with and reduce their feeling of control.
- If they do want to stop self harming, we've included some suggestions in our [Ideas to Help](#) section.

Why do people self harm?

Everyone has problems during their life, and self harm can affect **anyone**.

Self harm may be used as a **coping mechanism**, and it is **a myth that self harm is always a sign of suicidal behaviour**.

Some underlying issues can lead to young people harming themselves. We call these **triggers**, and have listed some below.

If you combine any of these triggers with the change that is going on both physically and hormonally for young people, it's not surprising that it can be a difficult time.

- Struggling with **difficult thoughts, feelings and emotions**, or maybe feeling overwhelmed
- Problems with **family, friends or relationships**
- **Stress** (specifically exams and academic achievement)
- **Abuse** (emotional, physical, sexual or neglect)
- Being **bullied** (many different types including cyber bullying)
- **Self image** issues

When someone is struggling to cope or tell somehow else how they are feeling, self harm can be a way of dealing with - and expressing - difficult feelings.

For some people, it can lead to a **sense of control or emotional release**.

Some young people may not understand or know why they self harm, and that's okay. It's still important to get help.

List three people or services that you will contact if you need to talk:

Name:
Number:
Email:

Name:
Number:
Email:

Name:
Number:
Email:

Communicating about self harm

If you are self harming...

...you might feel lonely, isolated and like you can't tell anyone about it - but **you are not alone**.

Some people perceive self harm as "attention seeking" behaviour, but it's clear that in most cases this is not true at all and most people feel they have to hide it. We really want to encourage you to talk about it and more importantly about how you're feeling.

This could be anonymously through services such as the **Samaritans** and **Tess** (find their details in our [Websites and Phonelines](#) section) or having a chat with a friend, family member, staff at school, college or university, GP, youth worker, or counsellor.

It's understandable that talking to someone might feel difficult (maybe even impossible) to start with. Sometimes writing, drawing or painting how you're feeling can help too. We're not saying it will fix everything, but usually it can really help to get it out - it can help you realise what's going on inside your head and how you're feeling, as well as helping others to understand why you may be behaving differently.

Here are a few ideas that might help you to start a conversation about how you're feeling or your self harm:

- **I'm finding (...) really hard right now.**
- **Can we have a chat about (...)**
- **I've been doing (...) to myself and I don't know why.**
- **If you've got a moment I could really do with a chat.**
- **Can I talk to you in private please?**

Self harm is a form of communication in itself

Self harm can be a way of expressing how you're feeling, whether this is intentional or not. It's not easy to talk about 'how you're feeling', 'what you're thinking' and 'what's going on for you'. This can lead to trying to find a way to cope with these things on your own. It can be very difficult to find the "right" words or words that can make/help people understand how you're actually feeling inside.

MY SAFETY PLAN

If I feel that I want to self harm:

I will talk to:

on:

I will seek help from:

I will calm myself by:

I will go to my safe space at:

My ideas to keep myself safe are:

When talking to others about their self harm...

...it's helpful to be aware that self harm is likely to be a coping mechanism they've developed to help cope with and manage emotions. Check out [Keeping Yourself Safe](#) to encourage them to do this in the safest way possible.

We understand it's not an easy subject to broach but it's so important to give people a chance to talk about what they're doing - and more importantly *why* they're doing it.

It's really key to **listen, take them seriously**, and be as **open-minded** and as **non-judgemental** as possible whilst someone is disclosing their self harm to you or talking about their feelings or what's going on for them.

Probably the **key thing** to focus on (as long as they don't need immediate medical attention) is **why they're self harming**.

Phrases like this might help you to start the conversation:

- **I've noticed that recently you don't quite seem yourself, is there anything you'd like to talk about?**
- **Is there anything I can do to help?**
- **I can see that you've got/done (...) and I'm concerned about how you are.**
- **Are you being safe in your self harming?**



www.YMCARightHere.com



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Keeping yourself safe

Trying to stop self harming can be difficult. To help keep yourself safe, there are different ways of self harming, some of which are safer than others such as using elastic bands or ice cubes.

Here is some more advice about keeping yourself safe.

- When you are self harming it's really important to look after yourself by using clean equipment and clean any cuts afterwards to reduce risk of infections.
- Think about the environment you're in whilst self harming: try to avoid dirty and dangerous situations and to be in a place near other people who could help you if necessary.
- Take time to understand and manage risks related to any substances you may use, and use a condom every time you have sex.
- If you have taken an overdose, seek medical attention. You can phone **999** for an ambulance or **111** for free information and advice if you're not sure it's an emergency. If you can, take the tablets or packaging of tablets with you so medical staff know what you've taken.

This mini-guide contains **practical advice, services and websites** to support young people affected by self harm, as well as those who care about them.

It has been created by young volunteers from **YMCA RIGHT HERE** project, who talked to 16-25 year olds about their **perceptions, beliefs and knowledge** of self harm, and also to education and medical staff who work with 16-25 year olds.

We hope this guide will **increase awareness** and get people to **talk more openly** about self harm, and we really want it to help young people gain access to the **services and support** that are available to them, and that they deserve.



YMCA

Ideas to help

Everyone has their own way of coping. Here are some things we've heard and found can help:

Distract yourself

Some people find it helps to distract themselves if they feel they may self harm. We understand the ideas below might not work for everyone, but they might help you:

- **Something fun:** listen to music, watch your fave tv show, do a puzzle (sudoku, wordsearch) or pop some bubblewrap!
- **Something creative:** painting, drawing or writing. Also, some people find drawing on yourself with a non-permanent red marker pen can help.
- **Something new:** read a different magazine, try yoga, learn an instrument, do some physical exercise like go for a walk or jog.
- **Something comforting:** allow yourself to cry, phone or meet someone you care about, sleep, cuddle a soft toy or pillow, or have a hot chocolate.

You'll find many more ideas at [nshn.co.uk/downloads/Distractions.pdf](https://www.nshn.co.uk/downloads/Distractions.pdf)

If you find it difficult, it can be helpful to start by distracting yourself for a short time, and build it up gradually.

Talking can...

...help you to understand what's going on, how you're feeling and to come up with ideas to feel better.

...help others to know how you're feeling and understand why you're doing the things you do.

Take a look at our [Communicating](#) section for ideas to get you talking.

Get more support

There are loads of services around to help you (see the [Local Support](#) section.) If the thought of going somewhere new feels scary, here are some tips:

- Take a friend, family member or someone you trust with you.
- Think about what you want to say before you go: [docreedy.org](https://www.docreedy.org) can be really useful for helping to start a difficult conversation.
- Check out the service's website to find out more and google the address to plan your route so you know where you're going.

Confidentiality

It can be difficult telling someone about self harm, especially if you're worried they will tell someone else. But talking to someone can often be a positive way of starting to work through what's on your mind, at the same time as giving that person an opportunity to help and support you in any way they can.

Usually what's said between you and a professional (teacher, youth worker, doctor, nurse etc) should be kept between you both. However, if they are concerned about your safety, they may discuss with you the possibility of talking to someone else who could help. If you aren't sure what is confidential, ask.

Talking to doctors / nurses

- Your parent or carer does not have to know and you have a right to privacy **even if you're under 16.**
- The only time they will need to break confidentiality is if you or someone around you is at severe risk of danger (for example, thought likely to act on thoughts of suicide).
- They should ask your permission before contacting anyone else, and let you know what is happening.
- Remember health professionals are not there to trick you or betray you. They are there to make sure you are listened to, supported and kept safe, and they have a duty to do what is in your best interests.
- Check out [docreedy.org](https://www.docreedy.org) to help you prepare for a GP appointment.

Talking to a teacher

- If there is a teacher or any staff member you trust, do talk to them they are there to help you and listen to you.
- They may not have the experience or training to be able to give you the best possible support, so they might need to refer you to a counsellor or other health professional to make sure you get all the support you need.
- They have a legal duty to pass certain information on (such as physical abuse or self harm) but this may not have to be to a parent/ carer.

Websites and phonelines

Not all websites about self harm are helpful - we've spent time finding the most supportive websites out there, so you don't have to.

Add www. before all websites listed!

Self harm specific:

selfharm.co.uk
nshn.co.uk
lifesigns.org.uk
selfinjurysupport.org.uk
themix.org.uk/self-harm

Girls and young women of any age can text Tess anonymously on 07537 432 444 Tue, Wed and Thur from 7pm to 9.30pm

Emotional support:

youngminds.org.uk
mind.org.uk
sane.org.uk/what_we_do/support/helpline
childline.org.uk
Or call 0800 1111 (up to age 19)
samaritans.org - anonymous support for anyone in crisis.
Call 116 123 or email jo@samaritans.org

Other specialist help:

beateatingdisorders.org.uk (eating disorders)
sexualhealthwestsussex.nhs.uk
talktofrank.com (drugs)
winstonswish.org (bereavement support for families)

Help for parents / carers:

www.bit.ly/1LP1kiu - a short film for parents / carers who are concerned about their child's self harming. Also check out ymcarighthere.com/advice-support/parentscarers

relate.org.uk/relationship-help/talk-someone
free instant online chat with a counsellor about parenting issues

youngminds.org.uk/for_parents
free helpline 0808 802 5544 open Mon-Fri 9.30am-4pm

www.wspcf.org.uk
info, training & support for parents / carers of children with special educational needs and disabilities 01903726188

If you or someone you know has hurt themselves badly and needs urgent help, go to A&E or call 999 for an ambulance.

Local support

You don't have to go through anything on your own. There might be someone you feel you can talk to at home or where you study. Below are other places where someone will listen. You can take a friend or family member with you to any of these places.

YMCA Dialogue Community Service provides free face to face therapy and group programmes to 11-18 year olds throughout West Sussex. 07739 893707. community.counselling@ymcadlg.org

e-wellbeing Digital wellbeing/online mental health service for young people run by YMCA DLG e-wellbeing.co.uk

FindItOut Centres are safe places for under 25s to get information and advice on a range of issues. yourspacewestsussex.co.uk

Allsorts Youth Project listens to, supports & connects children & young people between the ages of 5 and 25 years old, who are LGBTU. They provide youth groups, 1:1 support and advocacy support in Brighton and West Sussex. allsortsyouth.org.uk

BMEYPP Black and Minority Ethnic Young People's Project - **on Instagram, Facebook and Twitter**

Mind in West Sussex offer support and information about mental health and wellbeing to 16-25 year olds. coastalwestsussexmind.org
YES Service Youth Emotional Support (YES) is a free service for young people aged 11-18 looking for support with their well-being which includes one to one support and groupwork. 033 022 267 11 yes@westsussex.gov.uk

CGL drugs & alcohol service for under 25s; & support around parent(s) / carer(s) substance abuse changegrowlive.org
Young Carers can get support at westsussex.gov.uk/youngcarers

Worth Domestic Violence Advisors 0330 222 8181 or 07834 968539

Saturn Centre supports anyone over 14 who has been sexually assaulted. 01213 600 469 or saturncentre.org

Child and Adolescent Mental Health Service (CAMHS)
Chichester – 01243 813405
Worthing – 01903 286754
Horsham – 01403 223344

Talk to your doctor! Visit [docreedy.org](https://www.docreedy.org) to prepare your checklist. If your doctor's surgery is closed, you can get medical advice by calling **111**.

Be Okay mental health support for young people aged 16-25 sussexoak-leaf.org.uk/be-ok/