

# YOUNGMINDS

The voice for young people's mental health and wellbeing

**WORRIED ABOUT  
SELF-HARM?**



Between  
**1.12**  
in and

## WHO IS THIS BOOKLET FOR?

**This booklet aims to help you understand more about self-harm and to find support for yourself or someone you know.**

**It includes information about:**

- What self-harm is and why people do it
- Thinking about stopping and getting help
- How friends and family can help
- Useful addresses and contact numbers

**1** in **15**  
children and young  
people deliberately  
self-harm



## WHAT IS SELF-HARM?

Self-harm is a way of dealing with very difficult feelings that build up inside. People deal with these feelings in various ways.

### Here are some examples:

Cutting or burning themselves, bruising themselves, taking an overdose of tablets, pulling hair or picking skin.

Some people think that the seriousness of the problem can be measured by how bad the injury is. This is not the case – a person who hurts themselves a bit can be feeling just as bad as someone who hurts themselves a lot.

Self-harm can affect anyone. It is a lot more common than people think. Many people hurt themselves secretly for a long time before finding the courage to tell someone.



## WHY DO PEOPLE DO IT?

Everyone has problems in their life and often people want help. But sometimes it's hard to cope or even to put feelings into words. If feelings get bottled up inside, the pressure goes up and up until you feel like you are going to explode. This is the point where some people harm themselves.

*"I think control's a big thing. You can't control what's happening around you, but you can control what you do to yourself."*

“

*I didn't think there was any way out of my situation, so I took loads of tablets. I felt so bad I just wanted to die... and I nearly did. Now things are different, and I'm so glad to be alive.*

”

**37,000**

**children and young people**

are admitted to hospital every year due to the severity of their injuries





## WHAT MAKES PEOPLE SO STRESSED?

There are lots of things:

- Money
- Bullying
- Growing up
- Problems with friends
- Bereavement
- Housing problems
- Pressure to fit in
- Pressure of school or work
- Abuse
- Problems to do with who you are – your race, religion or sexuality



**When a lot of problems come together, they can feel too much. If you're also feeling vulnerable, it's hard to cope as well as you normally do.**



## THINKING ABOUT STOPPING

You may want to stop harming yourself but have worries about it, such as feeling:

- Embarrassed...in case people think you're weird
- Depressed...about anything ever getting better
- Afraid...that you might end up dead
- Helpless...you don't know what to do for the best
- Guilty...because you can't stop harming yourself, even if you want to
- Isolated...you don't know who to talk to
- Hating yourself...for not being what people want
- Upset...you can't keep your feelings in... or maybe you can't let them out
- Worried...in case people think you're just attention seeking
- Out of control...you might not know why you hurt yourself and wonder if you're going mad
- Scared...because you don't know why you do it...it's getting worse

**When self-harm becomes a way of coping with stress it is a sign that there are problems that need sorting out. Help or support may be needed from family, friends, or others.**

*"It helps a lot when I can be with someone I trust. I need people to understand me, support me. I need to be treated normally – just like anyone else. Not like a mad person. I'm not mad. I've just got problems because of what happened in the past. Something happens – and suddenly all the memories and feelings come back."*



**Many people find it useful to talk to someone who is trained to help.**

## **HELPING YOURSELF**

If you have worries that make you want to harm yourself, here's some things that might help you:

### **Thinking about why you do it**

Lots of people don't know why they hurt themselves and it can be scary to become aware of how you feel and why. Stopping self-harm is easier if you can find other ways of coping. To do this, you'll first need to have a clear idea of why you do it. Many people find it useful to talk to someone who is trained to help.

Here are some questions that may be helpful for you to think about:

- What was happening when you first began to feel like hurting yourself?
- What seems to trigger the feeling now?
- Are you always at a certain place or with a particular person?
- Do you have frightening memories or thoughts and feel you can't tell anyone?
- Is there anything else that makes you want to hurt yourself?





## What helps you not hurt yourself?

What helps you to cope when you feel upset? Some people find it helpful to be with a friend, talk to someone they trust or make a phone call. Others find it helps to do something they enjoy, listen to music or write feelings down in a diary.

*“The feeling of wanting to hurt myself would build up. I could put off doing it for a while but I couldn’t last forever. I knew I had to get help.”*

## Deciding to get help

Sometimes, however hard you try to stop hurting yourself on your own, you just can’t find a way.

If you feel like this, it probably means that you need to talk to someone you can trust. This needs to be someone who will listen to you, talk about how you feel and give practical help. There could be a real risk that you could harm yourself permanently or perhaps even die.

If you feel your life is in danger it is very important to get help. You can see your doctor, call the emergency services or go to accident and emergency.

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***Cutting myself is such a private thing. I find it hard to talk to other people about how I feel. They don’t understand. They think I’m seeking attention – that’s the last thing I want.***

”

*“The psychiatrist listened, and I got more say in what was happening...and he helped my mum and dad understand it.”*

## WHO CAN YOU ASK FOR SUPPORT?

- Friend
- Parents or carer
- Other family member
- Friend's parent/family friend
- Teacher/college tutor
- Youth/school/student counsellor
- Youth worker
- School nurse
- Doctor

When you have thought of someone to talk to, it helps to be prepared:

1. Where and when would you tell them?
2. Would you tell them face to face, by phone, letter, email or text?
3. What would you say?
4. You could practise by saying it out loud, somewhere you feel safe.
5. Picture how the person might respond if you told them.

Think of a way to look after yourself if they respond in a way which isn't what you'd hoped. Remember, the first person you contact might not be able to help. This may not be their fault – or yours.



## WHAT IF YOU CAN'T TALK TO SOMEONE YOU KNOW?

If there is no one you feel you can trust at the moment, you could try telephone helpline, email, web chat or textphone services. It's sometimes easier to contact someone who is trained to help, they can make you feel more relaxed - and it's up to you when you finish the conversation. (Some contact details are given at the end of this booklet.)

Your doctor or school nurse should be able to advise you about what support is available locally. They may refer you to someone who has experience of helping young people who self-harm.

The person you see will want to help - and won't think you are stupid, mad or wasting their time. The service is confidential, they should explain what this means and also when they might have to tell someone else. They are used to talking to people who have all sorts of worries, even if you're not sure what to say.

**Although it can take a lot of courage and determination, it's important to keep trying. You will find the right person to help you in the end.**

*"What helped was having someone to talk to who was reliable and didn't rush me. I haven't done anything to myself for ages now. Sometimes I feel like it, but I don't need to do it any more, and the feeling goes."*

## FRIENDS AND FAMILY – HOW YOU CAN HELP

If you are worried about someone who is self-harming and want to help, this section tells you some things you can do.

Friends and family have a really important part to play.

### **You can help by:**

- Noticing that someone is self-harming
- Offering to listen
- Getting help when it's needed

It may be difficult to understand why someone hurts themselves. You may feel shocked, angry or even guilty. It can also be hard to know how to help.



## Here are some suggestions:

- Keep an open mind – don't judge or jump to conclusions
- Make time to listen and take them seriously
- Help them to find their own way of managing their problems
- Help them work out who else can help
- Offer to go with them to tell someone, or offer to tell someone for them
- Carry on with the ordinary activities you do together
- Support any positive steps they take
- ! Don't be offended if they don't want to handle things your way
- ! Don't tease them – respect their feelings

*“Cutting was always a very secret thing... You feel so ashamed, so bad about yourself. You feel no one will ever understand.”*

**Friends and family  
have a really important  
part to play.**



*“She made me swear I wouldn’t tell anyone. I knew if I did she would have hated my guts. On the other hand, if I didn’t, she could have died and I would have felt it was my fault.”*

## **WHEN KEEPING SECRETS ISN’T SAFE**

Someone may tell you that they are hurting themselves and ask you to keep it a secret. This can put you in a very difficult situation. Of course it’s important to respect their wish for privacy. But if you think their life is in danger it is important to get help as soon as you can.

You may be able to work out together who would be the best person to tell. If not, try and let them know that you had to tell someone, and why.

## **REMEMBER THAT YOUR FEELINGS MATTER TOO**

- Look after yourself – make sure you get the support you need
- Remember - even those trained to work with people who self-harm need support, so it’s OK if you do too
- Try to carry on with your other activities and relationships
- You don’t have to be available for them all the time
- If they hurt themselves it is their responsibility, not yours, even if they say it is.



## USEFUL ADDRESSES AND CONTACT NUMBERS

### WWW.SELFHARM.CO.UK

A project dedicated to supporting young people affected by self-harm, providing a safe space to talk, ask questions, access information and ask for advice.

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### WWW.SELFINJURYSUPPORT.ORG.UK

Bristol Crisis Service for Women is a national text and email service supporting girls and women in emotional distress, Mon – Fri 7-9pm.

**Textphone:** ..... 0780 047 2908

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### CHILDLINE

ChildLine is the UK's free **24/7** helpline for children and young people. It provides a confidential telephone counselling service for any child with any problem. It comforts, advises and protects.

**Helpline:** ..... 0800 1111

**Textphone:** ..... 0800 400 222

Mon-Fri 9.30am-9.30pm & 11am-8pm Weekends

**Living away from home:** ..... 0800 88 44 44

Mon-Fri 3.30pm-9.30pm & 11am-8pm Weekends

**W:** ..... [www.childline.org.uk](http://www.childline.org.uk)



## SAMARITANS

Confidential emotional support for anyone who is in crisis.

**Helpline:** ..... 08457 90 90 90 UK & NI  
..... 1850 60 90 90 Republic of Ireland

**Textphone:** ..... 08457 90 91 92

**E:** ..... jo@samaritans.org

**W:** ..... www.samaritans.org.uk

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## YOUTH ACCESS

Provides information advice and counselling services throughout the UK for young people aged 12-25 years. Can give details of appropriate local agencies for young people. Can contact by letter, telephone, fax or email.

**E:** ..... admin@youthaccess.org.uk

**W:** ..... www.youthaccess.org.uk

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## YOUTH2YOUTH

For people under 19 years. Confidential and anonymous email and telephone helpline support run by young volunteers. Offers sympathetic listening and information about practical help.

**Helpline:** ..... 020 8896 3675

Mon-Wed 6.30pm-9.30pm

**Email & Online chat** via website Mon & Wed 6.30pm-9.30pm

**W:** ..... www.youth2youth.co.uk

## WWW.THESITE.ORG

Youthnet, which runs TheSite.org, guides and supports young people, enabling them to make informed choices, participate in society and achieve their ambitions.

**T:** ..... 020 7250 5700

**W:**..... www.youthnet.org

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## MIND

Provides mental health support and information.

**Mind infoline:** ..... 0300 123 3393 Mon-Fri 9am-5pm

**E:** ..... contact@mind.org.uk

**E:** ..... info@mind.org.uk

**Legal Advice line:** ..... 0300 466 6463

**E:** ..... legal@mind.org.uk

**W:** ..... www.mind.org.uk

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## NATIONAL SELF HARM NETWORK

Supports individuals who self-harm to reduce emotional distress and to improve their quality of life, empowering and enabling them to seek further support and alternatives to self harm.

**W:** ..... www.nshn.co.uk





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