

# **Self-injury**

**Supporting information  
for parents & carers**

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## Introduction

Supporting someone who is self-injuring or self-harming can feel huge, and be accompanied by questions, strong emotions and worry. Take a deep breath, and be reassured that they are looking for help, and there is plenty out there for them, and for you, too.

This booklet is full of information and resources for parents and carers who may be supporting someone with their self-harm, for example there is a safety plan that you might want to help them design for what to do when they feel the urge to self-harm. This can then be kept on them or placed somewhere where they may need it. There's also contact details of people who can help, and some distraction items that they might want to keep somewhere close to hand.

**This booklet is just the start of their road to recovery.**



## What is self-harm?

Self-harm is when someone hurts themselves on purpose. Examples of self-harm include cutting, burning, poisoning and bruising. Other forms of more indirect self-harm may be self-neglect or excessive risk taking behaviour.

Self-harming behaviour is relatively common - at least 10% of adolescents report having self-harmed - and it can affect anyone of any age, background or race. But it's a problem that needs to be taken seriously.

**Self-harm is not a positive way to deal with difficult feelings and experiences, and over time it can be hard to stop. That's why it's so important to spot it as soon as possible and do everything you can to help.**



You'll need to be braver  
than you've ever been in your  
life. Breathe.

Thank them for coming to tell  
you. Tell them they've done  
an amazingly brave thing to  
trust you. Tell them it's going  
to be something you can, and  
always will be able to help  
them with.

Louise

# Understanding the cycle of self-harm

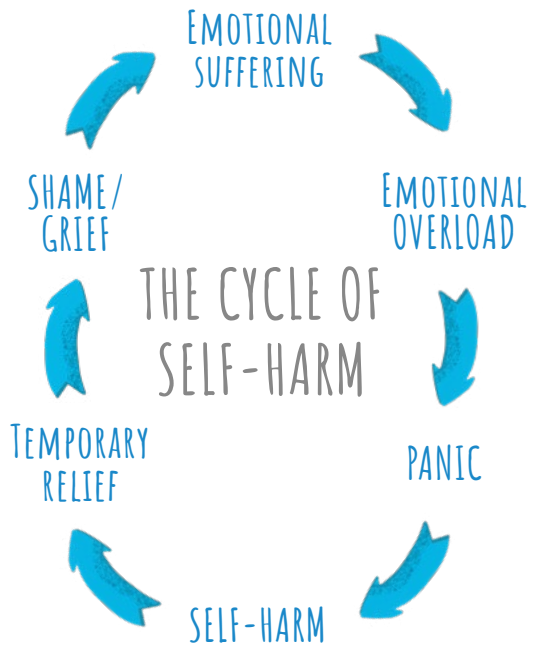
For many, self-harm is a way to find temporary relief from emotional overload. Breaking the cycle and helping someone to find other ways they might manage these feelings is really important.

This can include distraction or stress management techniques, and thinking of alternative methods of discharging extreme emotions. Some people find that delaying harming themselves can decrease or get rid of the urge. Reducing the accessibility of objects that might be used for self-harm may also help to delay the impulse to self-harm.

**The urge to self-harm is strongest for 5-15 minutes. Finding a way to distract themselves during this time can make all the difference.**

There are some excellent apps to help people manage the urges to self-harm such as **Calm Harm** and **DistrACT**.

Alongside learning coping strategies to distract from the need to self-harm, it can help to explore the issues behind the self-harming behaviour. For some people these may be obvious and resolvable, but for many others less so.

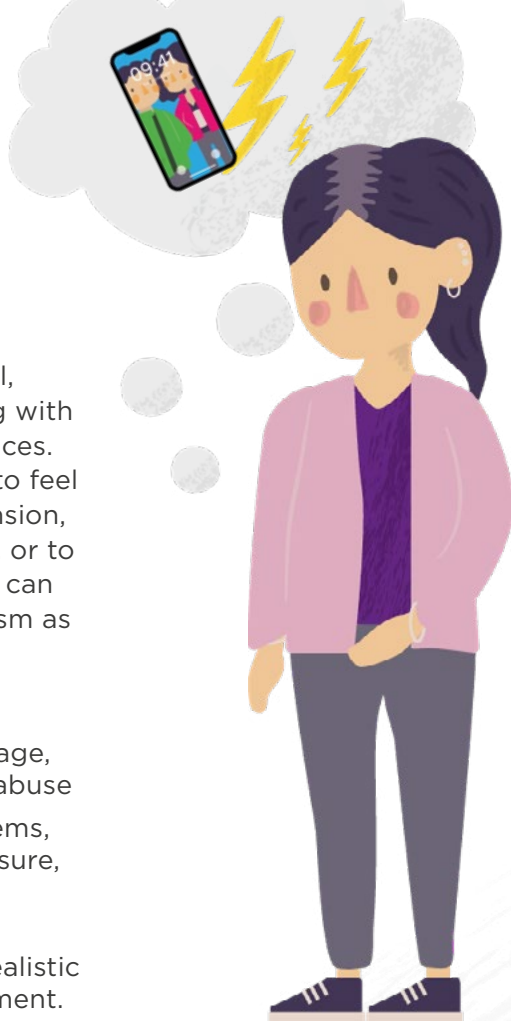


**Many people stop self-harming when the time is right for them. It's a way of coping right now, and doing it now does NOT mean that they will have to do it forever.**

## Why do people self-harm?

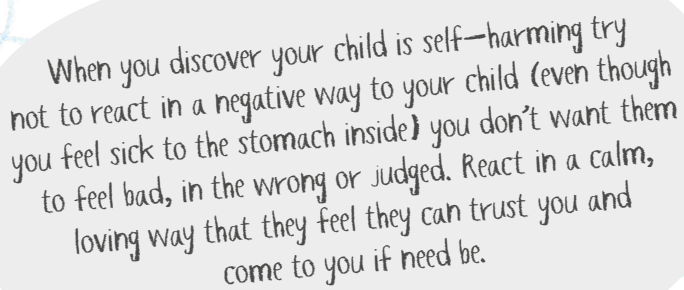
Self-harm is a very different experience for each individual, and is usually a way of coping with difficult feelings and experiences. It can be a way for someone to feel more in control, to reduce tension, to release powerful emotions, or to punish themselves. Self-harm can develop as a coping mechanism as a result of:

- anxiety, depression, low self-esteem, poor body image, gender identity, sexuality, abuse
- friendship or school problems, bullying, social media pressure, peer pressure, rejection
- family problems such as separation or conflict, unrealistic expectations and bereavement.



**If you are worried that someone you care for may be self-harming - start the conversation.**

Be honest and open with them and explain why you are concerned – re-assure them that you are there to listen, that you love them, and that will not change. If they are unwilling to talk to you now, give them space and re-assure them that there are people who are there to talk to and who will listen.



When you discover your child is self-harming try not to react in a negative way to your child (even though you feel sick to the stomach inside) you don't want them to feel bad, in the wrong or judged. React in a calm, loving way that they feel they can trust you and come to you if need be.

Helen

## Deep breath, don't panic!

Finding out that someone you care for is self-harming can leave you feeling a range of strong emotions such as confusion, anger, shock, guilt, worry and so on.

### **It's challenging, but try to stay calm.**

The main reason that people find it hard to talk about their self-harming is fear of others' reaction and being misunderstood.

Try to hold on to the idea that their self-harm behaviour is an expression of strong feelings and experiences that right now they can't handle any other way.

Acknowledge to them that opening up about their self-harming behaviour was a very brave thing to do and that you are grateful that they have told you.

**Re-assure them there is help and support out there.  
They are not alone, and neither are you.**

## How do I know someone is self-harming?

Worried someone you care for might be self-harming? Keep an eye open for these signs:

- Unexplained cuts, burns, bite-marks, bruises or bald patches
- Bloody tissues, bandages or wipes in waste bins
- Concealed lighters or sharps
- Becoming withdrawn or isolated
- Low mood, lack of interest in life or depression
- Blaming themselves for problems
- Feeling like a failure, useless, or hopeless
- Keeping their body covered

Have plenty of medical items to care for the wounds, keep it well stocked.

Check that the wounds are healing and – if they are cutting in the same place – the severity for depth and infection in case medical attention required.

Zoe





## Supporting someone who is self-harming

Friends and family can play a huge role in supporting someone who self-harms. You can help by:


- Offer a listening ear and showing you care when someone is struggling.
- Avoid judgements; we know that terms like 'attention seeking' stop people from seeking help.
- Remind the person of their strengths and abilities.
- Visit [www.suicide-prevention-cm.co.uk](http://www.suicide-prevention-cm.co.uk) or look at recommended apps together for ways they can manage self-harm urges. Remember, what works for some may not work for others. Encourage them to try different strategies until they find one that works.
- Encourage them to keep a diary, to look for patterns, triggers and urges. (There's more about this in the guide for young people.)
- Explore what support and services are available and offer to go with them to appointments.
- Make sure first aid materials are available and encourage them to get medical attention when needed.
- Watch for signs of bullying, abuse or other difficult situations that may be triggering self-harm.
- Don't treat them any differently from normal in other areas of their life.
- Appreciate that they might not be able to stop immediately, it will take time and their recovery may be bumpy.
- Be mindful of excessive online use especially unhelpful social media use as this can impact ability to regulate emotions.

**Remember, you don't need to understand why they self-harm, and you don't need to fix things. Listening and showing you care can be really powerful in itself, alongside working together to find the coping strategies and the support they need.**

## Thoughts of suicide


The majority of people use self-harm as a way of dealing with difficulties in their life, not as a way of wanting to end their own life – but having a history of self-harm is one of the highest risk factors for suicide.

Over 50% of people who die by suicide have a history of self-harm. If you are at all worried that someone you care for is having thoughts of suicide, **ask them, and ask them directly.** You will not put ideas in their head, research shows this. It also shows that talking directly about suicide significantly reduces the risks of it happening.



We found nights to be the worst time, so we went on long drives in the early hours... we hugged and cried... but most of all we listened without judging...

Catherine



For more information on how to help if a young person is having thoughts of suicide visit [www.papyrus-uk.org](http://www.papyrus-uk.org) or call papyrus hopeline 0800 0684141

# First Aid



## First aid for wounds

1. Apply gentle pressure with a clean cloth or gauze until the bleeding stops.
2. If the person feels faint, lay them down with their legs raised whilst you treat the wound.
3. Clean the wound with clean running water, gently washing it with soap. Dry it with a clean tea towel or face cloth.
4. Cover the wound once cleaned and dried with a sterile bandage to keep it clean and protected.
5. Watch for signs of infection, such as redness, swelling, warmth, or pus. It's important to keep the wound clean, so change the dressing if it gets wet, or dirty.

## When to visit A&E:

- If the wound is deep, or continues to bleed through the dressing
- If the wound becomes infected

## Call 999 if:

- The wound is deep and/or large and bleeding heavily.
- The person loses consciousness or shows signs of shock, such as paleness, rapid breathing, or a weak pulse.
- The person is having difficulty breathing or experiencing chest pain.
- The person has ingested harmful substances or has taken an overdose.
- The person has a temperature, feels unwell, is drowsy or confused and has an infected wound.
- The person has tried to take their own life.

## First aid for burns

1. Hold the burn under cool running water for 20 minutes to reduce pain and swelling.
2. Once the burn is cooled, cover it with a sterile dressing or clean cloth to protect it from infection.
3. If blisters form, don't burst the blisters; cover them with a dressing to protect the fragile skin.

## When to visit A&E:

- If the burn is blistered and larger than the palm of the hand
- If the burn is deep, and looks waxy and white, or charred
- If the burn affects a sensitive area of the body, such as the face, hands, feet, or genitals
- If there is signs of infection, such as redness, swelling, warmth, or pus

## Looking after yourself

If you are supporting someone who self-harms, you can experience strong emotions and it is important that you look after yourself as well. Recovery from self-harm may be a long process.

- Try to find time for relaxation and “me time” and keep on doing the things you enjoy.
- Look after your sleep patterns, eat well and try to exercise.
- Be aware of your own feelings in response to the self-harming of the person you care for. Try not to let them spill out as anger at the person.
- It can really help to find someone to talk to, and to share your concerns, frustration and hopes.
- Make use of support groups, helplines and online information and forums.

Keep the lines of communication open, find the strategies that really work for them, ask how you can help in that moment and don't be afraid of talking about it.

Don't feel ashamed or that you're to blame, your child will pick up on this.

Susie



## Getting professional help

If you are concerned about someone you should seek further help, particularly if:

- The self-harm or distress is increasing in frequency or intensity
- You notice additional problems such as anxiety, low mood or thoughts of suicide.

Sources of help include:

- Your child's GP, school or other support organisations may be able to direct you to local support, or Child and Adolescent NHS Mental Health Services.
- If a child or young person goes to hospital for any reason related to self-harm, they should be seen by someone who can talk to them about their self-harm. They may also arrange a mental health assessment. If it is not clear whether this has happened, ask the staff and clarify what is offered.
- There are a range of telephone helplines and online support forums which can provide support (see pages 14 and 15).



Don't be ashamed or embarrassed about the scars for they are battle wounds and in time will be a reminder of how far you have come.

Jennifer

## 24/7 Support: Crisis helplines in Cheshire and Merseyside

**If you feel you need urgent mental health support, please contact NHS 111 option 2 (for mental health).**

### Other 24/7 Support

**Papyrus** 0800 0684141  
papyrus-uk.org  
Support for young people  
with thoughts of suicide.

**Samaritans** 116 123  
**Shout** Text SHOUT to 85258  
**Childline** 0800 1111

### National Support, Advice and Information

**The Mix** themix.org.uk Advice  
and support for under 25s on  
many issues including self-harm.

**SANEline** sane.org.uk  
Out-of-hours mental health  
helpline including family, friends  
and carers. Support for 16+. 4pm  
to 10pm on 0300 304 7000.

**Young Minds** youngminds.org.uk  
Thorough and practical information  
and advice about young people's  
mental health, includes information  
on medication and parent's helpline.

**Anna Freud Centre**  
annafreud.org/on-my-mind/  
Information & resources on how  
you talk to your child about  
mental health/self-harm.

**Alumina** selfharm.co.uk  
Information, and a weekly  
online course for young people  
11-19, running over 6 weeks.

**MindEd** minded.org.uk  
Free online courses for parents  
and carers on mental health issues.

**Harmless** harmless.org.uk  
Information and support.

**Beat Eating Disorders**  
beateatingdisorders.org.uk  
Information, advice, helpline  
and online support groups.

**Kooth.com** Online support  
including one-to-one,  
discussion and information.  
(Not available in all locations)

## Ideas for distractions

### Wellbeing and Coping

[wellbeingandcoping.net](http://wellbeingandcoping.net)


**The Mix** [themix.or.uk/mental-health/self-harm/self-harm-coping-tips-and-distractions](http://themix.or.uk/mental-health/self-harm/self-harm-coping-tips-and-distractions)

### Resources and Apps

**CAMHS Resources** [camhs-resources.co.uk](http://camhs-resources.co.uk) has a wealth of information about children's mental health.

**Stem4** [stem4.org.uk](http://stem4.org.uk) Information to support young people and parents.

**Papyrus/Orcha** [papyrus.orch.co.uk](http://papyrus.orch.co.uk)  
Search engine for apps.



Encourage your child to use apps to monitor the self-harm incidents and urges to help you both understand the trigger points and work out solutions to resist the urge.

Susie



**DistrACT** A thorough app covering distraction techniques, self-help, and where to get help.



**Calm Harm** Free app to help you manage the urge to self-harm.



**First Aid** Download the Red Cross First Aid app.



**Stay Alive** Information and tools to stay safe in a crisis.

# Your notes

You can also use the safety plan on the next four pages to help put thoughts and plans down on paper.



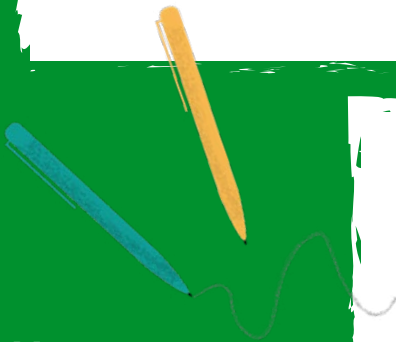
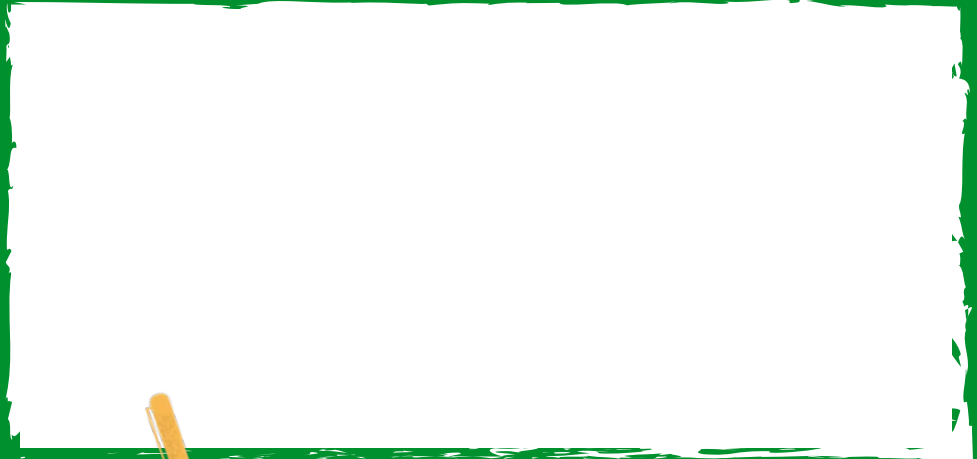


# Safe plan

*The following is the safety plan within the Children and Young People's version of this booklet so you are aware of what it contains and can support them to complete it.*

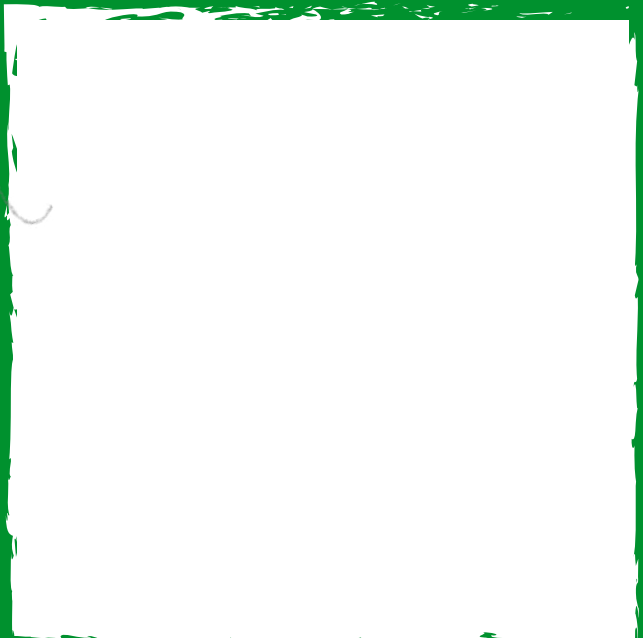
## My triggers

Triggers are what creates the urge to hurt yourself. They usually involve some form of strong emotions and can be situations, people, anniversaries or particular thoughts or feelings. If you don't know what these are right now that's OK, keeping a diary can help you figure out what they may be.



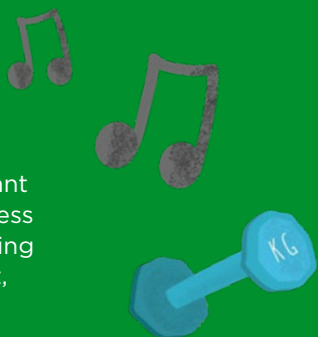
## My urges

Recognising your urges will help you spot them more quickly when they come on, and help you to take steps to reduce or stop your self-harming. E.g. physical sensations, strong emotions, repetitive thoughts, feeling disconnected, etc.



## How I deal with stress

Stress is a big trigger. When a lot of problems come together, it can often feel overwhelming so it's important to learn how to deal with it. Try writing down some stress busting activities that you know work for you. E.g. talking to someone, meditation, mindfulness, exercise or sport, walking or music – there's something for everyone.



## My distractions

The urge to self-harm is strongest for up to 15 minutes. Begin to identify different ways you can distract yourself from the urge, or at least delay self-harming. Remember, some work better than others at particular times.



Distractions are unique, what works for you won't work for everyone, so try out different things.

# Safe plan

## Keep a diary

One way to help yourself understand more about your self-harming behaviours is to keep a diary over a month or two. Include what happened before, during and after you self-harmed. This may help you to see patterns.

Writing a self-harm diary can be an upsetting thing to do, so be kind to yourself each time you do an entry, or get some support from a trusted person to help you write or review it.

**What was happening before you got the urge to self-harm? What were your triggers?**

*This could be about situations, people, or particular thoughts or feelings.*

**What urges did you experience?** *E.g. physical sensations, strong emotions, repetitive thoughts or feeling disconnected.*

**How strong was the urge?** ☐ Low ☐ Medium ☐ High

**What distractions did you try?**

**How well did they work?** ☐ Not at all ☐ Delayed me for a while ☐ Worked well

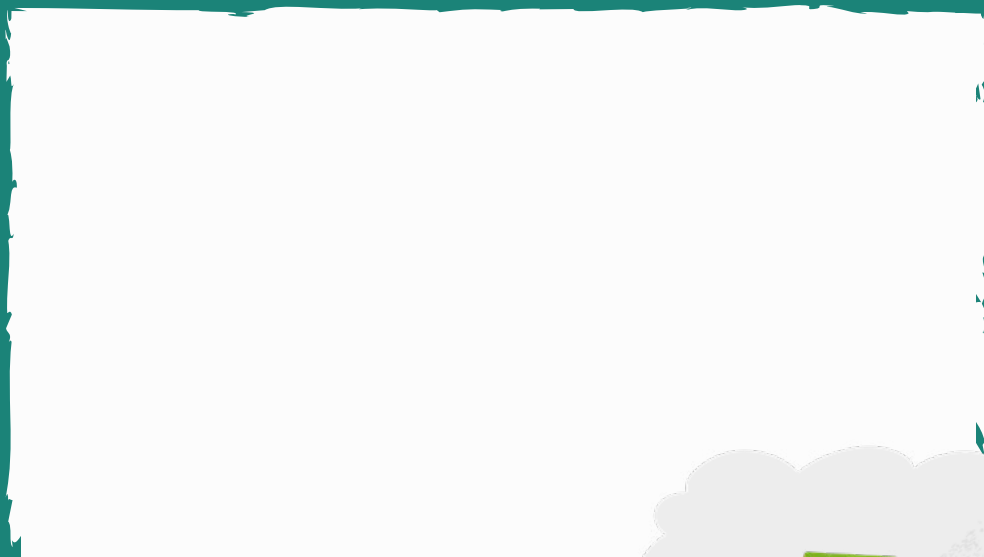
**How did you harm yourself?**

**How severe was the harm?** ☐ Slight ☐ Moderate ☐ Severe

**How did you feel afterwards?**

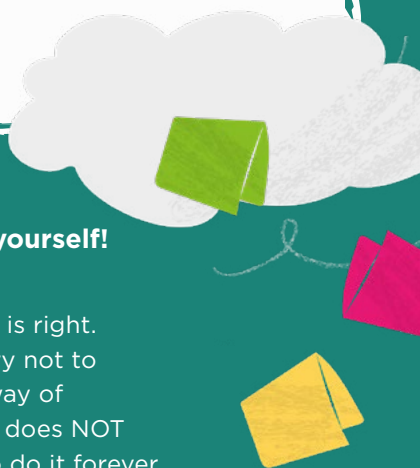
## My hopes

What is it that keeps you going and gives you hope? Think about the people, places or things you have to cherish or look forward to.



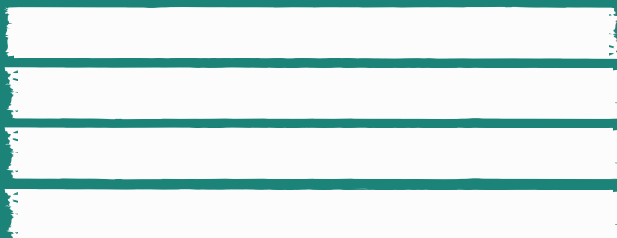
### Remember: be kind to yourself!

Many people stop hurting themselves when the time is right. Everyone is different, so try not to feel guilty about it. It's a way of surviving right now, and it does NOT mean that you will have to do it forever.



## My Supporters

Write down who you can talk to or get help from when you're having a tough time. Can you talk to them about your self-harming?





**Champs**  
Public Health  
Collaborative



**Cheshire and Merseyside**

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