

# SELF-HARM



**PAPYRUS**  
PREVENTION OF YOUNG SUICIDE



## What is self-harm?

The term 'self-harm' usually refers to someone intentionally causing themselves harm. Self-harm is often a physical response to emotional pain and/or intolerable experiences. It can also include self-neglect and engaging in risk-taking behaviour. Self-harm has a function for every individual who self-harms and stopping is not always straightforward even when you want to. Whether you are someone who self-harms, or you care about someone who self-harms, the following information is intended to shed some light on, what can be, a highly-stigmatised and complex subject.

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## What causes someone to self-harm?

For many young people self-harm is used as a coping mechanism. However, it's important to remember that everyone's reasons for self-harming are individual to them. Control, release, punishment, compulsion and expression are just a selection of reasons as to why someone may injure themselves. Sometimes, self-harm can also be a reaction to overwhelming life events that may feel unmanageable e.g. traumatic experiences in childhood such as abuse.

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## I am concerned about someone self-harming – what can I do?

In some situations there are clear signs that a young person is self-harming, at other times it can be harder to tell. If you think someone you care for is harming themselves, we encourage you to reach out to them. It's not always an easy conversation to have – but we recommend:

- **Asking** sensitively and directly if they have been harming themselves
  - **Managing** your reactions and remaining calm
  - **Exploring** the reasons behind their self-harm
  - **Listening** to their explanation
  - **Trying** to understand what's happening from their point of view
  - **Avoiding** taking control of the situation
  - **Encouraging** them to seek support
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## I am someone who uses self-harm – what can I do?

The more you understand your own self-harm, the more you can feel in control and hopefully less distressed. Understanding why you self-harm may help you talk about it with others too. There are steps you can take to ensure that you are safe and supported. Taking control of your self-harm can be really challenging – but we suggest:

- **Considering** what self-harm does for you and the role of it in your life
  - **Looking** for patterns in your self-harm and keeping a diary
  - **Exploring** possible alternative coping mechanisms and distraction techniques
  - **Caring** for your injuries by accessing medical attention when needed and keeping a first-aid kit
  - **Reaching** out to someone you trust and talking things through
  - **Getting** some professional support in place by talking to your GP, a helpline or a young person's counselling service
  - **Remembering** that things can change for you - there is **HOPE**
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## Self-harm and suicide

Self-harm is a struggle often shared with our Suicide Prevention Advisers at HOPELINEUK. More than half of people who die by suicide have a history of self-harm (NHS 2018).

Self-harm may, or may not, be a sign that someone is feeling suicidal – it is very important to ask and not make assumptions. If you are a young person having thoughts of suicide – or you are concerned about a young person who may be suicidal – you can call HOPELINEUK on 0800 068 41 41 for practical advice and support.

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## Myths and facts

**Myth:** Young people who self-harm are just looking for attention.

**Fact:** The phrase ‘attention-seeking’ dismisses the real reasons causing someone to injure themselves. Consider what’s being communicated.

**Myth:** It’s just a phase – they’ll grow out of it.

**Fact:** Self-harm can affect any person at any age and is not something that only young people struggle with. There are many myths about self-injury. The best way to understand and support someone is to talk to them directly, being clear you are not judging them or trying to make decisions for them.

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## Further support

### PAPYRUS

[www.papyrus-uk.org](http://www.papyrus-uk.org) –

See the coping strategies on our 'Help and Advice' pages

### Calm Harm

[www.calmharm.co.uk](http://www.calmharm.co.uk)

### Young Minds

[www.youngminds.org.uk](http://www.youngminds.org.uk)

### Life Signs

[www.lifesigns.org.uk](http://www.lifesigns.org.uk)

### The Mix

[www.themix.org.uk](http://www.themix.org.uk)

## Self-Injury Support

Self-Injury Support run a women's helpline, text service and webchat support. You can contact their helpline on 0808 800 8088, the text service on 07537 432 444 and access webchat through their website. These services are all open 7pm – 9.30pm, Tuesday – Thursday. There are also lots of resources and self-help links on their website. [www.selfinjurysupport.org.uk](http://www.selfinjurysupport.org.uk)



## HOPELINEUK

Call: **0800 068 4141**

Text: **07860 039 967**

Email: **pat@papyrus-uk.org**

Opening hours:

9am – 10pm weekdays

2pm – 10pm weekends

2pm – 10pm bank holidays

**[www.papyrus-uk.org](http://www.papyrus-uk.org)**

Our Suicide Prevention Advisers  
are ready to support you



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