

# Self-Harm

What to do if you are worried about self-harm. Information for school staff.



## What is Self-Harm?

Self-harm is where someone does something to deliberately hurt themselves when they find things difficult to cope with. It can include things like:

- Cutting
- Overdosing (self-poisoning)
- Hitting (self and others)
- Burning or scalding
- Picking or scratching skin
- Pulling hair
- Ingesting toxic substances (like bleach)
- Eating disorders

## Who self-harms?

There is not one type of person who self-harms. It does not depend on sex, age, religion or background. Both sexes self-harm, but their methods may be different, for example males may engage in behaviours such as fighting. **Both adults and young people can self-harm.** LGBTQ young people, those who have been abused or witnessed Domestic Violence, have been in care/ adopted, identify as emo, been bullied or experienced parental substance misuse are **potentially** more at risk of self-harm or other mental health concerns.

## Why do people self-harm?

People self-harm for a number of reasons. Something might have happened to make them feel bad about things. This could be stress or anxiety, friendship or relationship difficulties, isolation or loneliness, low self-esteem, questioning sexuality or gender.

**But often there is no known cause or trigger.**

## Is there a link to suicide?

People often think that self-harm is linked to suicide; however the vast majority of people who self-harm are not trying to kill themselves.

## Some reasons given by people who self-harm include:

- **Relief of feelings** By hurting themselves, people say they are able to release feelings that seem unbearable when held inside.
- **Distraction** Self-harm can provide distraction from internal emotional pain.
- **Communication** Self-harm may be a way of communicating distress.
- **Comfort** Self-harm may be experienced as soothing and comforting; from the release of tension, but also by providing an opportunity to seek care and nurture from others.
- **Feeling alive or real** Sometimes life experiences leave people feeling numb. Hurting their body may be a way of making them feel alive and real again.
- **Self-punishing** Some people carry feelings of shame, low self-esteem and self-blame, and may harm themselves as a way of punishing themselves.
- **Control** Self-harm can be a way of feeling in control when other things in people's lives feel out of control.

**Websites and Social Media** There is some concern about the role of the web and social media in encouraging self-harm or copycat behaviour. This can be linked to publicity about 'celebrity' self-harm or sites that encourage young people to share experiences or photos of self-harm, or that actively promote self-harm.

That it is why it is important to encourage the signposting of trusted, safe sites when looking for information about self-harm and support available. See list on back.

## Is self-harm attention-seeking or 'fashionable'?

Anyone who is self-harming is struggling with difficult feelings and their behaviour needs to be seen as indication of an underlying problem, not attention-seeking. In fact, most people who self-harm go out of their way to hide any evidence of what they've been doing, even from close friends and family.

## Support for schools

The NHS, Cornwall Council and agencies in Cornwall are working together to provide support for schools, young people and families. We are working closely with schools on a positive response to self-harm to offer information about best practice guidance; training and policy development.

The document 'Managing Self-Harm Practical Guidance for Schools' aims to

- Increase understanding and awareness
- Alert staff to warning signs and risk factors
- Provide guidance for staff
- Help senior leaders consider how to support staff, students and families

You can find this document at: [www.cornwallhealthyschools.org/selfharm](http://www.cornwallhealthyschools.org/selfharm) along with downloadable copies of the other leaflets available in this series: • For parents and carers • For young people

## Helping to reduce self-harm through supporting young people

Perhaps the most important thing we can do together is to build the emotional resilience of children and young people across society and, in particular, in school. If young people develop the skills to combat adversity and deal with the emotional rollercoaster of childhood and the teenage years, the rate of self-harm will start to reduce.

This is something the partnership involved in this work are committed to doing through projects work like Headstart Kernow; the Healthy Schools' Resilience and Self-Esteem Toolkit (ReSET), and Savvy Kernow.

## Harm minimisation

Staying safe is an important message for someone who self-harms, so that the physical risks, such as infection, are reduced as much as possible. Make sure that anyone who discloses self-harm understands the risks and

know how to minimise them. This includes keeping wounds (and any implements used) clean.

Your specific school policy may include access to first aid supplies in school. This is not condoning / promoting self-harm, rather recognising that young people can't just stop but helping

them to stay safe while they get support.

At the same time, help the young person try to find strategies to reduce the self-harm such as distraction techniques. There are a list of possible strategies included in the young person leaflet.

## How to help

**Don't panic or over-react** if someone discloses self-harm (even if you feel shocked). Respond to the trust you've been shown by reassuring and listening non-judgmentally.

**Telling someone who self-harms to simply stop is not helpful.**

Taking away their chosen form of coping could be dangerous.

Developing new coping strategies may take time and may need professional support.

**Don't take away control;** involve the young person in discussions about

next steps - referrals, appointments and parental involvement.

**You are not alone.** Know your school's policy on self-harm. If possible, attend training to help you understand and respond to self-harm.

**If you receive a disclosure you must tell the school Safeguarding**

**Lead.** Ensure that the young person knows who you will need to share information with to help keep them safe.

Supporting a young person with self-harm issues may evoke a variety of feelings. **It's important to seek support for yourself when needed.**

## Support in Cornwall

**www.kooth.com** Free online support and counselling for young people in Cornwall

**www.mindyourway.co.uk** Mental health and wellbeing services for young people in Cornwall

**www.savvykernow.org.uk** Friendly advice and services in Cornwall and the Isles of Scilly

## Apps

**www.docready.org** Docready helps young people get ready for the first time they visit a doctor to discuss mental health

**www.thesite.org/apps-and-tools/stressheads** Stressheads is an app to help deal with all kinds of life stress

**www.headspace.com** meditation app for mindfulness techniques

## National support websites

**www.epicfriends.co.uk** Advice for young people on how to help friends who are struggling to cope emotionally

**www.thesite.org** Non-judgmental support, information, discussion boards and live chat

**www.selfinjurysupport.org.uk** Supports girls and women affected by self harm

**www.youngminds.org.uk** The voice for young people's mental health and wellbeing

**www.childline.org.uk** Advice, info and help online or by telephone 0800 1111

**www.lifesigns.org.uk** User-led information and support for people who self-harm

**www.samaritans.org** / 08457 90 90 90 Telephone support for anyone who needs to talk

**For more information, resources, training and signposting contact the C&YP (5-19) Wellbeing / Healthy Schools Team**

**01209 313419**

**healthy.schools@cornwall.nhs.uk**

**www.healthyschools.org**