

# Self-Harm

Information about self-harm for parents in Cornwall and the Isles of Scilly.



## What is Self-Harm?

Self-harm is when someone intends to hurt themselves or chooses to inflict pain on themselves in some way. This can include:

- 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 DV, 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.**

## About this leaflet

The NHS and Cornwall Council have been working with schools in Cornwall to develop a countywide strategy for self-harm. Together our aim is to make sure that we support young people not to self-harm. We also aim to offer the best possible support for those who do self-harm and their families.

This leaflet is intended to help all parents and carers understand what self-harm is, and to help those whose children self-harm.

Perhaps the most important thing we can do together is to build

the emotional resilience of our children and young people. 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. You can find out more about the work going on at:

[www.savvykernow.org/parents](http://www.savvykernow.org/parents)

This work on self-harm is a partnership project by Cornwall Council, NHS Kernow, Council of the Isles of Scilly, schools and young people.



Kernow Clinical Commissioning Group

## 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; 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.

## 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.

## 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.

## Is Social Media dangerous?

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 is why it is important to encourage the signposting of trusted, safe sites like the ones on the back of this leaflet when looking for information about self-harm and support available.

## How to help your child

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

**You may be worried** or upset and feel disbelief, shock, anger and even guilt or denial. These reactions are normal but try to stay calm and supportive for your child (and it's important to seek support for yourself when needed).

**It is important to recognise how hard it may be for the young person to talk to you.** It may take a lot of courage for a young person to discuss their self-harm and their feelings, and it may be difficult for them to put things into words. Gentle, patient encouragement can help.

You may not be the first person your child discloses to.

This does not mean they don't trust you. Rather it may be because they don't want to hurt or upset you, or they feel ashamed. **It may be easier for them to tell someone else as first step** to getting help.

If your child is self-harming, **work closely with their school. Take an active role in deciding the best course of action for your child.** They will not be judgemental, and will want to work with you to support both you and your child.

The school will know how to **access additional support.** Your GP surgery can help too.

**Telling someone who self-harms to simply stop is not helpful.** Self-harm is a coping strategy which helps the young person deal with their emotional distress. Taking away their chosen form of coping could be dangerous. Developing new coping strategies may take time and may need professional support.

## Harm minimisation Is one way you can help your child.

You may find it very difficult to think that your child will continue to self-harm, but it is important that the physical risks, such as infection, are reduced as much as possible. Make sure first aid supplies are freely available and make an agreement that they will look after themselves if they continue. At the same time, help them to find strategies to reduce the self-harm such as distraction techniques (see the ideas in the young people's version of this leaflet or on some of the safe sites listed on the right)

## When your child is worried about a friend

Your child may tell you about a friend who is self-harming. This can be worrying and confusing for them. Support them by listening and advise them to encourage their friend to seek support from a trusted adult.

There is a leaflet in this series for young people.

## 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

**www.supportincornwall.org.uk/** Cornwall Care & Support Directory (A-Z of services)

## Apps

**www.docready.org** Docready helps young get ready for the first time you visit a doctor to discuss mental health issues like self-harm.

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

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

## National support websites

**www.familylives.org.uk/** Listening, supportive and non-judgmental advice for parents and carers

**www.healthtalk.org/** has a section where parents share their experiences and advice

**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

## Get help now

**In an emergency, dial 999. You can also call your GP out of hours service or go directly to A & E.**