

Why Do People Self-Harm?

Self-harm affects roughly 1% of the population. A person self-harms for many reasons but the underlying cause is usually to deal with painful emotions such as anger, loneliness, unhappiness, shame or guilt. These emotions may be related to abuse issues such as flashbacks or self-hatred resulting in a wish to punish themselves.

Many individuals that self injure find it difficult to talk openly about their feelings so harming themselves is a way of relieving their emotions and temporarily obtaining a sense of calm. For many people that self mutilate, it is much easier for them to deal with physical pain than with emotional pain. Other people injure themselves because they feel numb and pain is one way in which they can prove they are able to feel something or that they are actually alive.

Self-harm can be seen as a way to prevent suicide or to help cope with suicidal or intense unmanageable feelings. In this way it can be viewed as a survival mechanism because the person feels that they have no other way of coping. Where self-injurious behaviour is used to prevent suicide it is important to recognise that this has taken a great deal of effort for the person not to go to more extreme measures. It is also vital to understand that the severity of the injury is not indicative of the degree of emotional pain that the person is experiencing or their risk of suicidal behaviour

BPDWORLD



Where to find us

Visit our website www.bpdworld.org for information, advice and support

Helpline: 0870 005 3273

Talk to an understanding volunteer

Info line: 0870 005 6787

Contact addresses and for the pen pal service:

BPDWORLD
22 Revenue Chambers
St Peters Street
Huddersfield
HD1 1DL

Registered Charity Number:
1111750

WWW.BPDWORLD.ORG
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Providing Information, Advice & Support to those affected by Personality Disorder

0870 005 6787

Self-Harm



Ways to Prevent Self-Harm

There are many ways to help prevent self-injury but some will work better than others as it depends on the individual concerned. For some people keeping busy helps, for others they may find it more useful to do something relaxing or pampering. The following is a selection of ideas that may prevent or reduce episodes of self-harm:

- Keep a diary
- Call a friend and chat
- Focus on your breathing and the movement of your abdomen and chest
- Suck lemon slices
- Hold an ice cube for a little while or rub it on your skin
- Listen to some soft music
- Watch your favourite comedy film
- Call a help line
- Listen to a relaxation tape
- Eat comfort food
- Listen to upbeat music and dance around
- Learn some breathing exercises to aid relaxation
- Treat yourself to a luxurious bath
- Tear up old newspapers
- Put on loud music and scream
- Play a physical game like tennis or squash
- If you are angry or upset with someone then write him or her a letter then tear it up or burn it
- Clean the house or the car
- Eat a hot curry or other spicy food
- Go for a walk or run
- Visit the gym
- Hit a punch bag
- Punch pillows
- Write about happy times in your life
- Use a red marker pen and draw on the area you want to cut

What Can Friends and Family Do?

It can be very difficult for friends and family to understand self-injurious behaviour. However, it is important that they try not to make negative remarks and accept that the behaviour is a way for the person to cope with difficult feelings.

It can be very distressing to discover that a loved one is self harming but it is vital that you mask your shock and / or fearful reactions because the person is then unlikely to ask you for support if they think it will cause you distress. However, if you are accepting of the person then you can be a valuable source of support by giving them the opportunity to talk about their feeling without fear of judgement.

It is also important to accept that the person may not want your help with regard to self-harm and in this case you must respect their privacy.

Where the individual seems willing to accept your help then it is important to be clear on exactly what support they would like from you. Sometimes just being around can reduce self-harm. Firstly because you are available if they want to talk and secondly, because harming behaviours most frequently appear when the person is alone.

Do not try to prevent the self-harm from occurring by trying to lay down rules. You must remember that no-one wants to hurt themselves but this is the only way in which they can deal with the painful emotions they are experiencing. If the person is forced to stop the self-harming behaviour without having another coping mechanism to fall back on, then it is possible they may attempt to take their own life

What To Do If You Have Self-Harmed

If you have self-harmed and you feel that you need medical assistance please do one of the following in order to obtain medical care.

If your injuries are life threatening or you require urgent medical attention call 999 for an ambulance or attend your nearest Accident and Emergency department immediately.

If you are unsure of the severity of the self-harm then:

- Contact NHS Direct who will assess whether you require medical attention or if you can self-care at home.
- Unless you need urgent medical attention, you can contact your local GP or nurse for an emergency appointment and necessary first aid.
- If you require home care only, then consult your local pharmacy who will advise you regarding the appropriate first aid

Breaking the Pattern of Self-Injury

The feeling and emotions that cause self-harm do not just disappear. Neither do we suddenly develop new healthy coping mechanisms from nowhere. Recovering from self-harm means being able to discuss it openly with professionals that can help you to work through the issue underlying this behaviour.

The first step to recovery is finding the strength and courage to discuss your self-harming with a professional that you can trust.

Your General Practitioner may be able to suggest a medication that might help. Alternatively, some form of counselling or therapy is advisable to help you talk through your difficulties and enable you to find some new adaptive coping mechanisms