

Adolescent self-harm

What is self-harm?

We appreciate that this is a difficult topic, but it's an important one, and something that you have asked for as parents and carers.

The information in this guide will help you understand more about self-harm and what to do if you are worried about your child or someone you know who is self-harming. It should hopefully help explain:

- What self-harm is.
- How your adolescent child can help themselves and how you can help support them.
- Where to go for further help.

Usually, self-harm is a behaviour where someone harms themselves as a way of coping with difficult thoughts and feelings. The more common methods used are cutting, burning and non-lethal overdoses. However, there are several other forms adolescent children use, for instance, hitting, headbanging, suffocation, hanging, scratching, pinching and restricting their eating.

Some young people who self-harm also experience suicidal thoughts and urges, but this isn't always the case. As stated above, many young people self-harm as a way of managing difficult thoughts, feelings, and emotions – not to end their life. However, self-harm can result in accidental death.

What can make an adolescent child vulnerable to self-harm?

It is worth highlighting at this point that mental health does not discriminate. We are all prone to experiencing poor mental health, so there is no hard and fast rule what makes a child more vulnerable compared to another. But research and clinical experience has suggested some common factors which include, but are not limited to:

- **Individual factors:** Depression, anxiety, low self-esteem, hopelessness, poor problem-solving, impulsivity, eating disorders, drug or alcohol abuse, bullying (for example, because of race or sexuality).
- **Family factors:** Mental health difficulties in the family, poor parental relationships, drug/alcohol misuse in the family, unreasonable expectations, conflict between the young person and parents, excessive punishments or restrictions, family history of self-harm, abuse, neglect.
- **Social factors:** Difficulties in peer relationships, bullying, peer rejection, availability of methods of self-harm, friends who self-harm, media and internet influences.

How does self-harm help manage difficult thoughts, feelings and emotions?

Self-harm can serve several different purposes. These are some of them:

- Identifying with a peer group.
- A form of escape.
- Provides a feeling of physical pain to distract from the emotional pain felt.
- Manage extreme or overwhelming feelings.
- Reduce tension.
- Communicate their distress to others.

Alternatives to self-harm

It is recommended that adolescent children use distractions and alternative techniques to help reduce their urge to self-harm. Some examples are:

Distractions:

- Go for a walk.
- Contact a friend.
- Watch a favourite TV programme or film.
- Listen to soothing music.
- Spend time with a pet.
- Have a relaxing bath.
- Have a cold shower.
- Talk or text their parent/carer.

Releasing emotions:

- Flick an elastic band on their wrist.
- Use a red pen and draw on their arms.
- Do some sports or something that exerts energy.










Top tips for parents and carers

Talking about self-harm with your child can feel like a very scary and emotive subject. It is totally normal to feel this way. Some general tips to help you broach the subject with your child include:

- Having a general conversation about how they are feeling and what's on their mind. Don't bring self-harm up straight away.
- Having the conversation whilst doing something else, for example, going for a walk, drive in the car.
- Being prepared to listen - don't feel like you must have all the answers.
- Suggesting they speak to someone else if they don't feel comfortable talking to you, for example, another family member or friend.

- Supporting them to think through their problems and providing alternatives to self-harm.
- **Most importantly, let them know you aren't judging them and that you love and care for them.**

National and local support services

 <p>Free, safe and anonymous online support for young people</p> <p>kooth.com</p> <p>online until 10pm daily</p>	 <p>The Mix helps young people take on any challenge, from mental health to money, breakups to drugs, and everything in between</p> <p>themix.org.uk</p> <p>Helpline open until 12am everyday</p>	 <p>Find the help and advice you need. You are not alone</p> <p>Support for young people and parents</p> <p>youngminds.org.uk</p>
 <p>ONLINE, ON THE PHONE, ANYTIME childline.org.uk 0800 1111</p> <p>Counsellors available 24 hours a day, 7 days a week, online or on the phone</p> <p>For children, young people and parents.</p>	 <p>Free confidential counselling & wellbeing services for children & young people aged 4-25</p> <p>114 Pyle Street Newport 01983 529569 info@iowyouthtrust.co.uk</p> <p>MENTAL HEALTH DROP IN When: 2pm – 5pm every Wednesday</p>	 <p>Stamp Out Suicide A free, ongoing, over the phone counselling service to help people get through their darkest moments.</p> <p>07766 808 222 10am-2am</p>
 <p>PAPYRUS PREVENTION OF YOUNG SUICIDE</p> <p>Confidential suicide prevention advice to young people struggling with thoughts of suicide, and anyone worried about a young person.</p> <p>papyrus-uk.org Available 24/7 0800 068 41 41</p>	 <p>Whatever you're facing We're here to listen</p> <p>Call free day or night on 116 123</p> <p>Email jo@samaritans.org</p> <p>samaritans.org SAMARITANS</p>	 <p>Bereavement Support</p> <p>Resources for all dealing with bereavement, online, on the phone and in person support. Resources for those supporting young people through loss</p> <p>cruse.org.uk 0808 808 1677.</p>

Where can I get local advice and support?

If you are concerned that your child/young person may be self-harming and you'd like help or advice, please contact the specialist Child and Adolescent Mental Health Services (CAMHS) team in your area:

Hampshire CAMHS

Single Point of Access (SPA)

Telephone: 0300 304 0050

Also see the CAMHS parents and carers guide on [Crisis, Self-Harm and Suicide](#)

Isle of Wight CCAMHS

Free confidential mental health support and advice.

Telephone: 01983 523 602

Monday to Friday 9am to 4:30pm

In an **emergency** call 111 for dedicated mental health support 24/7.

