

The Fix This Parents' Guide to Self-harm

Fix This

1 This Parent's Guide aims to raise parents'/carers' awareness and understanding around self-harm and to support parents/carers to begin to think about how to talk to young people about self-harm.

2 Self-harm is a complex issue and it is extremely difficult to raise the subject with young people. It's hard to accept that there are no easy solutions and that as parents/carers we can't simply 'fix' things for them. But we hope that this guide will unravel some of the complexity, and help feel confident to begin to have those conversations.

3 Turn over NOW to find out what self-harm is and why some young people do it:
4 closely linked stages;
A What it is in terms of direct self-injury
B What it can be in addition to direct self-injury
C Why young people say they do it
D And the underlying reasons behind the distressing feelings causing young people to self-harm.

TURN
OVER
NOW

4 There are 6 key points to remember about self-harm:

1. Self-harm is **not just one thing**. It is different for different young people... from cutting themselves, to car dodging...
2. Self-harm is when someone hurts themselves **as a way of dealing with difficult or distressing feelings**. Some young people find that self-harm **helps them cope better** with those feelings.
3. There **are wide a range of reasons why** some young people say that self-harm helps them feel they can cope with their distressing feelings better.
4. The difficult and distressing feelings experienced by young people who self-harm are **due to different reasons for each young person**. It's never helpful to make assumptions or to generalise. There can often be more than one reason and sometimes young people don't know why.
5. There are **different words used** to describe self-harm.
6. Young people who self-harm may have **struggled with difficult and distressing feelings for some time** before they self-harm.

5 Support and advice

If you find out your child has been self-harming you may feel shocked, distressed, confused or angry. Try to stay calm and let them know you are there to help and listen to them.

Get some support and advice - we recommend you read the reassuring and helpful information on the NSPCC website on what to do if your child has been self-harming.

http://www.nspcc.org.uk/help-and-advice/for-parents/positive-parenting-tips/self-harming/self-harming_wda94588.html

There will be a new website with advice for parents/carers on self-harm – keep in touch with Space2 to find out when it's completed.

A What is self-harm?

Self-harm is when someone hurts themselves as a way of dealing with difficult or distressing feelings. Some young people find that self-harm helps them cope better with those feelings, for a while.

Ways of self-harming can include:

- Cutting their skin
- Burning their skin
- Taking an overdose of tablets
- Banging their head
- Throwing their body against something hard
- Punching themselves
- Sticking things in their body
- Swallowing inappropriate objects
- Biting themselves
- Pulling hair or eye lashes out
- Scratching / re-infecting wounds
- Drinking bleach
- Eating glass

B Self-harm can also take the form of getting into or remaining in risky situations, such as:

- Controlled eating patterns – anorexia, bulimia, over-eating.
- Risky behaviour e.g. car dodging
- Risky sexual behaviour
- Getting into fights
- Get into cars being driven dangerously
- Get into cars with someone they don't know
- Excessive use of drugs or alcohol

There are a range of words used to talk about self-harm: self-injury, deliberate self-harm, self-inflicted harm, deliberate self-injury. Young people often refer to self-harm as cutting, slashing or burning.

D Young people who self-harm may have struggled with difficult and distressing feelings for some time before they self-harm. These feelings can be due to:

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| • Physical, sexual or emotional abuse | • Stress due to school work/exams |
| • Feeling depressed or anxious | • Being bullied |
| • Feeling bad about themselves | • Violence in the home |
| • Relationship problems with boyfriend / girlfriend | • Feeling that no-one listens to them |
| • Relationship problems with friends or family members | • Feeling hopeless |
| • Flash backs to traumatic events in their lives | • Feeling isolated, alone |
| • Confusion about their sexuality | • Feeling out of control |
| • Being rejected because of their sexuality | • Bereavement |
| • Feeling powerless – as though there is nothing they can do to change anything | |

For young people who self-harm, there can be a combination of factors at work.

C Why do young people self-harm?

There are many different reasons why some young people say that self-harm helps them feel they can cope with their distressing feelings better.

For example, they say it can be a way of:

- Changing emotional pain into physical pain
- Taking a break from difficult things in life
- Controlling one aspect of their life
- Getting rid of big emotions that feel overwhelming
- Punishing themselves, perhaps because they feel bad about themselves and their lives
- Communicating to other people how much emotional pain they feel, when they cannot find the words to describe all their thoughts and feelings