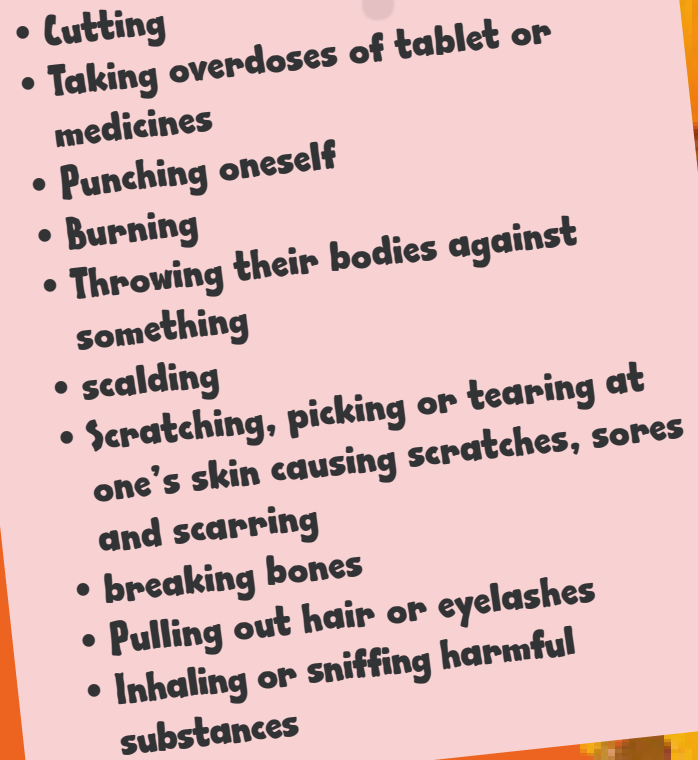


## What is Self Harm?

The phrase 'self harm' is used to describe a range of things that people do to injure themselves in a deliberate and usually hidden way, as a way of dealing with emotions. It can go on for years and is more common than most people realise. Self Harm can take a number of forms including:

- 
- Cutting
  - Taking overdoses of tablet or medicines
  - Punching oneself
  - Burning
  - Throwing their bodies against something
  - scalding
  - Scratching, picking or tearing at one's skin causing scratches, sores and scarring
  - breaking bones
  - Pulling out hair or eyelashes
  - Inhaling or sniffing harmful substances

Some people self-harm on a regular basis while others do it just once or a few times. For some people it is part of coping with a specific problem and they stop once the problem is resolved.

## Who self harms?

There is no straight forward answer to this. The truth is - anyone is at risk from self harming at some point in his or her life depending on the experiences they have and the way they feel about these experiences. People self harm for a variety of reasons and in a variety of ways, and what can cause one person to harm themselves, may not create the same level of distress in another person.

## Why might people Self Harm?

The underlying reasons why someone might self harm are often complex and it can be quite difficult to understand. Different people self harm for different reasons at different times.

Some reasons might include:

- Escape from feelings of emptiness or unreality
- Relief from overwhelming anger, emotional or physical tension
- Physical expression of inexpressible emotional or physical tension
- Feeling they deserved to be punished for some reason
- Seeing blood flow may be like watching bad things being flushed away
- Some people describe intense feelings of anger or distress before harming themselves
- Others describe themselves as feeling numb
- Self harming may be a way of managing their moods and feelings making them feel in control

There are many things that can cause distress in someone that can in turn lead them to harm themselves. Such issues that may trigger the onset or a period of self harm might include:

- bullying
- trauma
- abuse
- school or work pressures
- bereavement
- difficult relationships

There doesn't always need to be a triggering event in someone's life that makes them turn to self harm, sometimes individuals just experience a period of decreased self-esteem or increased distress that leads them to harm themselves.

## Self Harm is NOT...

- Attention seeking or manipulative - most people try to hide their injuries
- A mental illness; it is a symptom of internal stress or distress
- Only a young person's problem
- A suicide attempt, self harm is about staying alive.
- The problem, but does suggest that the person is struggling with something else
- A problem that can't be solved

## AND...

- People self harm to relieve the pain of their emotions, not for the pain of the harm.
- People who self harm are not a danger to others.
- The severity of self harm is not directly related to the level of distress that the individual is feeling.
- The fact that someone has harmed themselves is what is significant, not what they did or how severe their harm was.

# If you are Self Harming...

## Try and understand why you self harm

try and learn as much as you can about why you self harm. Some people keep notes of what is going on in their lives when they feel the need to harm themselves. Others find it helpful to talk through why they self harm with a person they trust such as a youth worker.

## Finding other ways to cope

You might find it easier to stop self harming if you can learn new ways to deal with unbearable feelings. Everyone is different, so finding a new coping strategy that works for you might take time. Check out the organisations on the right that can help with coping.

## Deciding it's time to get help

It's sometimes easier to talk to someone who doesn't know you and has been trained to help. Check out the 'Where to go for Help' section for organisations that can offer information, advice and support on self harm and put you in touch with someone to talk to.

## Distractions and The **Five** Minute Rule

There are many distraction techniques – from holding an ice cube, elastic band flicking on the wrist, writing down your thoughts, hitting a pillow, listening to music, writing down pros and cons. But some find one of the most helpful to recovery was the **five** minutes rule, where if you feel like you want to self harm you wait for **five** minutes before you do, then see if you can go another **five** minutes, and so on till eventually the urge is over.

## Keeping **Safe**

if you are not able to stop self harming then try and keep **safe**. Learn about how to avoid infections and how to recognise when you need medical attention. For example, if you are cutting yourself use something clean, preferably sterile which hasn't been used by other people. Be careful not to harm yourself if you have taken drugs or alcohol, as this makes it much harder to stay **safe**.



This leaflet was compiled by Young People in Oxfordshire, using their own experiences and from researching information around self harm

Alternative formats of this publication are available on request. These include other languages, large print, Braille, audio cassette, computer disk or email. Tel:01865 328908



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# Where to go for help

If you or anyone else are in danger call the police on 999 or 112 if you are using a mobile - this works even when you have no credit or the keypad is locked

Young people's useful contacts and sources of help

[www.spired.com](http://www.spired.com)

Oxfordshire's website for young people

Face2face Counselling  
01993 892424

Confidential counselling service for young people aged 13 - 19.

Childline - 0800 111

the free helpline

[www.childline.org.uk](http://www.childline.org.uk)

website has lots of useful info, support and links

[www.selfharm.org.uk](http://www.selfharm.org.uk)

Support, info, links to help, and more from The Site

[www.firstsigns.org.uk](http://www.firstsigns.org.uk)

Information, advice, and links

[www.opalproject.co.uk](http://www.opalproject.co.uk)

self harm support for young people

Bristol Crisis Service for Women

[www.selfinjurysupport.org.uk](http://www.selfinjurysupport.org.uk)

0117 925 1119

Fri-Sat 9pm-12:30am,

Sun 6-9pm.

For women in emotional distress with a focus on self harm

[www.sane.org.uk](http://www.sane.org.uk)

0845 767 8000 6pm - 11pm

[www.youth2youth.co.uk](http://www.youth2youth.co.uk)

020 8896 3675

Monday and Thursday evening 6.30pm to 9.30pm.

Helpline, run by young people, for young people

[www.getconnected.org.uk](http://www.getconnected.org.uk)

08088084994 1pm - 11pm

free confidential help for young people

[www.youngminds.org.uk](http://www.youngminds.org.uk)

0808 802 5544

parents helpline

## Are you hurting



If you know someone who self harms

Keep an open mind - self harm is a way of coping with painful feelings. This can be difficult to understand, but someone who is experiencing self harm deserves kindness, compassion and support.

## Don't PANIC

Don't **P**ut them down. Self-esteem is already low.

Don't **A**bandon or reject in any way. Don't relax attentions because they seem to be 'better'.

Don't **N**ag. Don't intrude and balance being watchful with a respect for privacy.

Don't **I**gnore what has happened.

Don't **C**riticise their actions, however you feel about it, remember the pain and turmoil they were, and maybe still are, experiencing.