

"Self-harm used to be a way of getting rid of the feelings inside me. To get rid of all the hurt, anger and pain that I was feeling... Something that I have always done to mask my feelings. I don't know how to release my feelings in any other way and find talking exceptionally difficult." (Young person)

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; from 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.

"Just don't give up, don't give up because there is help out there, there is.... it's been hard, very, very, very hard at times but you will get there. You will and I know it's such a total cliché and you, I used to hear it all the time but it is so true and you have to talk. Don't keep anything to yourself and go and see your GP yourself with regards to your own health and well-being because you need to stay strong" (Parent)

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.