

What is Self-Harm?

Self-harm is when someone intends to hurt themselves or chooses to inflict pain on themselves in some way. This can include:

- Cutting
- Overdosing (self-poisoning)
- Hitting (self and others)
- Burning or scalding
- Picking or scratching skin
- Pulling hair
- Ingesting toxic substances (like bleach)
- Eating disorders

Who self-harms?

There is not one type of person who self-harms. It does not depend on sex, age, religion or background. Both sexes self-harm, but their methods may be different, for example males may engage in behaviours such as fighting. **Both adults and young people can self-harm.** LGBTQ young people, those who have been abused or witnessed DV, have been in care/adopted, identify as emo, been bullied or experienced parental substance misuse are **potentially** more at risk of self-harm or other mental health concerns.

Why do people self-harm?

People self-harm for a number of reasons. Something might have happened to make them feel bad about things. This could be stress or anxiety, friendship or relationship difficulties, isolation or loneliness, low self-esteem, questioning sexuality or gender. **But often there is no known cause or trigger.**

"Self-harm used to be a way of getting rid of the feelings inside. I was trying to get rid of all the hurt, anger and pain that I was feeling... Some people always do it to mask my feelings. I don't know how to release my feelings in any other way and find talking exceptionally difficult."

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.