



**If the young person uses self-harm to express pain and intense emotions, they can be encouraged to:**

- Start a journal in which to express their feelings.
- Paint, draw or scribble on a big piece of paper with a red pen.
- Compose a poem or song to say what they feel.
- Write down any negative feelings and then rip the paper up.

**If the young person uses self-harm to calm and soothe themselves, they could:**

- Take a bath or a hot shower.
- Wrap themselves in a warm blanket.
- Cuddle a pet.
- Massage their neck, hands and feet.
- Listen to calming music.
- Practice mindfulness.

**If the young person self-harms to release tension or vent anger, they could:**

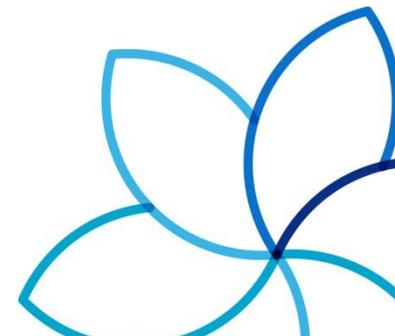
- Exercise vigorously, run, dance, jump on the spot.
- Punch a cushion or mattress, or scream into a pillow.
- Use stress balls to squeeze.
- Rip up sheets of paper.
- Make some loud noise.

**If the young person self-harms because they feel disconnected or numb, they could:**

- Contact a friend; they do not have to talk about the self-harming.
- Chew something with a strong taste, sweet and sour.
- Take a cold shower.
- Hold an ice cube in the crook of their arm or behind their knee.
- Go online and utilise self-help websites.

# Self-harm

A guide for parents and carers



## What can parents/carers do to help?

- Try to stay calm and be non-judgemental.
- Let the young person know that you are there for them, actively listen.
- Encourage the young person to talk about their feelings.
- Try to have empathy and show interest in their distress.
- Support the young person to be in control of their decisions.
- Clarify if there is an immediate need for medical attention, for example if the young person has taken an overdose or is bleeding out, or you feel that you cannot keep them safe in the moment.
- Offer to help them find support.

## What's not helpful?

- Forcing change by telling them to stop doing it.
- Telling them off.
- Blame the young person for your own shock and upset, avoid saying things such as *"It really upsets me when you do that"* this will add to the young person's shame and guilt.
- Panic or try quick solutions
- Ignoring the young person's injuries, or overly focusing on them.
- Labelling

Believe that the young person who has threatened to harm themselves in the past, not carry it out in the future.

## Information about self-harm/suicidal thoughts

Self-harm is self-poisoning or self-injury, irrespective of the apparent purpose of the act. Self-harm is a way young people cope with overwhelming feelings of emotional pain and distress. By hurting themselves, they may feel better for a while and be more able to cope with their lives.

Cutting triggers the body's chemistry, endorphins are released to help the body deal with pain and stress and produce a calming effect on the brain when a young person is feeling distressed emotionally or overwhelmed, it also helps reduce the physical pain of the cut, which goes some way to help us to understand why young people may repeat self-harming behaviours. The feeling of calmness only lasts a short time, as the endorphins levels reduce naturally, and the young person returns to feeling overwhelmed or emotionally distressed again.

## Tips for young people who are self-harming

Please share this page with your young person and support them with some calming strategies or distractions as described below.

Creating a self-soothing plan when your young person has the urge to self-harm is a good way to delay the self-harming behaviour and enable the urge to dissipate so they can try to avoid cutting on that occasion. Within the leaflet are some ways to create a self-soothe plan.

It may be a good idea to set up a self soothe box in advance, so that it is ready for when the young person begins to recognise that they are struggling. Writing a journal or a diary to help the young person recognise triggers can be a good idea to anticipate difficult times and then put these suggestions into practice.