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Email: info@frasac.org.uk
Website: www.frasac.org.uk

Opening Times:

Monday to Friday 9am – 5pm

Further information & advice:

NCH
www.nch.org.uk

National Self-Harm Network
www.nshn.co.uk

Young Minds
020 7336 8445
www.youngminds.org.uk

NHS 24
08454 24 24 24
www.nhs24.com

SIARI (self injury &
related issues)
www.siari.co.uk

Childline
0800 1111
www.childline.org.uk

Samaritans
08457 90 90 90
www.samaritans.org

Rape Crisis Helpline
Freephone 08088 01 03 02
www.rapecrisscotland.org.uk

National Children's Bureau
www.selfharm.org.uk

LifeSIGNS
www.lifesigns.org.uk



**Fife Rape & Sexual
Assault Centre

(FRASAC)**

**YOUNG
PERSONS'
PROJECT**



**SELF-HARM
&
SELF-INJURY**

What is Self-Harm?

Self-harm is when someone deliberately hurts or injures her or himself. Self-harm is also sometimes called self-injury. For the purposes of this publication we will refer to both using the term self-harm. Self-harm can take a number of forms including:

- * Cutting or blood-letting
- * Burning yourself
- * Hitting yourself, hitting walls or other hard objects
- * Getting into fights or excessive risk taking/putting yourself in dangerous situations
- * Breaking bones
- * Hair or eyelash pulling
- * Scratching, picking or tearing at your skin causing sores and scarring
- * Inhaling or taking harmful/poisonous substances

Who Self-Harms?

All sorts of people self-harm. Often they carry on successful careers or look after families, and there is little outward sign that there is anything wrong. Self-harm seems to be more common among women, partly because men are more likely to express strong feelings, such as anger, outwardly.

Self-harm by young people is not unusual but, again, it is often hidden because it is done in private or because people are ashamed or afraid.

Research published in 2001 suggested that as many as 215,000 eleven to fifteen year olds in Great Britain (1 in 17) may have harmed themselves. The numbers may be higher because self-harm is often hidden. The average age for children starting to harm themselves was thirteen. The earliest reported incident in the research was at age seven.

At its peak, one of the people interviewed had harmed herself over 10 times a day, either by cutting or blood-letting. However, many participants had also gone for periods of days or months without self-harming, before starting again.

Each year more than 24,000 teenagers are admitted to UK hospitals after deliberately harming themselves. A recent survey of teenage girls in Edinburgh showed that nearly one in three have self-harmed.

STAYING SAFE & LOOKING AFTER YOURSELF

Until you feel ready to stop, try to look after yourself and take care of your injuries. If you *must* cut then you can try to do so in the least harmful way and decide beforehand what you are going to do and stick to your limits.

- * **Don't share items** you use to self-harm with anyone else. If you do you risk infection (hepatitis, AIDS etc)
- * If you are cutting use something **clean** and **sterile**
- * Try to **keep cuts shallow** and avoid harming yourself near main arteries and tendons. Try to **avoid cutting your wrists**. Keep first aid supplies on hand and know what to do in the case of emergencies. If you think the wound is infected see a doctor or nurse immediately.
- * Do as little as you can. **Set limits** – decide how many cuts or burns or bruises and how big they will be – and set these limits so that they are just enough to relieve your distress but no more.
- * Make sure your **tetanus protection** is up to date.
- * **Avoid alcohol or drugs** if you think you are likely to self-harm – these can lower your inhibitions physically, which can lead you back to harming yourself.
- * **Eat well** – a diet rich in carbohydrates is thought to increase levels of serotonin in the brain which is thought to improve mood. Mood swings are often said by people to be triggers for their self-harm. Also avoid alcohol and caffeine as these can lead to sleeping problems and anxiousness.
- * **Don't drive yourself too hard**. Many young people who self-harm are high-achievers, and sometimes they put themselves under too much pressure. Sometimes it's OK for your work or your performance to be "good enough".
- * **Stay in a public place** – if you only self-harm in private, staying in a crowd of people might stop you from hurting yourself.
- * Even if you don't want to stop yet, it's important to **try to talk** to someone you can trust.

- * **Craving sensation** – do something that creates a sharp physical sensation

Try squeezing ice HARD (this really hurts!) or rubbing ice on the part of your body you feel like injuring;



put a finger into a frozen food (like ice cream) for a minute.

Some people find that putting an elastic band on their wrist and pinging it really hard takes their mind of self-harming.



Spin yourself round on the spot until you get dizzy

- * **Wanting focus or control** – Focus hard on your breathing (in through nose, out through mouth)

do something that you really need to focus on like playing a computer game



choose a random object like a wastepaper bin, and try to list 30 different uses for it

5-4-3-2-1 rule: name 5 things you can see, 4 you can hear, 3 you can smell, 2 you can touch and 1 thing you like about yourself

- * **Wanting to see blood/burns/cuts**

draw on yourself with a red felt-tip pen or lipstick



make a tray of red blood by dropping six or seven drops of red food colour into a shallow bowl of water. Use this to draw on the parts of your body that you want to cut/burn.



use red play dough and place it on your body where you want to cut. Use a **blunt** knife to cut through it

- * **Wanting to see scars or pick scabs**

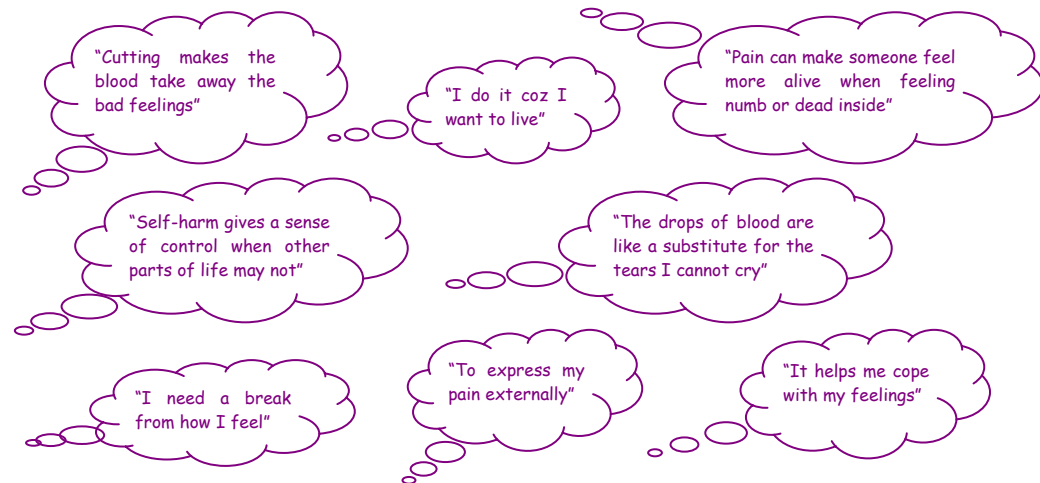
get a henna tattoo kit, put the henna on as a paste and leave it on overnight; the next day you can pick it off as you would a scab and it leaves an orange-red mark behind



Why Self-Harm?

People who self-harm usually do so because of some difficulty they have or have had. It can include anxiety, depression, being abused, bereavement, peer pressure or being bullied. For most people it is a way of getting through great emotional pain. A number of self-harmers refer to self-harming acting as a safety valve – a way of relieving the tension.

Some comments made by people who self-harm include:



It may be difficult to understand why someone would deliberately harm themselves but it's important to remember that many people do things that are harmful from time to time. Some people smoke, drink too much or overeat. While these things may be thought to be more socially acceptable than self-harming, they can also be harmful ways of dealing with stress and the pressures of everyday life.

Why Is Self-Harming A Problem?

People who self-harm describe it as giving them relief from overwhelming feelings and pressures and therefore as a means of preventing suicide. However, when people harm themselves there is a risk of serious physical damage and infection. In the longer term there is a risk of permanent damage and scarring.

People who harm themselves often feel ashamed, guilty and disgusted and become depressed about what they are doing. Once people start self-harming they can become 'addicted' to it and, just like any other bad habit, it can be very difficult to stop.

How Can You Help Someone Who Has Harmed Themselves?

Safety:

First make sure they are safe. Keep calm and give them something to treat the injury (plaster, bandage) or help by treating it yourself. If it is serious such as an overdose or excessive bleeding, call the emergency services on 999.

Understanding:

Second, listen and try to understand why the person is self-harming. Don't jump to judgements and don't accuse them of attention seeking. Don't make the situation worse by being angry.

Offer but don't force help:

Some people who self-harm will find it helpful to talk to someone. However, some people have had bad experiences with professionals, so ask what help they would like.

Ask about what triggers the self-harm and whether anything else could replace the self-harm e.g. when stress builds up, what could the person do to relieve it?

Remember that self-harm can be a way of coping, so stopping the self-harm is not always the best thing to aim for immediately. Safety and understanding are more important in the short term.

Why and How People Stop Self-Harming?

The first step to getting out of the cycle of self-harm is to tell someone that you are harming yourself. This can be either a friend, family member, doctor or nurse, telephone helpline, internet support or a teacher at school. Those who had decreased or ceased self-harm gave a variety of reasons. The following are just some reasons:

- * improved self-esteem
- * the desire to self-harm had diminished as they learned to communicate better
- * stability and a supportive environment helped
- * some had learned to distract themselves by talking to others, listening to music, reading, drawing, poetry, meditation or singing

STRATEGIES TO DEAL WITH SELF-HARM

Buy yourself some time – If you get the urge to harm yourself, tell yourself that if you still want to do it in 10 minutes, you can. When the 10 minutes is up, see if you can manage another 10 minutes. Gradually increase the time you wait.

Learn how you feel – are you feeling angry, sad, depressed, craving sensation, wanting focus, wanting to see blood, wanting to see scars/pick scabs? Try and match the feeling to an activity e.g.

* **Angry**

use a pillow to hit a wall



rip up an old newspaper



on a sketch or photo of yourself mark in red ink what you want to do

go for a walk or a bike ride



clean the house



Pop bubble-wrap



* **Sad, depressed** – do something slow and soothing

take a hot bubble bath



listen to soothing music



call a friend and chat about things that you like



Get magazines and catalogues and cut out all the words and pictures that make you feel good/happy

Make a list of all your good points