



LOOKING AT

SELF-HARM

Explains what self-harm is, possible reasons people self-harm, ways you can manage self-harm as well as some useful exercises, what to do if someone you know is self-harming & apps and websites for more support.

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What is self-harm?

Self-harm is when you hurt yourself on purpose. People usually do it because something else feels wrong. It seems like the only way to let those feelings out.

It is a very common behaviour in young people and affects around one in 12 people, with around 10% of 15–16-year-olds self-harming. Some reports suggesting up to 25% of YP self-harm.

Self-harm it is usually as a result of another problem. It can happen if you are feeling anxious, depressed, stressed, or bullied and feel you don't have any other way of dealing with these issues.

Often self-harming brings only temporary relief. It can be upsetting when you think that self-harm is the only way you can cope, but there are other healthy ways you can cope.

Sometimes it feels like no-one understands why you self-harm but lots more people today know about what the condition really means

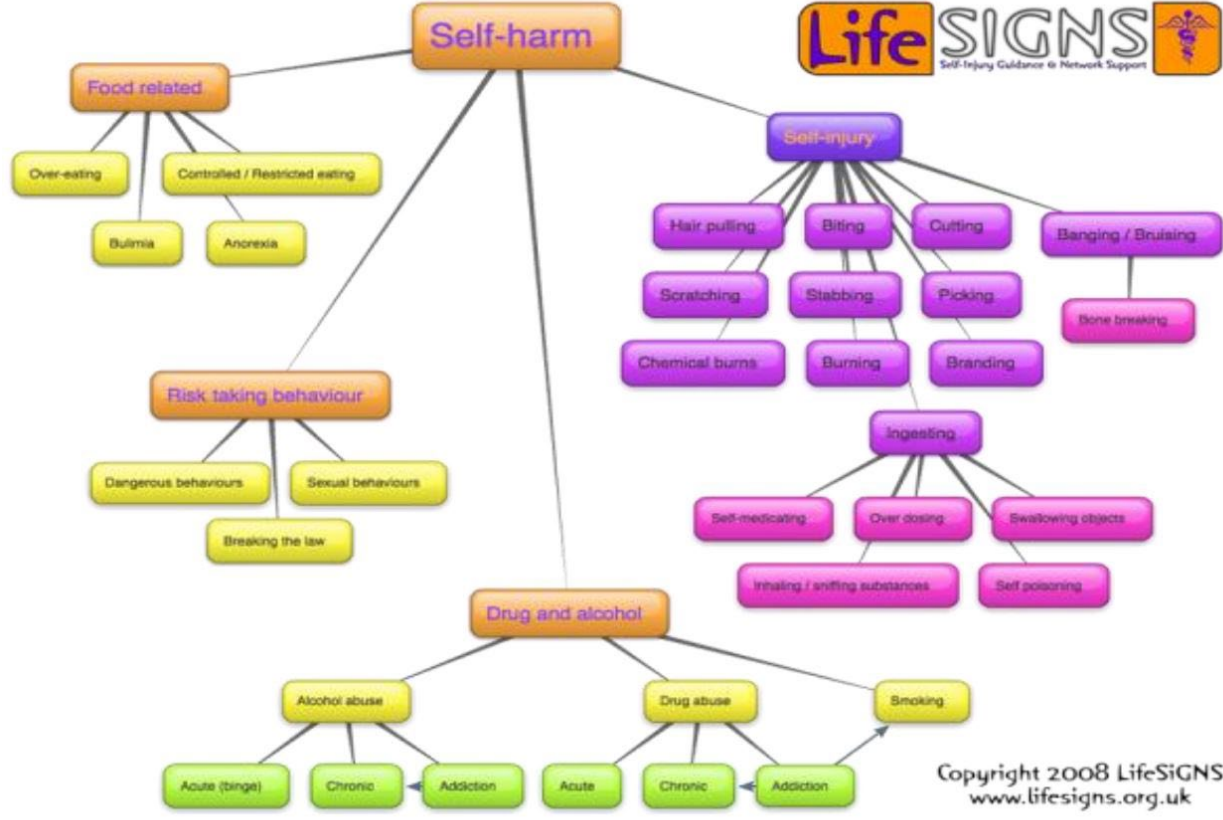
Examples of how people self-harm

****warning**** the following information about the different types of self-harm may be upsetting or triggering. If you are feeling vulnerable you might want to skip to the next section.

- Cutting yourself
- Burning yourself
- Biting, picking or scratching your skin
- Hitting: either yourself, or something around you e.g., a wall.
- Pulling out your hair (head, arm, leg, eyebrows).

There are more examples, these are just some of the more common ones. Check out the spider diagram below for how self-harm is also just an umbrella term that includes self-injury.

It is important that you look after yourself if you are self-harming and to make sure you have any first aid equipment you need to take care of cuts and scars. Lifesigns is a great website for self-harm but specifically for first aid support: <https://www.lifesigns.org.uk/first-aid-for-self-injury-and-self-harm/>



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Why do people self-harm?

Self-harm is an incredibly personal thing. As with most mental health concerns there are no fixed rules as to why we do things.

Sometimes self-harm is linked to an experience, i.e., is a way of coping with something difficult that is happening now or has happened in the past. Sometimes you might not feel you can identify what is making you self-harm.

Any difficult or upsetting situation could potentially cause someone to self-harm, some common reasons include:

- Feeling under pressure: this can be from a number of sources, feeling stressed from work/school or having to deal with a high-pressured relationship or maybe internal pressure to be the best/want to succeed.
- Low mood: this could have been caused by a number of things, but some examples could be from the loss of a job, the breakdown of a relationship or even a bereavement.
- Bullying: bullying or difficult relationships/friendships especially if they are tense, self-harm is sometimes used as a way to release this tension.
- Worries: being excessively worried about something, e.g., money, job prospects/safety, relationship troubles, low self-esteem.
- Sexual/physical or emotional abuse
- Dealing with an illness or other health problem.

How can I manage my self-harm?

Identifying your self-harm patterns

Working on identifying your patterns when it comes to self-harm is great in helping you understand your self-harming behaviours. It can also help you to be able to recognise things that may be triggering your self-harm and what happens when you start to have the urge to self-harm. If you don't feel able to resist the urge to self-harm then it's a great tool to record your experiences.

Recognising your triggers

Triggers can be anything from people, events, situations, anniversaries that give you the urge to hurt yourself. To help identify what these are, in your diary/phone or just in your mind, think about what was happening before you last self-harmed. Was there a particular thought you were fixating on? What was the situation before you started self-harming? Maybe you saw someone you didn't like or had a traumatic experience with, maybe you had an argument with someone or your failed a test. The next step is to identify your urges

Recognising your urges:

Urges can come in different ways and may feel different for you at different times. **They can include:**

- Increased heartrate
- Nausea
- Feeling foggy or heavy
- Feeling disconnected, like you are watching yourself from outside of your body
- Overwhelming emotions like sadness, fear or rage
- Making decisions that aren't good for you
- Having specific thoughts such as 'cut' or 'hurt'

Once you are able to recognise your triggers and urges it becomes easier to be able to take positive steps towards reducing or stopping yourself self-harm. A good way to start is to find good distraction techniques when you feel your triggers or urges coming on.

Distractions by type:

There are many possible distractions from self-harm that you can use. Ways to trial some out could either be by type of distractions or by feelings

Fun

1. Watching your favourite tv show/film
2. Listening to music
3. Colouring in/painting
4. Playing with playdough or modelling
5. Playing computer games
6. Getting outside to walk, shop, see a friend
7. Building things, then destroying them and then rebuilding

Physical

1. Do a workout
2. Go to the gym
3. Buy a punching bag
4. Ripping paper up
5. Playing with a stress ball
6. Throw socks against the wall
7. Swimming/bike ride/run

Creative

1. Write poetry/journal/stories
2. Doodling
3. Knitting/sewing
4. Origami

Comforting

1. Cuddling a soft toy
2. Allow yourself to cry
3. Drink a hot drink
4. Sleep
5. Have a bath/shower
6. Wearing pjs/get under a blanket



Distractions by type

Constructive

1. Writing a to-do list
2. Untangling necklaces/wool
3. Organising your room
4. Cleaning
5. Cooking/baking
6. Writing a list of positive things in your life
7. Painting nails
8. Gardening
9. Reading a book

Displacement

1. Drawing on yourself in red pen
2. Snapping elastic band on your wrist
3. Putting plasters where you self-harm
4. Squeezing ice cubs/pressing against where you self-harm
5. Draw where you self-harm on a piece of paper and add the damage you want to do.
6. Take a hot shower and use a good body exfoliator
7. Bite into a chili



Distractions by feeling

Anger and Frustration:

- Exercise
- Hit cushions
- Shout
- Shake
- Tear something up

Sadness and Fear:

- Wrap a blanket around you
- Walk in nature
- Let yourself cry or sleep
- Lie in a comfortable position and breathe slowly
- Talk to someone

Need to control:

- Write lists
- Tidy up/have a clear out
- Clench and relax
- Weed a garden

Numb and disconnected:

- Elastic band flick
- Hold ice cubes
- Bite a chilli or peppermint
- Have a cold shower

Self-harm exercises

Helpful activity

Below is a list of activities / aspects of life. These can all be carried out in ways which are more or less self-nurturing or self-harming. On the scale for each activity, show in a way that feels appropriate to you, where you think you fall.

	Self-nurturing					Self-harming				
	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10
Eating										
Sleeping										
Working										
Exercising										
Leisure / relaxing										
Partner / sexual relationships										
Friendships										
Family relationships										
Alcohol / drugs										
Spending										
Another activity of your choice										

Asking yourself questions

Finishing the following sentences might help you work out why you self-harm

The reason I hurt myself for the very first time was.....

Before I hurt myself I feel.....

After I hurt myself I feel.....

The situations that I am most likely to hurt myself are.....

Self-harm helps me cope by.....

What to do is someone you know is self-harming?

- 1.** Do NOT tell them to stop!
- 2.** Show that you see and care about the person in pain behind the self-injury.
- 3.** Show concern for the injuries themselves. Whatever 'front' they may put on, a person who has injured herself is usually deeply distressed, ashamed and vulnerable. You have an opportunity to offer compassion and respect – something different from what they are often used to receiving.
- 4.** Make it clear that self-injury is okay to talk about and can be understood.
- 5.** Convey your respect for the person's efforts to survive, even though this involves hurting themselves. They have done the best they could.
- 6.** Acknowledge how frightening it may be to think of living without self-injury. Reassure the person that you will not try to 'steal' their way of coping. (Also reassure yourself you are not responsible for what they do to themselves.)
- 7.** Help the person make sense of their self-injury. eg ask when the self-injury started, and what was happening then. Explore how it has helped the person to survive, in the past and now. Retrace with them the steps leading up to self-injury – the events, thoughts and feelings which lead to it.
- 8.** Gently encourage the person to use the urge to self-injure as a signal: – of important but buried experiences, feelings, and needs. When they feel ready, help them learn to express these things in other ways, such as through talking, writing, drawing, shouting, hitting something, etc.
- 9.** Support the person in beginning to take steps to keep themselves safe and to reduce their self-injury – if they wish to. Examples of very valuable steps might be: taking fewer risks (e.g. washing implements used to cut, avoiding drinking alcohol if they think they are likely to self-injure); taking better care of injuries; reducing severity or frequency of injuries even a little. In all cases more choice and control are being exercised.
- 10.** Don't see stopping self-injury as the only, or most important goal. A person may make great progress in many ways and still need self-injury as a coping method for some time. Self-injury may also worsen for a while when difficult issues or feelings are being explored, or when old patterns are being changed. It takes a long time for a person to be ready to give up self-injury. Encourage them and yourself by acknowledging each small step as a major achievement

Helpful Information

APPS:

Calm Harm: Calm Harm is an app designed to help people resist or manage the urge to self-harm. Calm Harm provides tasks to help you resist or manage the urge to self-harm.

Self-Heal: A free App to help with the management of self-harm. Includes distraction task suggestions, useful contacts, information on self-harm

Websites

Harmless: harmless.org.uk User-led organisation for people who self-harm, and their friends and families

Lifesigns: lifesigns.org.uk User-led self-harm guidance and support network.

The Mix: 0808 808 4994 (helpline) themix.org.uk Helpline and online support for people aged 16-25.

National Self Harm Network (NSHN): nshn.co.uk Survivor-led closely monitored forum for people who self-harm, and their friends and families.

Sane: 0300 304 7000 sane.org.uk Support and information about mental health problems, including online support.

Self-injury Support: (formerly BCSW – Bristol Crisis Service for Women) 0808 800 8088 (helpline Mon-Fri 7-10pm) 0780 047 2908 (text support) selfinjurysupport.org.uk Information and support for people who. Tess text and email support for young women. www.selfinjurysupport.org.uk. Rainbow diary free diary if you are under 18 y old that can be ordered online.
<https://www.selfinjurysupport.org.uk/rainbow-journal>

Young Minds: 0808 802 5544 (parent helpline) youngminds.org.uk Information for parents and young people about mental health and wellbeing.

Childline - Children and Self Harm: <https://www.childline.org.uk/info-advice/your-feelings/self-harm/self-harm/> - <https://www.childline.org.uk/searchpage/?query=self+harm> - <https://www.childline.org.uk/info-advice/your-feelings/self-harm/self-harm/>

Self-Harm UK: Free online self-harm support for 14-19-year-olds. <https://www.selfharm.co.uk/>

Calm harm: An app based on the principles of Dialectical Behaviour Therapy (DBT) with Comfort, Distract, Express Yourself, Release, Random and Breathe based activities.
www.stem4.org.uk/calmharm