



Understanding self-harm

for 11-18 year olds

Learning about self-harm
and how to cope with it



What is self-harm?

We all experience difficult feelings at some point and we all have our own ways of coping. Self-harm is when we hurt ourselves to cope with difficult feelings.

We might self-harm for many different reasons, and in different ways. Sometimes we might not realise we've self-harmed until afterwards.

Warning: some information might be difficult to read or cause strong or upsetting feelings. Please only keep reading if you feel safe to do so. If you need support, you can find **24/7 helplines on the back cover of this booklet.**

Why might I self-harm?

Some of us use self-harm to deal with something difficult in our lives, or as a way to cope with overwhelming feelings. Sometimes, we might not know why we do it.

Some of us might self-harm once and then try other ways of coping. But some of us might feel that it helps, so we start to rely on it.

Some young people we spoke to said they self-harmed because they were trying to:

- Show how they **feel without speaking**
- **Distract themselves** from how they were feeling
- Cope with, or escape from, **painful feelings, thoughts or memories**
- Feel more **in control**
- **Punish** themselves for something
- **Stop feeling disconnected** from themselves or the world
- **Create a reason to look after themselves**, like caring for wounds

Myths about self-harm

When people don't understand self-harm, they might do or say hurtful things about it. This is called stigma. In the table below, we'll explain the truth about some myths that can lead to stigma.

Myth	Reality
There's only 1 type of self-harm	We can self-harm in lots of ways. This might include cutting, biting, hitting or burning ourselves, or hitting things, like punching a wall. Or things that are bad for our health, like drinking too much alcohol. We can also hurt ourselves in non-physical ways, like being self-critical or digitally self-harming.
If you self-harm, it means you're suicidal	Self-harm doesn't always mean we're thinking about ending our life. Sometimes it's to cope with difficult feelings and experiences. It might feel like the only thing that can help us at the time. Some of us might also experience suicidal feelings, but self-harm doesn't always mean we want to die.
It's obvious when you're self-harming	We might self-harm in ways that others can't see, or that doesn't leave scars or injuries. Or we might hide self-harm because we feel ashamed or worried about how others will react. Sometimes we might not recognise that we're self-harming.
You can never stop self-harming	With the right help and support, we can reduce self-harm and then stop. But it might not always be easy. Recovery can look different for all of us. Sometimes we might face challenges in the process, and that's okay. This is about learning what does and doesn't help us.

How do I tell someone I've self-harmed?

Try to tell **someone you trust** as soon as you feel ready. This could be someone like a parent, carer, guardian, friend or partner. Or professionals like a teacher, doctor, social worker or counsellor.

Before you talk to someone, you could:

- **Write down how you feel.**
- **Practise what you want to say.**
- **Make a list of supportive people who you could talk to.**
- **Think about how you want to tell them.** You could talk face-to-face, write a letter, talk by phone or text, or talk while doing something together.

Telling someone isn't easy – we might feel scared, stressed or anxious. But it's something to be proud of.



Eventually, I told my parents, who supported me and helped me seek out counselling.



If you don't have someone you trust to talk to, find organisations and services that can support you on the back cover of this booklet.

Remember: you don't have to go through this alone.

How to cope with the urge to self-harm

What works best will depend on how we're feeling and why we have the urge to self-harm. For this reason, the table on the next page shows **tips for coping with different feelings**. Young people we spoke to also shared their own tips for this section.

Some of the tips on the next page might not work for you, and that's okay. Only try what you feel comfortable with.

If you feel	You could...
Angry or tense	Shout, hit cushions, squeeze a stress ball, tear up paper, listen to heavy music like metal.
Sad	Let yourself cry, sleep, spend time outside.
Scared	Listen to calming music, use a heavy weighted blanket, do a breathing exercise.
A need for control	Tidy up the space around you, write a list or letter about your feelings then tear it up, draw measured lines on paper.
Overwhelmed or over-stimulated	Use headphones or ear plugs, turn off lights, feel things that you like the texture of, apply ice if you feel hot or get a blanket if you feel cold.
Numb	Hold ice cubes on your skin, eat or smell strong flavours like lemon or mint, watch or listen to a comforting TV show, video or song.
Alone	Call or text a friend or a helpline on the back cover of this booklet, go somewhere public that feels safe like a library.
Ashamed	Remind yourself that we all make mistakes, talk to someone about how you feel, spend time with people who make you feel better about yourself.

Delaying self-harm

Instead of trying to replace self-harm, you could also try to delay it. This can feel really hard, so try a small amount of time before building up to longer delays.

For example, start by trying to wait 30 seconds before self-harming. If you can do this, then try waiting for a couple of minutes, then slowly increasing the time that you wait.

How to manage self-harm in the long term

Learn your triggers You could keep a mood diary or journal to make notes about what happens before, during and after you feel the urge to self-harm.

Make a safety plan This will give you a quick way to remember:

- What to do if you need help
- Warning signs that you might self-harm
- Things you can try to help you feel calmer

Talk to someone Asking for help can feel really scary, but this is often the first step to getting support. If you'd prefer to speak to someone you don't know, you can contact a 24/7 helpline on the back cover of this booklet.

Seek treatment and support Getting professional support for self-harm might include:

- **Support from school, college or work.** Teachers, nurses, support teams and managers are there to look after you. They might be able to offer support, like counselling. Or help you talk to a trusted adult or doctor.
- **Support from your doctor.** You can see a doctor alone or ask a trusted adult to help you make an appointment. Doctors might offer therapy, which means exploring how you feel and what you've been through. It's also about understanding your emotions or learning to cope with certain situations.
- **Visiting hospital.** If we need urgent help, we might go to accident and emergency (A&E) in hospital. A health professional should ask questions about your mental health and tell you what support they can offer. Some of us need to stay in hospital for treatment.



Recognising you need help is a massive step.



How to cope with relapse

When we've gone for some time without self-harming, but then started again, we might hear this called 'relapse'. This is nothing to be ashamed of. We might think of relapse as a chance to learn which ways of coping work for us, and which ones don't.

It might feel like we have to start over, but we can all find ways to cope again.

Think back to when you stopped self-harming before Try to remember what helped and didn't help last time. Is there anything you can do again now? Or anything you can do differently?

Tell someone You might want to tell someone you've talked to before, or someone new. Your doctor might be able to refer you for a different type of support.

Try out different tips We might find coping tips that we used before don't help as much now. Or we might have stopped practising things that helped, and need a reminder. Could you try any new tips from this booklet to cope with self-harm urges?

Remember why you want to stop This can keep you motivated to keep working on stopping self-harm. Your reasons might have changed, and that's okay too.

Self-harm injuries

If you're worried about an injury or scar, talk to your doctor or ask a trusted adult to help you get medical support.

If you can't see a doctor or nurse right away, call **NHS 111** or call **999** if it's an **emergency**.

It's important to look after self-harm injuries so we don't get unwell from them.

Where can I find more support?

If you want to talk to someone by phone or text, you can contact these free services anytime.

You can talk to them about things you've read in this booklet, or anything else about mental health and wellbeing.

Childline 0800 1111

Offers a 24/7 helpline, plus counselling in English and Welsh. You can also post on message boards to talk to other young people. **childline.org.uk**

HOPELINE247 0800 068 4141

Helpline open 24/7 for people having suicidal thoughts, as well as for people who are worried about someone else. **samaritans.org**

Shout Text SHOUT to 85258

A confidential and anonymous 24/7 text support service for anyone struggling to cope.

giveusashout.org

Find us online

mind.org.uk/young-people

  @mindcharity

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 mindforbettermentalhealth

Please send any feedback to
youngpeopleinfo@mind.org.uk

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