

Supporting a Young Person who uses Self-Harm: Parent/Carer Pack

Useful websites and links

Young Minds a guide for Parents: Self Harm

<https://www.youngminds.org.uk/parent/parents-a-z-mental-health-guide/self-harm/>

Mental Health Foundation. Truth about Self-Harm Guide

<https://www.mentalhealth.org.uk/sites/default/files/2022-07/MHF-The-truth-about-self-harm-guide.pdf>.

NSPCC: Understanding Self-Harm

<https://www.nspcc.org.uk/keeping-children-safe/childrens-mental-health/self-harm/>

Self-Injury Support: Supporting someone who Self Harms

<https://www.selfinjurysupport.org.uk/i-want-to-help-someone>

Calm Harm: A free app to help young people manage the urge to self-harm

<https://calmharm.co.uk/>

Useful Helplines



Young Minds Parent Helpline

0808 802 5544

from 9:30am – 4pm, Monday – Friday. Freephone.

For support around understanding your child's behaviour, and practical advice for the child or young person's main carer. If you need further help, they'll arrange an independent, experienced professional to call you for a 50-minute telephone consultation within seven days.

For more information <https://www.youngminds.org.uk/parent/parents-helpline-and-webchat/>

- **If your child is in danger of immediate harm or their life may be at risk, call 999 or visit A&E.**

Extracts from Young Minds a guide for Parents: Self Harm

<https://www.youngminds.org.uk/parent/parents-a-z-mental-health-guide/self-harm/>

Why do young people self-harm?

Self-harm is usually a way of trying to manage very difficult feelings. People often self-harm when life feels hard to cope with – when lots of distressing feelings have built up and it's become overwhelming. In the moment, the sensation of self-harming and experiencing some physical pain can feel easier than feeling out of control emotionally.

If a young person is self-harming, it's often a sign that something in their life isn't quite right or has become too much to deal with. It can be understood as an important message about how a young person is feeling – one that needs to be noticed with care by the adults around them.



Some myths you might hear about self-harm can make it harder to talk about as a parent – including that it's a 'phase' young people go through, or that it's an attention-seeking behaviour.

While it might feel hard to understand sometimes from the outside, self-harm can be a way for a young person to:

- manage, reduce or express very strong and upsetting emotions – such as hurt, sadness, anger, fear or feeling bad about themselves
- relieve tension and pressure, or reduce feelings of panic and anxiety and temporarily feel calmer
- experience a feeling of physical pain to distract from emotional pain
- gain a sense of control over feelings or problems – for example, by feeling there's something they can do when things feel too much
- stop feeling numb or 'zoned-out' – which can be a protection mechanism our bodies use when we're experiencing overwhelming feelings

However, while it often feels like self-harm brings some relief in the moment, this is only temporary. As feelings build up again, so does the urge to self-harm. As this cycle continues over time, a young person may start to feel ashamed, confused or frightened about the fact that they're self-harming – increasing the load they're carrying on top of what they're already going through. This can become a cycle that's really hard to break, and a habit that's hard to stop.



Young people tell us it's helpful when parents...

- are open-minded and don't make assumptions
- remember that their child is not doing this for attention – it's their way of letting out the pain on their terms
- let their child know they are there to help, and aren't going to judge them
- listen to them and offer reassurance – things like 'I'm proud of you', 'we will get through this together' and 'I recognise your pain and want to help'



Young people tell us it's unhelpful when parents...

- put too much pressure on their child to stop
- force their child to talk when they're not ready
- minimise their child's feelings by saying things like 'it's only puberty', 'it's just a phase' or 'you just need to grow up'

Helping your child in the short term

Over the longer-term, becoming more aware of how they feel when they self-harm, what's making them feel this way and what kinds of things help, will empower your child to feel more in control. This will hopefully reduce the sense of being overwhelmed and the feeling that they need to self-harm. You can find more tips about this below.

When the urge to self-harm does build in the moment, having a list of other things they can do straight away can also help your child to 'ride the wave of' their intense feelings without self-harming.

Remember that different things will work for different people, and that what helps will usually depend on the feelings your child is trying to manage. Some young people will want to do something soothing like wrapping themselves up in a comfy space, while others might want to do something very active to burn off the energy in their body.

Talk to your child about different strategies they could try, while also giving them space to find their own ways of coping and figure out what works for them. Strategies could include:

- Making and using a [self soothe box](#)
- Writing down how they're feeling in a journal
- Writing down difficult feelings on pieces of paper and then ripping them up
- Ripping up a magazine or newspaper
- Hitting a soft cushion, pillow or bean bag
- Listening to loud music
- Having a shower
- Doing some exercise



- Going for a walk outside, or taking the dog for a walk
- Focusing on their breathing – how it feels in their body to breathe in and out
- Wrapping up in a blanket or duvet
- Talking to someone – a friend, family member or calling a helpline
- Tidying or organising something
- Doing a hobby they enjoy that helps them feel calm, such as painting, drawing, colouring-in, watching a favourite TV programme, playing video games, cooking or baking

Your child might want to use an app like [Calm Harm](#) so they have something on their phone that suggests different techniques they can try when they feel the urge to self-harm.

Helping your child over the longer term

♡ Try to open up a conversation about what's going on ∨

♡ Keep communication as open as you can, letting your child know they can talk to you anytime ∨

♡ Stay calm and non-judgemental ∨

♡ Think together about what's causing them to self-harm ∨

♡ Help them to notice when the urge to self-harm builds, and how they're feeling when that happens ∨

♡ Spend quality time together doing activities they enjoy ∨

♡ Help them do the daily things that support our wellbeing ∨

♡ Ask your child if there are things that would help them to feel more safe ∨

“ Empathise with their emotional state. Life is tough right now and it shouldn't be, but it is. Make sure your child knows there is so much they can do to make things better, and none of them involve attacking themselves or feeling bad about themselves. ”

Laura, parent

“ Check in with your child on a regular basis. It can be easy to feel that everything is back to normal when your child appears to be coping, but it's essential to monitor what's really happening for your child. ”

Michelle, parent

“ Become your child's best critical friend – compassionate, supportive, encouraging them to seek help and confidential where it matters. ”

Laura, parent