

Information for friends and family

What is Self-Harm?

Self-harm is when someone deliberately hurts or injures themselves as a way of coping with how they feel, or as a way of trying to express how they feel or change how they feel. There are many ways in which people harm themselves for example;

- Cutting
- Scratching
- Burning
- Overdosing / self-poisoning
- Pulling out hair
- Head banging
- Punching walls
- Bruising yourself
- Over or under eating
- Taking alcohol or drugs
- or any other risky behaviours that could cause you harm

Why Self Harm?

People can self-harm for many reasons, often as a way of expressing feelings. Those feelings could include pain, guilt, hurt, stress, upset, anger or a combination of several feelings. These feelings could be emerging from something that is currently happening in the young person's life or could be hidden or suppressed feelings from events in the past.

Some hurtful and painful events experienced by other young people who have self-harmed have been bullying, money, relationships, parents splitting up, abuse, neglect, sexuality, bereavement, peer pressure and feeling as though they are not meeting other people's expectations. Some young people may not know why they are self-harming.

Some people may think that the seriousness of the problem can be measured by how bad the injury is. This is not the case-a person who hurts themselves a bit can be feeling just as bad as someone who hurts themselves a lot.

Quotes from service users

"I was welcomed to the project and I felt like I finally had a safety net, finally had someone who wanted to listen and made me feel like they understood everything I was going through"

"I was lonely and angry, angry at the people who were bullying meand I was feeling down about myself"

"Whenever I was angry or upset I would scratch myself and it made me feel better, but it ended up getting worse"

Statistics

- UK highest rates of self-harm in Europe – 400 per 100, 000 people
- 1/6 women and 1/10 men will self-harm at some point in their lives
- Of those who self-harm 1/3 people will self-harm again during the next year
- 41% of people will not tell anyone about their self-harming behaviour
- Childline has seen a 68% increase in the number of self-harm related counselling interactions since 2011/2012
- Research focusing on young people suggests that about 10 per cent of 15 to 16 year olds have self-harmed

Is self-harming behaviour attention-seeking?

Because it can be hard to understand, healthcare professionals, friends and relatives sometimes mistakenly regard people who self-harm with mistrust or fear and see their behaviour as attention seeking and manipulative. If someone you know self-harms, you may feel helpless when faced with their wounds, and your own feelings and fears about the situation may cause you to blame them instead of supporting them.

Bear in mind they may be using the only way they can to communicate their pain and to get the attention, care and comfort they need. However upsetting it may be for you, it doesn't necessarily mean this is their intention. Whether people have deep wounds or slight injuries, the problem they present should always be taken very seriously. The size of the wound isn't a measure of the size of the conflict inside and for them self-harm is a coping mechanism.

How can I tell if a young person is self-harming?

This is very difficult as most self-harmers cope alone and there is no typical person who would self-harm. The majority of young people hide the evidence of their self-harm and go to great lengths to do so.

Below is a list of possible signs that someone is not coping, these are not necessarily signs that they are self-harming;

- Always keeping skin covered up
- Wanting to be alone
- Change in behaviour – aggressive, frustrated, distressed or anxious
- Breakdown in communication
- Hiding specific items
- Locked doors, draws
- Very secretive
- Change in eating or sleeping patterns

- Not wanting to go out and staying in all of a sudden
- Poor performance or results at school, truanting
- Loss of interest in favourite hobby or sports
- Wearing long sleeves, trousers in warm weather
- Sudden appearance of unexplained cuts, marks or bruising on their body

What should I do if I discover someone is self-harming?

- Try to be open-minded and non-judgemental
- Reassure them that it is okay to talk and that you are there for them
- Offer to help find professional aid - a GP or counsellor
- It is important not to take control as their self-harming behaviour may be their only way of being in control of something in their life
- It is important not to give ultimatums as this could encourage secretive self-harm and reinforce already negative thoughts and low self-esteem

Should I try to stop them from self-harming?

- No, if they feel the need to self-harm they will find a way
- Taking away their coping strategy may cause more harm
- Trust in your relationship could be undermined if you try to stop them self-harm

Things you can do to help

- T** talk to me
- L** listen to me
- C** cuddle me

- Notice that someone is self-harming
- Learn more about self-harm
- Make time to listen and give them time to talk - take them seriously
- Keep an open mind - do not judge or jump to conclusions
- Let them know that you are there for them
- Don't pressure them to stop or make them promise never to self-harm again, it may make them feel guilty if they do and also feel guilty for breaking their promise

- Some young people don't self-harm for long, others can self-harm for years. Try not to show your disappointment if they can't give up immediately or start again, it takes time
- Try not to become over-protective
- Encourage them to get professional help, offer to go with them or to help them refer onto projects such as The Butterfly Project or Phoenix Project
- If the person has self-harmed seek medical attention if required
- Carry on with ordinary activities you do together

Alternative ways to cope

Here are a few alternative coping strategies you can suggest;

- Writing a journal
- Counselling
- Writing poetry / song lyrics
- Going for a walk or a run
- Crying
- Watching TV
- Playing sport



- Punch a punch bag or pillow
- Calling a friend
- Being creative; painting or drawing
- Having a bath or a shower
- Meditating
- Reading a book or a magazine
- Breaking pencils
- Screaming

- Listening to music
- Write a letter expressing their feelings and then destroy it
- Scream into a pillow



- Talking to someone they trust
- Praying
- Playing a computer game
- Taking a short nap
- Other hobbies; play a musical instrument up

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- Writing negative thoughts down and then ripping them

Visit our website www.ncompassnorthwest.co.uk follow the link to the counselling service and you will find lots of useful information and resources. We also have a link to facebook and twitter which may be helpful.

Remember your feelings matter too!

- Look after yourself – make sure you get the support you need
- Remember - even those trained to work with people who self-harm need support, so it's ok if you do too
- Try to carry on with your other activities and relationships
- Try to view self-harm as a coping strategy

Support available for you;

The Young Minds Parents' Helpline offers free confidential online and telephone support, including information and advice, to any adult worried about the emotional problems, behaviour or mental health of a child or young person up to the age of 25.

*Call free on **0808 802 5544** -Monday to Friday 9.30am-4pm

Or

*Email parents@youngminds.org.uk

Quotes from service users

"I am getting less angry using the coping strategies"

"I never thought that counselling would have helped so much"

"Life's made of mountains but counselling helps with the small hills so they don't turn into mountains"

"I am starting to feel much more focused on my future and achieving my goals...step by step instead of being stuck in the past"

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For parents or carers Additions to your medicine cabinet

It is important that you do not try to set ultimatums about self-harm; the young person needs to feel supported. We believe that in order to show support, the best thing you can do is provide a first aid kit. This first aid kit will help them continue to self-harm but in a safe manner.

By providing a first aid kit, the young person will appreciate that you understand they need time to work things out at their own pace. It also puts your mind at rest, because you will know that you have provided sterile and safe equipment to prevent infection.



Cotton Wool Pads

Eye Wash



Steri-Strips



Antiseptic Cream



Adhesive Wound Dressings



Stretch Bandages

Antiseptic Wipes



It might be useful to have a contact card in the first aid kit listing important phone numbers, i.e. parents work/mobile number, hospital phone number, helpline phone numbers, counsellors phone number etc.

What we do



The Butterfly Project provides early intervention support to young women between the ages of 11-18 that are self-harming and who live in Fylde, Wyre and Lancaster Districts.



The Phoenix Project provides early intervention support to young men between the ages of 11-18 that are self-harming and who live in Fylde, Wyre and Lancaster Districts.

Once referred to the project we will meet initially with the young person to discuss their needs and agree the right support for them.

We offer up to 18 sessions of 1-1 counselling as a safe place where a young person can talk to a counsellor about anything that is upsetting them or causing them to self-harm. We help address those issues and emotions, preventing them from getting worse. The counsellors help to identify safer and healthier ways of coping with life and difficult emotions.

Counselling is a safe place where they can talk to someone who will listen carefully without judging and the young person can talk to someone in confidence about anything that is upsetting or causing them to hurt themselves. Each session lasts for 50 minutes.

Other young people in the projects have used that time to talk about things that have been stressing them out, or make decisions, to cry, or to revisit past painful events so that ultimately they can change how they are feeling for the better, to feel better about themselves and their situation.

If they decide they don't want involvement in the Butterfly or Phoenix Project following the initial chat, that's ok. They are welcome to contact us again in the future should they change their mind.

There are also group workshops, where they can meet other young people within the project who may have experienced similar feelings and explore them in a safe place. Each workshop has a different topic eg stress, anger, trust, confidence, happiness, and body image.

In addition after the initial meeting, the young person can come along to our monthly peer support drop-in? It is a friendly and inviting group where they can chill out and meet other young people in the projects.

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