



Supporting Young People to Take Charge of Their Mental Health

Self-Harm

What is self-harm?

Self-harm is when we choose to inflict pain on ourselves in some way. It is usually a sign that something is wrong, and can act as a 'release' for people when they are suffering emotionally. Self-harming behaviours include:

- self-injuring – cutting, burning, scratching, bruising and pulling hair out
- developing an eating disorder
- drinking or taking drugs excessively
- taking risks with sexual health and choice of sexual partners
- taking overdoses

What causes self-harming?

Self-harm is often found to be a symptom of other underlying issues. There are many reasons why people may choose to adopt self-harming behaviours:

- if we suffer from anxiety
- depression
- feeling unsupported in life
- being bullied
- as tension relief during stressful times or following a traumatic event
- to punish ourselves in some way
- as an expression of hidden emotions
- in severe cases, self-harming could be a suicide attempt

Self-harming can be misinterpreted by many as a 'cry for help' or attention-seeking, and whilst this could be true of some behaviours, often it is a deeply private act for many young people, and one which we might feel intense shame and embarrassment about. We may hide self-injury marks from others and hold a deep-seated fear of 'being found out'

Getting help

Self-harming has the potential to be very dangerous as some harming and injury behaviours, such as cutting, strangling and taking overdoses can lead to us killing ourselves, even if accidentally. We might actually view self-harming as a survival technique to help us when things get bad, and have no desire to end our lives through it, but accidental death can and does occur in these situations. Sometimes harming behaviours can overtake us too, so that we have little control over them in the end – things like eating disorders and excessive drink and drug abuse can put us in genuine physical peril and have huge health implications for our futures. This is

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Reading
Berkshire
RG1 7UD



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one of the reasons why it is so important to get help if we find ourselves in a pattern of self-harming.

Self-harming is only ever really a temporary release from what is at the root of our problems. Key to regaining our control and phasing out these dangerous acts is addressing the underlying problems that were causing us to harm in the first place. The first step on this path is to talk to someone we trust about what is going on with us – no one who cares for us wants to see us suffer and inflict pain inwards on ourselves in this way – they WILL want to help us. Try talking to a parent, friend, teacher, school nurse, or GP.

We may require further treatments, such as medical intervention depending on our injuries, or referral for talking treatments like CBT or counselling. In this case, we'd need to reach out to our GP, but remember that no one has to do this alone; a trusted adult in our life can help us make an appointment and attend it with us if the thought of doing so alone is too overwhelming, Do not suffer in silence – the cycle can be broken, and people who care about us WILL want to help.

How can No5 help?

Learning to effectively deal with the issues at the root of self-harming behaviours is important, as not dealt with it can cause longer-term issues and serious injury, so it is important to talk to somebody about it if things are becoming too much to handle. Here at No5 we offer free, impartial and confidential support to young people aged 11-25. Come and talk to us – counselling is about listening to, and helping YOU to work through your problems and find more effective ways of dealing with life's issues, in a caring, trusting environment.

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