

YOUNG PEOPLE AND SELF-HARM – A HELPFUL GUIDE

Self-harm is a term used when someone injures or harms themselves on purpose rather than by accident. Common examples include cutting or burning, pulling hair or picking skin, or self-strangulation. Self-harm is always a sign of something being wrong. Some young people use self-harm as a way of trying to deal with very difficult feelings that build up inside. This is clearly very serious and can be life threatening.

Young people say different things about why they do it:-

- Some say that they have been feeling desperate about a problem and don't know where to turn for help. They feel trapped and helpless. Self-injury helps them to feel **more in control**
- Some people talk of feelings of anger or tension that get bottled up inside, until they feel like exploding. Self-injury helps to **relieve the tension** that they feel
- Feelings of guilt or shame may also become unbearable. Self-harm is way of **punishing oneself**
- Some people try to cope with very upsetting experiences, such as trauma or abuse, by convincing themselves that the upsetting event(s) never happened. These people sometimes feel 'numb' or 'dead'. They say that they feel detached from the world and their bodies, and that self-injury is a way of **feeling more connected and alive**
- A proportion of young people who self-harm do so because they feel so upset and overwhelmed that they wish to end their lives by **committing suicide**. At the time, many people just want their problems to disappear, and have no idea how to get help. They feel as if the only way out is to kill themselves

It is often difficult for those who care for young people to understand self-harm, know what to do and say or know where to go to get extra help. The Mental Health Foundation have published a useful guide to help with the – 'The Truth about Self-Harm and you can download it [here](#).

There are also a number of useful web resources and contact numbers including:-

Young Minds – provide expert knowledge to professionals, parents and young people through their online resources, training and development, outreach work, publications and [Parents' Helpline](#) - **0808 802 5544**

Papyrus - offer support and resources to those caring for young people, family members, friends and workers as well as providing a free confidential helpline for young people, family members and workers – [HOPEline UK](#) - **0800 068 41 41**

Mental Health Foundation – develops and run research and delivery programmes across the UK offering straightforward and clear information on every aspect of mental health. They have a number of useful practice guides and other resources available to support individuals, carers and workers