

Understanding

Self-harming can take many forms, including cutting, burning, hitting, stopping wounds from healing and eating disorders. But this has to be viewed in context of more common forms of harming ourselves such as drinking, smoking, risky sexual behaviour and extreme/dangerous sports.

Working or living with someone who self-harms can be frustrating, confusing and very emotional. It is hard to come to terms with someone we love hurting themselves in this way.

People who self-harm are often not aware of the effect they have on those around them. Self-harming is about what is happening to them, rather than those who care about them. There are ways to help yourself and others cope when self-harm becomes a part of your life.

If you or someone else is experiencing self-harm - get help or offer help and try to contact:

- Community mental health worker
- School counsellor/guidance staff
- GP, health visitor or practice nurse
- Counselling service
- One of the national resources listed on this leaflet

Helplines and support

The Samaritans (24hours): 0845 790 9090

Breathing Space (6pm-2am): 0800 838587

Childline (24 hours): 0800 1111

Saneline (noon-2am): 0845 767 8000

Women's Aid (9am-4pm or 24 hours by phoning police/social work): 0870 241 3548

Young Minds (mental health advice - 9.30am-5.30pm): 020 7336 8445

National Self Harm Network (support and information): www.nshn.co.uk

Self-harm Alliance (support and info): www.selfharmalliance.org

Penumbra (support, information and projects): www.penumbra.org.uk

Argyll and Bute Choose Life Initiative
25 West King Street
Helensburgh G84 8UW
01436 658824

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SELF HARM

The Myths
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THE FACTS

chooselife

Shatter the silence

The Myths

- He's just cutting himself to get back at me - it's just manipulation
- She never seemed the type, she never gets in trouble
- He was just looking for attention
- She must be mentally ill
- I thought after we'd talked he would stop doing all that
- She must have been abused
- He seems to be coping fine, why would he self-harm?
- She was just pretending to kill herself
- If we take all the knives away, then he will be cured.
- She's a lost cause - we've been trying to help her for years

THE FACTS

Self-harm is often used as a coping or survival mechanism. It can often prevent suicide

Many different kinds of people self-harm - there is no 'type'

Some people who self-harm have been abused, but not all - some abuse may have been emotional

Level of injury does not always reflect the level of intent behind the action

Stressful events and feelings can build up and contribute to someone returning to self-harming behaviours

People can have a long history of self-harming, but can be helped

People who self-harm are at greater risk of suicide, but self-harming is not a suicide attempt

Why do people self-harm?

There are many complex and individual reasons why someone might self-harm - you won't know unless you talk to them. Some possible reasons might be:

- Relief from overwhelming anger or emotional pain
- Feeling in control of at least one part of their lives
- Low self-worth and feeling a need to be punished
- Escape from feelings of emptiness, despair or numbness
- Injury on the outside can make pain on the inside seem more real

How can you help?

- Be non-judgemental
- Acknowledge the person's distress
- Don't act shocked - this will put up a barrier between you
- Don't give ultimatums - like demanding the person stops self-harming immediately
- Treat the person with dignity
- Listen and give respect
- Don't make it about you
- Give time for trust to develop