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The Achieve and Learn Trust believes that nothing is more important than safeguarding the young people in our schools.

One of the mental health issues we have seen increase in schools during the past 5 years, is young people self harming. As parents it is difficult to find out that your child is deliberately hurting themselves. This bulletin gives advice on what to look for, how to engage in meaningful conversation with your child, and where you can get further help and advice.

What is Self Harm?

Self-harm is when someone hurts themselves on purpose to distract from or manage distressing or overwhelming feelings or experiences.

Someone who is self-harming may be dealing with lots of intense thoughts and feelings. Hurting themselves can feel like the only way to cope. Or they might feel numb and hurt themselves so they can feel something.

If your child is self-harming, or you're concerned they might be, it can be incredibly worrying. The important thing to remember is that lots of young people go through this and come out the other side with different ways of coping. You also need to remember that you're not alone.

Ways That Young People Self Harm

Some ways that young people self-harm include:

- cutting themselves or pricking the skin with sharp objects
- scratching skin with fingernails
- deliberately picking scabs
- burning skin
- biting skin
- hitting themselves
- banging their head or another part of their body on a wall
- pulling at their head and body hair



Signs that someone may be self-harming

- 1 Unexplained injuries that do not heal
- 2 Scars
- 3 Missing patches of hair
- 4 Wearing long-sleeved clothing on hot days
- 5 Decreased functioning at work
- 6 Challenges with relationships
- 7 Appearing overwhelmed or ambivalent
- 8 Being withdrawn
- 9 Low self-esteem

Reasons why Young People Self Harm

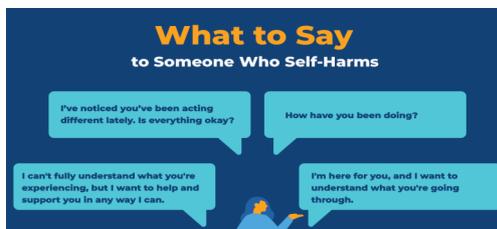
If a young person is self-harming, it's often a sign that something isn't quite right or has become too much to deal with.

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.



Self-harm is usually a way of trying to manage very difficult feelings. People often harm themselves when life feels hard to cope with - when distressing feelings have built up and become overwhelming. In the moment, physical pain

You might hear myths about self-harm, including that it's a 'phase', or attention-seeking. In fact, while it might feel hard to understand from the outside, self-harm can be a way for a young person to manage complex and overwhelming emotions:



What Can We Do?

When the urge to self-harm does build, it's useful for your child to have a list of other things they can do instead. This can help 'ride the wave' of intense feelings without self-harming.

Different things will work for different people. What helps usually depends on the feelings your child is trying to manage. If your child wants to feel soothed, they might want to wrap themselves up in a comfy space. If they want to burn off energy, doing something active can help. 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.

<p>Self-Soothing (Comforting yourself through your five senses)</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Something to touch (ex: stuffed animal, stress ball) 2. Something to hear (ex: music, meditation guides) 3. Something to see (ex: snowglobes, happy pictures) 4. Something to taste (ex: mints, tea, sour candy) 5. Something to smell (ex: lotion, candles, perfume) 	<p>Distraction (Taking your mind off the problem for a while)</p> <p>Examples: Puzzles, books, artwork, crafts, knitting, crocheting, sewing, crossword puzzles, sudoku, positive websites, music, movies, etc.</p>	<p>Opposite Action (Doing something the opposite of your impulse that's consistent with a more positive emotion)</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Affirmations and Inspiration (ex: looking at or drawing motivational statements or images) 2. Something funny or cheering (ex: funny movies / TV / books)
<p>Emotional Awareness (Tools for identifying and expressing your feelings)</p> <p>Examples: A list or chart of emotions, a journal, writing supplies, drawing / art supplies</p>	<p>Mindfulness (Tools for centering and grounding yourself in the present moment)</p> <p>Examples: Meditation or relaxation recordings, grounding objects (like a rock or paperweight), yoga mat, breathing exercises.</p>	<p>Crisis Plan (Contact info of supports and resources, for when coping skills aren't enough.)</p> <div style="border: 1px solid black; padding: 5px; text-align: center;"> <p>Family / Friends Therapist Psychiatrist Hotline Crisis Team / ER 911</p> </div>

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



Harm Reduction Principles

Harm Reduction for Self-Harm

- Self-harm is a coping strategy, even if it's a maladaptive one
- Adaptive coping strategies take time to build; in the meantime, harm reduction can reduce the damage done

mentalhealthathome.org

Other Sources of Support

THE MIX

24/7 Mental Health Support
<https://www.themix.org.uk/get-support/group-chat>
Text 85258

shout

85258

Text Shout for Mental Health Support

kooth

You can live chat or message.
<https://www.kooth.com/one-to-one-support>



ChildLine

0800 1111

<https://www.childline.org.uk/get-support/contacting-childline/>
Webpage for under 12s which includes telephone numbers and a link to chat online.
<https://www.childline.org.uk/kids/>



PAPYRUS

PREVENTION OF YOUNG SUICIDE

If you are under 35 and struggling with suicidal feelings or concerned about a young person.
You can also Text on 07786 209 697 or email at pat@papyrus-uk.org

0800 068 4141

C A M H S

Child and Adolescent Mental Health Services

24-hour daily mental health response line in a mental health crisis.
0800 953 9599



CALM HARM

An app that helps manage the urges to self-injure/ self-harm