

Self-Harm

Self-harm is when you hurt yourself as a way of dealing with very difficult feelings, painful memories or overwhelming situations and experiences.

Some people have described self-harm as a way to:

- express something that is hard to put into words
- turn invisible thoughts or feelings into something visible
- change emotional pain into physical pain
- reduce overwhelming emotional feelings or thoughts
- have a sense of being in control
- escape traumatic memories
- have something in life that they can rely on
- punish themselves for their feelings and experiences
- stop feeling numb, disconnected or dissociated
- create a reason to physically care for themselves
- express suicidal feelings and thoughts without taking their own life

Understanding your patterns of self-harm

Understanding your patterns of self-harm can help you to work out what gives you the urge to self-harm, and recognise when the urge is coming on. Remember, even when you are unable to resist the urge to self-harm, it is helpful to reflect afterwards on what happened. This will enable you to better understand the next time you have similar Feelings.

Try breaking down your experience into the following:

Learn to recognise triggers

'Triggers' are what give you the urge to hurt yourself. They can be people, situations, anniversaries, sensations, specific thoughts or feelings.

Practice noting down what was happening just before you self-harmed:

- Did you have particular thoughts?
- Did a situation, person or object remind you of something difficult?

Become aware of the urge to self-harm

Urges can include physical sensations like:

- racing heart or feelings of heaviness
- strong emotions like sadness or anger
- a disconnection from yourself or a loss of sensation
- repetitive thoughts about harming yourself, or how you might harm yourself
- unhealthy decisions, like working too hard to avoid feelings.

Recognising your urges helps you take steps towards reducing or stopping self-harm. Try writing down what you notice about your urges, to help you spot them more quickly each time they come.

Identify distractions

Distracting yourself from the urge to self-harm is a way of giving yourself more breathing

space and reducing the intensity of the urge.

It can be done when you feel the urge, or as soon as you become aware that you are hurting yourself.

Keep a diary

One way to help yourself understand your self-harming behaviour is to keep a diary of what happens before, during and after each time you self-harm. It is helpful to do this over a period of time (like a month) so you can start to see patterns.

This can be quite an intense experience and can bring up difficult feelings. If you feel confident to try this on your own, make sure you do something relaxing or enjoyable afterwards.

If you find doing this distressing, you may want to ask for support from someone you Trust.

Distracting yourself from the urge to self-harm

The main way people help themselves when they want to self-harm is through distraction.

Different distractions work for different people, and the same distraction won't necessarily work for you every time. For example, distracting yourself from anger feels very different to distracting yourself from fear, so it's important that you have a few different strategies to choose from.

The following are suggestions.

If you're feeling anger and frustration, here are some distractions you could try:

- exercise
- hit cushions
- shout and dance
- shake
- tear something up into hundreds of pieces
- go for a run.

Expressing your anger physically, or by doing things like shouting, won't work for everyone and could intensify feelings. Try things out and continue with any that have a positive effect.

If you're feeling sadness and fear here are some distractions you could try:

- wrap a blanket around you
- spend time with an animal
- walk in nature
- let yourself cry or sleep
- listen to soothing music
- tell someone how you feel
- massage your hands
- lie in a comfortable position and breathe in – then breathe out slowly, making your out-breath longer than your in-breath. Repeat until you feel more relaxed.

If you're feeling a need to control, here are some distractions you could try:

- write lists
- tidy up
- declutter
- write a letter saying everything you are feeling, then tear it up
- weed a garden

- clench then relax all your muscles.

If you're feeling numb and disconnected, here are some distractions you could try:

- flick elastic bands on your wrists
- hold ice cubes
- smell something with strong odour
- have a very cold shower.

If you're feeling shame, here are some distractions you could try:

- stop spending time with anyone who treats you unkindly
- recognise when you are trying to be perfect and accept that making mistakes is part of being human
- remind yourself that there are reasons for how you behave – it is not because you are 'bad'.

If you're feeling self-hatred and wanting to punish yourself, here are some distractions you could try:

- write a letter from the part of you that feels the self-hatred, then write back with as much compassion and acceptance as you can
- find creative ways to express the self-hatred, through writing songs or poetry, drawing, movement or singing
- do physical exercise (like running or going to the gym) to express the anger that is turned in on yourself.

Ways people self-harm can include:

- cutting yourself
- poisoning yourself
- overeating or under-eating
- exercising excessively
- biting yourself
- picking or scratching at your skin
- burning your skin
- inserting objects into your body
- hitting yourself or walls
- misusing alcohol, prescription and recreational drugs
- pulling your hair
- having unsafe sex
- getting into fights where you know you will get hurt.

The following questions can help you begin the process of understanding your self-harm:

- How do you feel before and after you hurt yourself?
- What was the reason you started to hurt yourself?
- What does self-harm give you now?
- What are the situations where you are most likely to want to hurt yourself?
- What are your fears about living without self-harm?
- What would you miss about self-harm?
- What else would be useful to understand about your self-harm?

Self Harm Safety Plan

Know When to Get Help

What are the warning signs that you are beginning to struggle with your problem? These can include thoughts, feelings, or behaviours.

- 1.)
- 2.)
- 3.)
- 4.)
- 5.)

Places, situations or people to avoid

- 1.)
- 2.)
- 3.)
- 4.)
- 5.)

Getting through the moment with things that help me feel safe and calm:

I can make my environment safe by

- 1.)
- 2.)
- 3.)
- 4.)
- 5.)

Use Coping Skills

What can you do, by yourself, to take your mind off the problem? What obstacles might there be to using these coping skills?

- 1.)
- 2.)
- 3.)
- 4.)
- 5.)

Replacement behaviours: If you need a physical release, what things can you try?

For example: you can try snapping a rubber band against your skin, holding a piece of ice, or taking a short, cold shower.

- 1.)
- 2.)
- 3.)
- 4.)
- 5.)

Reach Out to Social Support

If you are struggling to handle your problem alone, contact trusted family members or friends.

- 1.)
- 2.)
- 3.)