

Further reading

About self-harm (for young people, 13 years +)
(Mind and Barnardo's 2008)

Healing the hurt within – Understanding self-injury and self-harm, and heal the emotional wounds. Jan Sutton (2009)

Useful organisations / websites



mind.org.uk
selfharm.co.uk
nshn.co.uk
youngminds.org.uk
barnardos.org.uk
nspcc.org.uk
childline.org.uk
samaritans.org
nhsdirect.nhs.uk



North Staffs Mind
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Stoke-on-Trent
ST1 5HN

T 01782 262100
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W www.nsmind.org.uk

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A Parents Guide to... Self Harm



The Younger Mind 'Jigsaw' was
designed by pupils of St Edwards
Junior High School, Leek.



We're Mind, the mental health
charity. We're here to make
sure anyone with a mental
health problem has somewhere
to turn for advice and
support.



What is Self harm?

Self harm is a broad term to describe a coping mechanism that is used by some. self harm is more accurately described as self injury and can take many forms, for example, cutting the skin or pulling hair out by its roots.

It's a way to deal with extreme emotional distress, a way to survive. Self harm, on the whole, is an attempt to cope with stresses in life and is not suicidal behaviour in itself.

It can also be an attempt to communicate the pain the person is feeling inside. Often self harm is kept hidden and private. Self harm is a sign of mental distress – whether that has a name like depression, anxiety or not.

Recent studies (2011) show that 1 in 10 young people self harm, it may be helpful for you and your child to know that you are not alone.

Often people don't know why they self harm. It's a means of communication what can't be put in to words or even in to thoughts and has been described as an inner scream. Afterwards people feel better and able to cope with life again for a while.

If someone you love and care about is self harming, you may feel helpless, frightened and shocked. However, what you do or don't do can make a lot of difference.

As a parent/carer/guardian:

- ◆ Do not panic and over-react.
- ◆ Do not dismiss it as 'attention seeking'.
- ◆ Do not condemn, criticise or get angry.
- ◆ Do not just focus on the injuries; it's important that you appreciate how much emotional pain your child is in.
- ◆ Do not force your child to talk about it as you may make the situation and your relationship more fraught.
- ◆ Do not interrupt or argue against what your child is saying, no matter how hard it is.
- ◆ Do not blame your child; make them feel guilty or ashamed.
- ◆ Do not expect change to happen quickly.
- ◆ Do not expect your child to stop self harming, just because you want them to.
- ◆ Do not make assumptions.



What will help your child?

- ◆ Do try to stay calm, even if this is difficult to do.
- ◆ Do give your child the time and space to explore their feelings.
- ◆ Do ask your child what you can do to help them. They may not know the answer straight away.
- ◆ Do make it clear that you are ready to talk whenever they are.
- ◆ Do understand that they may want to talk about it to someone else. What's important is that they are talking to someone.
- ◆ Do acknowledge that your child is struggling emotionally.
- ◆ Do acknowledge that self harm is a result of underlying emotional distress, which will need to be addressed before the need to self harm will reduce or stop.
- ◆ Do find support for yourself to help you deal with your feelings, as finding out your child is self harming is scary, you are human after all.
- ◆ Do offer your child the opportunity to talk to someone else in confidence, if they are in agreement, this could be a counsellor.

