

WORKING WITH YOUNG PEOPLE WHO SELF HARM:



**DEALING WITH
THE HARM, ENGAGING
WITH THE SELF**

This resource pack has been developed by MAP as part of a project funded by Norwich Clinical Commissioning Group designed to better equip professionals working with young people who self-harm to meet their needs.

There are searching questions that we can and perhaps should ask about the apparent increase in self-harming behaviour among young people in our communities. Meantime they need us to work as effectively as possible with them. This booklet aims to provide a practical summary of the key elements in understanding and working with young people who self-harm.

Adolescence and young adulthood bring intense bodily changes, including brain development, that can make a young person feel 'out of control' at the best of times. There are also many other internal and external pressures and challenges that can provide a fertile ground for self-harming behaviour. A brief search of our own memories can be helpful to remind us what life can be like for young people at this time!

What makes people start self-harming?

- The thing that triggers someone to self-harm for the first time will be different for everyone.
- Though harming is a method of coping with difficult emotions, there will be many more young people who experience the same emotions and do not hurt themselves.
- Approximately half of all teenagers who harm themselves once will never do it again.

What is self-harm?

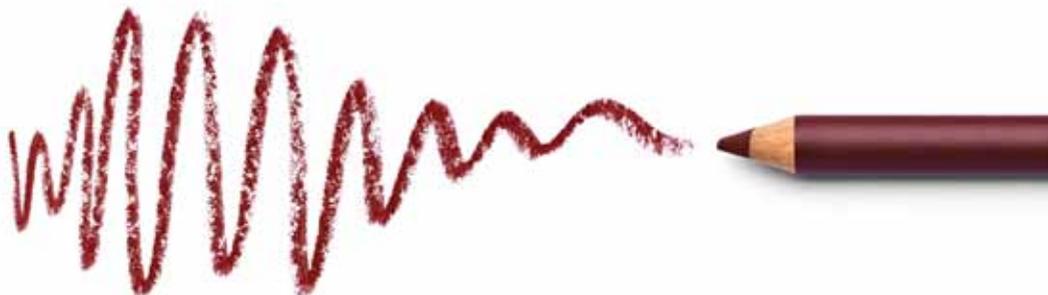
National Institute for Health and Care Excellence (NICE) guidelines 2004

Self-harm is an expression of personal distress, usually made in private, by an individual who hurts him/herself. The reason a person harms him/herself may be different on each occasion and should not be presumed to be the same.

NICE guidelines 2004

Self-harm includes;-

- Self-Injury - cutting, stabbing, jumping from heights etc..
- Self-Poisoning - overdosing, ingesting poison.
- The spectrum includes smoking, tattooing, alcohol and drugs, food restriction, over-eating, promiscuity and other risk taking behaviour.



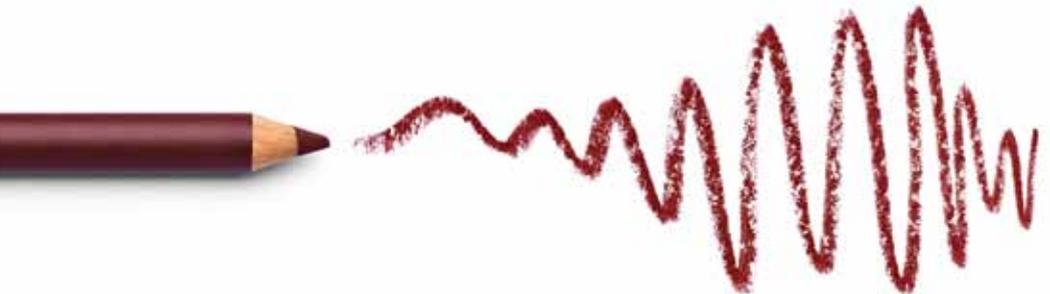
When are young people likely to self-harm?

At times of high stress and pressure e.g. exam periods	Situations that leave a young person feeling upset, rejected, powerless, anxious, angry or as if they have failed e.g. getting a badly graded piece of work back	When they feel they need to get away from a situation or person/people
Difficulties in relationships with friends, partners and family such as arguments or break-ups	Difficult times in the year such as the anniversary of the death of a loved one	When they feel unable to communicate and express their emotions
After a traumatic event – a bereavement, family breakdown, sudden drastic change	If they are being bullied	Remembering the past
If they are subject to or see domestic violence	When people talk about their problems	Feeling emotionally and physically tired
To minimise experiencing difficult feelings for a few minutes	Being under the influence of drugs and/or alcohol	Listening to sad songs/watching sad films
When they are alone	When they are bored	Thinking about the future

Why do people self-harm?

The following is offered as a summary of the range of reasons why people self-harm. But it is also vital to listen to each individual's story without making assumptions – perhaps it's different for them.

Communication - young people may not have the resources of life experience to express their feelings in any other way – helps them manage moods	Cleansing – those who have been abused may use self-harm to symbolically cleanse themselves
Anger and frustration – people can feel that expressing anger is wrong and therefore choose self-harm to release their anger	Dissociation – an extreme 'grounding' technique – re-focuses on the present; makes them feel alive. OR to cause numbness providing a time of peace and calm
Caring – some people lack human contact and after self-injury, it can feel nice to be looked after	Coping - self-harm can become someone's coping strategy to deal with life's difficulties; to feel in control; to survive
To feel better - self-harm can be extremely addictive as endorphins are released into the body.	Chastisement – self-blame/hate, shame, perceived wrongs, criticism– feel they deserve it



'Hear Me'

Selfharm.co.uk made a film called 'Hear Me' in 2006. It recorded young people's thoughts and feelings about their self-harm through pieces of art they had created in an art therapy workshop. They were asked to try and explain why they self-harm and here are some of their comments:

"We are trying to keep ourselves alive"

"It becomes an addiction"

"I concentrate on the pain to forget other things"

"To express anger"

"Control"

"Routine"

"Relief"

"Punishing myself"

"I feel depressed before I cut"

"To prove I'm alive"

"Blame"

"Low self-worth"

"Ritual"



How can we help?

It is completely understandable for us to want a self-harmer to stop harming. However, we can't *make* them do that. We *can* empower them to find their own path to recovery, enabling and assisting them to access whatever support and services they may need, each of us working within our own professional boundaries and organisational guidelines.

What young people say they want...

A non-judgemental outlet for exploring and sharing pain	To feel supported	To be listened to and understood
To remain in control of how to express pain	To be/feel respected	To feel whole (not just seen as a self-harmer)
To be spoken with honestly	To be given practical advice on wound care	To be able to tap in and out of support services
Help to feel good about themselves	Focus to not always be on self-harm	Laugh and have fun
Consistency from the service provider	To work at their own pace	



Dealing with disclosures

What professionals can do short-term...

Explain boundaries of confidentiality- never make promises	Active Listening - encourage them to explore their underlying emotions	Don't be judgmental - convey respect for their survival efforts
Expand their coping portfolio - help them find alternative coping strategies	Show concern for their injuries - offer first aid treatment from someone qualified	Educate the young person about their body - (See 'Staying Safe' section on selfharm.co.uk)
Never ask them to stop!!! This will increase their anxieties and feelings of guilt.	Be supportive - the young person needs to take responsibility for themselves - they are in control!	Record disclosures appropriately



The following harm-reduction strategies should be offered lightly, as possible options that have been found to be helpful and never as a menu of alternatives from which the young person must choose...

Harm-reduction methods

For young people...

If possible, speak to someone you trust	Drawing on the skin with red ink/paint	Call a friend or family member
Squeeze an ice cube in the hand until it melts	The 5 min rule - delaying the self-harm	Use a stress ball
Hit a pillow or cushion	Play/make relaxing music	Write down how you feel
Scribble/Doodle/Draw/Paint	Rip up paper	Eat strong flavoured food
Flick/snap an elastic band or hair bobble on your wrist	Go for a walk	Go for a run
Play sport	Arrange to see friends	Make a loud noise (without damage)
Do something fun and/or creative	Get some good sleep	Use relaxation techniques - breathing exercises
Have a cold shower	Ring Childline 0800 11 11	Ring the Samaritans 08457 90 90 90

Final thought.

Self-Harm is only a part of the person not the whole of them.

It's important for the young person to leave you feeling you don't just see them as a self-harmer. This may include:-

- Asking them about other aspects of their life.
- Changing the subject before they leave

Support for You

Seek help or advice from other professionals, reliable websites, books and dvds.

Work collaboratively with the young person at all times! Your relationship with them, whether it involves interacting for 5 minutes, 5 months or 5 years, is important.

Resources and Contacts

Websites

Useful for professionals and for signposting young people to.

www.selfharm.co.uk - information and support

<http://alumina.selfharm.co.uk/>
- Alumina is an online course started by selfharm.co.uk for young people aged between 14 & 18.

www.ormiston.org/point1 - for Tier 2 counselling referrals and professional consultations

www.map.uk.net - provider of Point 1 counselling, consultations and training on working with self-harm
www.map.uk.net/pages/self-harm/

www.youngminds.org.uk
- leaflets, information and support

www.mind.org.uk - leaflets, information and support

www.nhs.uk - information

www.readytochange.org - Norfolk Well-being Service

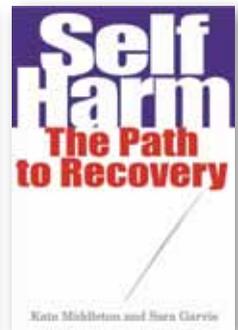
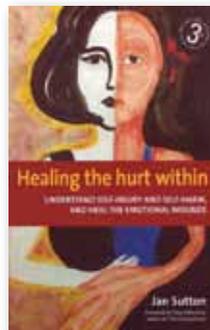
Dvd

'Talking about: Self-Harm - helping young people talk about things that matter' by selfharm.co.uk and schoolwork.co.uk. See the selfharm.co.uk website

Books

'Stopping the pain - a workbook for teens who cut and self-injure' by Lawrence E. Shapiro, PH.D. (2008) - **This book should be used by a trained counsellor on a 1-2-1 basis**

Useful books



MAP in Norwich

MAP, The Risebrow Centre, Chantry Road, Norwich Norfolk,
NR2 1RF
01603 766994

MAP in Great Yarmouth

MAP, 52a Deneside, Great Yarmouth, Norfolk, NR30 2HL
01493 854839

MAP in West Norfolk

MAP, Youth and Community Centre, Providence Street, King's Lynn,
Norfolk, PE30 5ET
01553 766086

www.map.uk.net

 [mapyoungpeople](https://twitter.com/mapyoungpeople)  [MAPyoungpeople](https://www.facebook.com/MAPyoungpeople)



**DEALING WITH
THE HARM, ENGAGING
WITH THE SELF**

