



national
self harm
awareness day
2024

SELF HARM FACTSHEET

WHAT IS SELF HARM?

Self harm is anything that someone does intentionally to cause physical harm or injury to themselves. Behaviours can range from cutting to burning, hair pulling, self hitting, scratching, overdosing, or swallowing something dangerous. This is not an exhaustive list.

WHY DO PEOPLE SELF HARM?

Self harm is a coping mechanism that people use to help manage their emotions in times of distress. Typical causes of emotional distress include bullying, work or school pressures, family arguments, relationship problems, money worries, low self-esteem, stress, anxiety or depression, confusion over sexual or gender identity, grief after bereavement or loss, experiences of abuse, being in contact with the criminal justice system, eating disorders, or substance misuse problems. There is no 'one reason' why people self harm.

WHO SELF HARMS?

It is difficult to know the true scale of self harm because it is often a behaviour that is hidden. From what we know, self harm is most common in young people (particularly young women), but it can and does impact people from all walks of life. It can affect people of any age, gender, or ethnicity.

WHAT SELF HARM IS AND ISN'T

Self harm is not attention seeking, attempted suicide, a 'cry for help', just a fad or trend, or done because people enjoy the pain. It is a behaviour

that people use as a way of managing emotional distress in the absence of having another effective coping strategy that works for them. It is something that, with the right help and support, people can recover through as and when they are ready.

WHAT IS THE RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN SELF HARM AND SUICIDE?

The relationship between self harm and suicide is extremely complicated and individual. Most people who self harm will not go on to attempt to take their own life. We do know, however, that self harm is a unique risk factor for suicide, so providing help and support is crucial.

WHAT CAN BE DONE ABOUT SELF HARM?

Recovery through self harm is possible. The first step is usually speaking to someone who can provide support, such as a friend or a relative. Alternatively, a GP or another professional might refer you to a counsellor, psychologist, therapist, psychiatrist or mental health team. Organisations like Harmless and The Samaritans can also help.

It can be hard to reach out for support, but speaking to someone about your difficulties does not mean you are 'crazy' or 'mentally ill'. It just means you perhaps need a bit of help to get by at the moment and figure out how to cope differently with your emotions and experiences (over time). Remember that you don't have to be alone. There is help and support available, and you deserve it. With the right help and support, you can find a path to understanding and recovery.



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