



Information Sheet: Self-harm

What is self-harm?

Self-harm is a deliberate act that causes physical injury or pain to a person's own body. Common forms of self-harm include cutting, burning, scratching, hair pulling, head banging, biting or hitting oneself. Self neglect or putting oneself in a dangerous situation are also forms of self-harm, as are substance abuse, sex addiction, eating disorders or overdosing.

Self-harm is not generally attention-seeking behaviour, as it is often carried out secretly and injuries are hidden under clothing or jewellery - out of shame, embarrassment or fear. Some people do tell others about their self-harming behaviour as the only way of letting others know about their distress. Self-harm is not generally an attempt at suicide, but rather an attempt to ease the emotional pain the person is experiencing. In extreme cases, however, accidental suicide may result. People who self-harm can find it very difficult to stop as their behaviour is often a coping mechanism; they would need to find alternative ways of coping in order to stop.

Why do people self-harm?

Self-harm affects people from all walks of life. There can be many reasons why people self-harm, including sexual abuse, bullying, family breakdown, poor relationships, stress, financial worries and low self-esteem. It can help release feelings such as tension, anger and frustration and it can help a person to regain a sense of control. It can also be used as a form of self-punishment. Some people struggle to communicate with others and use self-harming behaviours as a way of communicating their feelings of distress. Other people use self-harm to try to keep their feelings secret, believing they may not be heard or understood.

How you can help yourself:

There are lots of things that people do to distract themselves from self-harming. Here are some ideas.

- Exercise, e.g. running, swimming, cycling
- Playing with a stress ball
- Writing journals, letters, stories etc.
- Drawing on yourself or paper with a red pen
- Squeezing ice cubes
- Relaxing
- Cuddling a pillow
- Cleaning or gardening
- Shredding paper
- Phoning a friend
- Yoga, meditation
- Contacting Childline on 0800 1111
- Punching a pillow
- Popping bubble wrap
- Drawing, painting, knitting or sewing
- Snapping an elastic band on your wrist
- Having a bath or a shower
- Getting plenty of rest
- Writing a 'to do' list
- Reading
- Watching television or listening to music
- Being with other people
- Talking about problems with someone close

How CCL can help:

We offer brief counselling for self-harm (six sessions) to people, aged 16 and over, living in Ryedale and, where appropriate, in Scarborough. You can be referred by your doctor or any other NHS worker, e.g. a Primary Care Mental Health Worker.

Other sources of information:

www.mind.org.uk or www.rcpsych.ac.uk (type 'self-harm' in the search boxes). 'Self-Harm: the path to recovery.' by Kate Middleton and Sara Garvie.