

# SELF-HARM

TALK TO US

OFF  
THE RECORD

## WHAT IS SELF-HARM?

Self-harm or self-injury is when someone hurts themselves intentionally as a means of expressing, releasing or coping with intense feelings. The reason people self-harm is often complex, very personal and often feel deeply private. It may be a matter of pushing emotional pain into a physical outlet. It may be a way of expressing hidden feelings. It is important to know that sometimes self-harming is a survival technique, a way of releasing or controlling emotions that may otherwise leave someone feeling worse.

*The hurt makes things seem a lot better*

## WHAT YOU MIGHT EXPERIENCE

Self-harming can take on many forms, not just cutting but also scratching, bruising, burning, scalding, inserting objects into the body, pulling hair out (trichotillomania) or taking an overdose. If you are self-harming then you might have hurt yourself a few times, or you might be self-harming on a regular basis. You might find you have done the following:

- Self-inflicted cuts, scratches, bruises or other wounds
- Wearing long sleeves or long pants, even in hot weather to hide wounds
- Claiming to have frequent accidents or mishaps
- Spending a great deal of time alone
- Carving words or symbols on the skin

## CAUSES

The reason people self-harm are often complex, however, some things make people more likely to self-harm:

- Physical illness
- Experiences dating back to childhood
- Unemployment
- Bereavement
- Family problems
- Other life-changing events

## WAYS TO LOOK AFTER YOURSELF

By self-harming it can feel like your feelings are more manageable for a while, making it hard to give up self-harming behaviours, but the release or the escape is only short term. It can be hard to give up self-harming behaviours however you can find other ways to cope with difficult feelings.

- Identify where the distress and painful feelings are coming which are triggering the urge to self-harm. Write down what you noticed about how you were feeling and what might have triggered you.
- Create a list of things to do which can replace self-harming; think about what outlets you have to express frustration, sadness, numbness or a need for control. Some ideas below:  
**If you're feeling frustrated:** hit a pillow / throw the pillow on the ground, tear scrap paper up into pieces, dance, exercise, sing out loud  
**If you're feeling numb:** Smell your favourite scents, flick elastic bands on your wrist  
**If you're feeling the need for control:** tidy up, clean your room, make lists, try guided stretching exercises.
- Take your focus away from thinking about harming yourself by distracting yourself with tasks or things like phone games, fidget spinner, counting your breath.
- You can ask for support from your school nurse and GP.
- Download the Calm Harm app for ideas to help resist or manage urge to self-harm.
- If you're feeling overwhelmed with emotions and need someone to talk to, you can get in touch with 24/7 support services such as Samaritans (116 123) and Childline (0800 1111).