



Alderbrook School Pastoral Team

Wellbeing Guidance for Parents and Students

Support for Students who Self Harm



Advice For Students

What is Self-harm?

- Self-harm is when you hurt yourself on purpose. You usually do it because something else feels wrong. It seems like the only way to let those feelings out, but often self-harming brings only temporary relief. There are other healthy ways you can cope
- The organisation Young Minds says this is a very common behaviour in young people and affects around one in 12 people, with 10% of 15-16 year olds self-harming

Why do I feel like I need to do this?

- If you self-harm, it is usually as a result of another problem. It can happen if you are feeling overwhelmed, anxious, depressed, stressed, bullied there are many other reasons too. You feel there's no other way of dealing with how you are feeling in that moment in time
- Sometimes it feels like no-one understands why you self-harm, but lots more people today know about what the condition really means

What should I do if I have harmed myself?

- Tell someone. You may have caused damage to your body and that needs to be treated in case it gets worse or affects something else: get basic first aid. Wounds can easily become septic and bruises can be a sign of internal injury. Any form of medication or substance you inhale or swallow can cause serious trauma to internal organs that you cannot necessarily see or feel immediately. Seek advice from a nurse/doctor or pharmacist. They will help you to treat any physical damage and can help to signpost you discreetly to other support
- You may be concealing scars which need treatment so they do not look obvious in future

What will happen if I tell someone?

- Choose someone who will listen to you and help you to access support. School staff will simply be concerned for your safety and your health. We will not judge you or be angry
- Staff at school can also talk calmly to your parent/carer for you if you want. We can explain to them how you are feeling and what you need help with to manage your feelings

What can I do to help myself stop?

1 COMMUNICATION Just talk to someone you trust: a parent/relative, pastoral manager, form tutor, teacher or youth worker, school nurse or GP. Self-harm can be a sign that you need help and they can refer you to the right people for therapy that will work for you

2 DISTRACTION Exercise, use a punch bag, pop bubble wrap, rip up paper, squeeze a stress ball, dance, stamp your feet, go for a walk/drive/ride/run, throw socks against the wall, count, do something creative like writing in a journal, art, knitting, make a compilation of favourite music

3 COMFORT Listen music that soothes you, a podcast or something funny, use an app like Calm Harm, breathe in for 5 and out for 9, cry, sleep, have a bath, stroke an animal, eat/drink something that tastes good or feels nice, find a scent that is calming for you like a perfume or essential oil

4 DISPLACEMENT Draw on yourself, snap an elastic band on your hand, put plasters or bandages on where you self harm, squeeze an ice cube, chew something, have a hot/cold shower and exfoliate, bite a chilli, use fake tattoos/face mask and peel it off, use makeup

5 FUN/INSPIRATION Call/meet a friend, look at the sky, watch a candle, meditate, look at art or an object very closely, watch fish/birds, do yoga, play with a slinky, colour in, go on a virtual safari.

Advice for Parents

Why do young people self harm?

It might help them cope with negative feelings and difficult experiences, to feel more in control, or to punish themselves. It can be a way of relieving overwhelming feelings that build up inside. The young person might be experiencing issues with anxiety, depression, low self-esteem, poor body image, gender identity, sexuality, abuse, school, bullying, social media pressure, family or friendship troubles and bereavement. Self-harming can become a habit that is hard to stop.

How can I tell if my child might be self-harming?

Be wary if you notice any of the following signs: unexplained cuts, burns, bite-marks, bruises or bald patches, keeping themselves covered/won't allow you to see parts of their body, avoiding swimming or changing clothes around others, bloody tissues in waste bins, being withdrawn or isolated from friends and family, low mood, lack of interest in life, depression or outbursts of anger, blaming themselves for problems or expressing feelings of failure, uselessness, or hopelessness.

What should I do if my child self harms?

1 **STAY CALM AND TREAT INJURIES** Avoid asking your child lots of questions all at once and avoid 'policing' them because this can increase their risk of self-harming. Don't ask why immediately. Start a general conversation and say "I noticed you seem to have some cuts/burns (etc) on your body that look sore. You don't have to show me but if you do we can check if they need treatment". If they refuse, say it's ok, give them medical advice and explain gently who you will need to tell* and say they can come back to you to talk. Reduce risks by removing objects being used for self-harm. Ensure that their injuries are clean and treated so that they are not infected or creating further medical issues. Above all, show them that you want to listen to them.

2 **COMMUNICATE** Maintain open communication with your child - they may feel ashamed and find it difficult to talk about. Avoid a confrontation. Keep boundaries and a sense of normality to help your child feel secure and emotionally stable. If you feel confident to raise this, you can ask the whether removing whatever they are using to self-harm is likely to cause them use something less hygienic to self-harm with, or whether it reduces temptation.

3 **SEEK HELP** *Please do inform us at school via your child's Pastoral Manager, Head of Year or the school Designated Safeguarding Lead via the school office address – we can help you and your child by signposting you, suggesting strategies and giving you access to people who can help further. Your child may need a risk assessment from a qualified mental health professional. Talk to your GP and explore whether your child can be referred to your local Child and Adolescent Mental Health Services (CAMHS/Solar). You can also help a child self-refer to Solar. Seek support for yourself – you may feel guilt, shame, anger, sadness, frustration or despair, but it's not your fault.

How do I support my child through this?

- Create structure and routine, particularly around eating and sleep
- Point out what is safe and encourage discussion, keeping in mind their developmental level
- Provide a non-judgemental perspective and remember that a child or young person who is anxious will focus on the negative information more than the positive
- Help set limits and encourage them to try alternative activities, listen to an app such as Calm Harm that will provide professional advice and strategies, show them online resources that will help them communicate with someone else independently via a helpline and empower themselves by absorbing constructive professional advice.

External sources of help and advice about self-harm

Websites with advice about self-harm:

<https://www.selfharm.co.uk/>

<https://www.supportline.org.uk/problems/self-injury-and-self-harm/> 01708765200 info@supportline.org.uk

Counselling support:

Kooth <https://www.kooth.com> online counselling for young people every day

Solar <https://www.bsmhft.nhs.uk/our-services/solar-youth-services/> call 0121 301 2730

Pause <https://www.forwardthinkingbirmingham.org.uk/services/13-pause> call 0300 300 0099

Apps to help avoid self-harm:

Apps that can help are: <https://www.nhs.uk/apps-library/blueice/> and <https://www.nhs.uk/apps-library/distract/>

The following apps are produced by the teenage mental health charity Stem4:

<https://calmharm.co.uk/> helps to comfort and distract if someone feels an urge to self harm

<https://www.clearfear.co.uk/> helps young people to manage anxiety

<https://combinedminds.co.uk/> uses a Strengths Based Approach to help others have a positive influence on a young person who is struggling

Magazine with articles that regularly cover self-harm/anxiety issues:

Teen Breathe is a magazine aimed at young people that is full of practical advice about managing emotions and how to practice mindfulness, available locally in WH Smith, Waitrose or subscribe online via <https://www.teenbreathe.co.uk>

Some of the best general resources regarding health of young people:

Health For Teens <https://www.healthforteens.co.uk>

Mental Health advice <https://www.rcpsych.ac.uk/mental-health/parents-and-young-people>

The Mix <https://www.themix.org.uk>