



Self Harm Awareness

What is self harm?

The deliberate act of inflicting pain or damage to your own body. Self-harm can include cutting, burning, and other forms of injury. Self-harm can also be consuming toxic amounts of alcohol or drugs or participating in unsafe sex.

Self-harm is not the same as suicide, nor is it a mental illness. It is a behavior that indicates a lack of coping skills. Self-harm is often rooted in early childhood trauma like physical, verbal, or sexual abuse. Self-harm is a symptom of emotional distress that should be taken seriously.

Who self-harms?

Self-harm is most common in teenagers and young adults though it can occur later in life. Those at most risk are people who have experienced trauma, neglect, or abuse.

Many people who self-harm do so to distract from trauma, seek release from mental anguish, or regain a sense of control. Self-harm may offer a temporary release but does not address the root of the problems or anguish.

<https://www.psychologytoday.com/intl/basics/self-harm>

<https://www.nami.org/Learn-More/Mental-Health-Conditions/Related-Conditions/Self-harm>

What To Do When Someone Self-Harms

Warning signs to look for:

- Frequent bruises or bandages
- Long sleeves or pants even in hot weather
(may be trying to hide injuries or scarring)

Self-harm may be behavior that might be part of a larger condition and there may be additional signs of emotional distress. They may make statements that sound hopeless or worthless, have poor impulse control, or have difficulty getting along with others.

The UK's National Health Service offers the **SLEEP approach:**

S: *Stop and make time to talk*

- DO NOT try and have a rushed conversation
- DO give the other party time to talk. Make/stick to time to offer your undivided attention and care. Meeting place is also important, offer somewhere private for an honest and uninterrupted conversation.

L: *Listen to what is being said*

- DO listen carefully and empathetically to the other party. Be patient and give them time to get through any embarrassment or shame they may feel. Just listen.

E: *Empathize*

- DO NOT be judgmental or shocked at what is shared with you, this may signal that it is not safe to open up to them
- DO acknowledge that they are feeling distressed, reassure them that things can change, and that they have taken an important step by sharing with you

E: Explore

- DO engage in dialogue about what the person is feeling. Feelings of hopelessness and frustration can be navigated to gain a better understanding of where they are. A resource on how to do that is provided here:

<https://www.harmless.nhs.uk/assessment/>

P: Plan

- DO NOT promise to keep the information secret, this can create an environment for inaction or further hurt if the situation escalates.
- DO agree on the next steps. This can be done collaboratively with the other party. Respecting the wants of the other party is important but if there is serious risk then others such as caregivers must be made aware.

*While the approach is geared towards supporting “young people” this can be invaluable resource that can be adapted as needed

<https://www.harmless.nhs.uk/talk/>

What to do if you self-harm

Do talk to a trusted caregiver, friend, adult, or medical professional who is familiar with the subject. For example, a psychiatrist can diagnose and create a treatment plan with cooperation from you. A friend can help support you and be source of strength on the journey.

Therapy can help in addressing the root of the emotional distress and to learn new behaviors if self-harm has become a habit.

“ The first thing you should know is that you’re a good person, and that your body and mind deserve good care. You may not have heard that very often in your life, but it’s important to know this basic truth about yourself. Knowing this can inspire you to learn healthier ways of coping with stress. “ - Young Men’s Health Site

<https://www.nami.org/Learn-More/Mental-Health-Conditions/Related-Conditions/Self-harm>

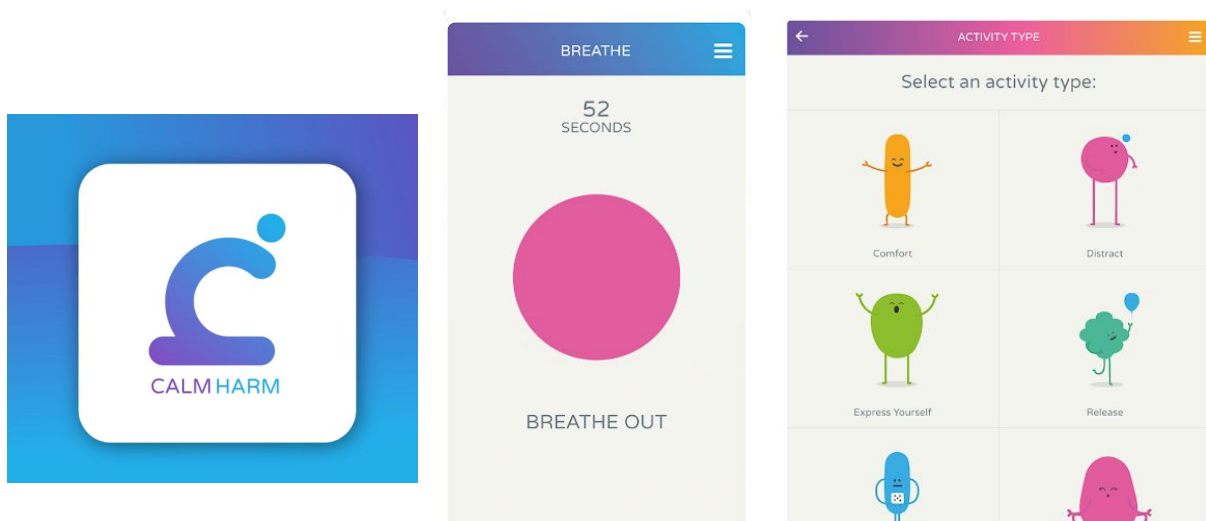
<https://youngmenshealthsite.org/guides/self-harm/>

Distractions

Calm Harm

The free app Calm Harm offers many different exercises to distract from the urge and calm one’s mind. There are different categories to choose from for everyone’s individual needs and even trackers to monitor one’s patterns.

It is definitely worth a try!



<https://play.google.com/store/apps/details?id=uk.org.stem4.calmharm&hl=de>

15 Safer Alternatives to Self-Harm

- 1.) Snap a rubber band against your wrist
- 3.) Find somewhere isolated and scream as loudly as you possibly can (alternatively do it into a cushion)
- 9.) Write down exactly how you are feeling in a diary – or if you'd prefer to, just scribble everything out

For the full list check out: <https://www.ditchthelabel.org/15-safer-alternatives-to-self-harm/>

Media

There is a fine line between portraying self harm in TV shows and movies as what it is and romanticising the idea of self harm. Often times, it is made into a big plot point to portray the character's internal struggles while failing to leave a meaningful message apart from "it is bad".

Many celebrities have spoken out about their personal experiences with self harm, most recently probably Demi Lovato. There are numerous other examples, though we do not want to create a "Hall of Fame". After all it is always a personal struggle and just because someone happens to be famous, doesn't change any of that.

The core message here is: *You are not alone.*

Get help

Call a friend, text a family member. Let them know how you are feeling. Or use one of the many free mental health resources:

<https://stonewalljapan.org/resources/mental-health/>