



What is self-harm?



Self-harm involves the deliberate physical harming of oneself. This can often be done in secret without others knowing and can include things such as cutting, biting, burning, hitting, scratching or picking skin.



Why do people self-harm?

Self-harm can often be used to try to control difficult and overwhelming feelings to gain some kind of relief from emotional pain. It may also be used to express anger, frustration, to feel 'something' (if feeling numb) or to communicate a need for help.

People who self-harm may have been experiencing a range of problems such as:

- Difficulty getting along with family or friends
- Feeling isolated or bullied by someone
- Experiencing or has experienced a difficult relationship breakup
- Experiencing or has experienced current or past physical, sexual or emotional abuse or neglect
- Experienced the loss of someone close such as a parent, sibling, friend, partner etc.
- Is experiencing serious or ongoing illness or physical pain

Does self-harm help?

While self-harm can provide short-term relief from feeling angry, distressed, numb or overwhelmed. It is not a sustainable strategy to manage distress and it can have serious health implications.

Getting help

It may seem difficult to reach out for support but it is important to talk to someone about your self-harm. It can help you to identify what causes you to want to physically hurt yourself and find other ways to manage the pain that you are feeling inside. If you do self-harm and the injury is not healing or looks serious, it is important to go to visit your doctor or hospital. If you find this embarrassing, don't worry as these health professionals will not judge you.

Who can I talk to?

Someone that you feel comfortable with and someone you feel you can trust. This may be a family member, a friend, a nurse, a minister, a counselor or your local doctor. You may also need to see a mental health clinician such as a psychologist to talk through the reasons for your self-harm and find alternative ways of managing the feelings you are experiencing. If talking to someone seems too overwhelming, write down what you want to say first and then approach someone. If you get a negative response, don't give up. Keep trying until you find someone who will listen and help.

Other ways of dealing with emotional pain

If you feel like you want to harm yourself, here are a few things you can try instead:

- Exercise – go for a brisk walk or a fast run to use up energy
- Distract yourself – sing loudly, dance, bake, play music, cook something that you would like to eat
- Relax – practice relaxation techniques like deep breathing
- Try an alternative – squeeze an ice cube, have a very cold shower, or punch and scream into a pillow
- Talk to someone about how you are feeling – finding words for feelings (rather than actions) can be difficult but may help you to feel less overwhelmed
- Write a journal to keep track of your thoughts.

Although the above tips are not solutions to the problem, they may help you in the short term. Again, it is important to identify the reasons why you self-harm and try to get assistance in finding alternative ways to cope and live the life you want. This can take time, but is worthwhile in the end.

* Information sourced from the Project Air Synergy Strategy factsheets

Counselling and Psychological Services (CAPS)

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Level 5, Jane Foss Russell Building
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Crisis contacts

Ambulance/Fire/Police: 000
Lifeline (24 hours): 13 11 14
Mental Health Access Line: 1800 011 511