



Self-Harm - Parent/Carer Information

Your child may have told you of some difficulties they are going through at the moment. Finding out your child is self-harming is understandably distressing, shocking and perhaps a little scary. Please do not panic; young people self-harm when they find their emotions overwhelming and don't know appropriate ways for dealing with them. Very rarely do self-harmers go on to attempt suicide.

Have you ever been so angry or upset you wanted to punch a wall or hurt yourself? That is similar to what self-harm feels like, a build-up of emotions that you don't know how to deal with. In order to help young people stop self-harming we must look at the reasons why they are self-harming and teach them more appropriate ways to manage their emotions. Self-harming is the symptom and we must treat the cause.

How can I help?

Don't jump to conclusions as to why your child is doing it. This is a really difficult area for a parent. When your child is ready they will tell you, by respecting and showing them your love through the physical care of them and their injury you are starting on a positive journey together.

Don't force them to explain what happened and why. Concentrate on the injuries your child is showing you and help deal with the care and safety of the injury.

Do not tell them their behaviour is wrong or treat with negativity; it is likely they already dislike themselves so it is important not to reinforce that.

Don't voice your concerns that this is 'someone' else's fault - particularly friends or peers. Focus on your child and listen to them, this will help your child open up to you and feel supported.

Ask your child if they have someone they can trust to speak to. Encourage them to see that person when they can. Don't seek to find out who that person is or question if they have seen them. You are showing your child you understand their need to discuss things with someone who is not emotionally attached to them and that this helps them.

Let your child know you are there for them, when they feel ready to talk to you, you will be ready to listen. If they sense or see you are too upset, trust and respect their judgement to halt the conversation and return to it another time.

You are a responsible adult and if you feel the injuries need medical attention then state this. Particularly if you are worried about infection, ensure your child is aware you are seeking medical advice, NHS Helpline 111 or your own GP. Explain this is due to the injury needing treatment and your concerns are medically based.

Where can I get support?

Contact your school and ask if they have a counsellor or can access a CAMHS appointment for you. Go to your local GP and ask what services they can provide. They may be able to recommend a private counsellor if they are unable to provide any services themselves.

The following websites have links and online support available:

www.childline.org.uk or www.youngminds.org.uk

If your child is reluctant to speak to anyone there is a book available they can work through themselves:

Stopping The Pain: A Workbook for Teens Who Cut and Self-Injure: A Workbook for Teens Who Self-injure (Teen Instant Help) Paperback - 29 May 2008 by Lawrence E Shapiro

Look After Yourself

Currently you may be feeling one or more of the following emotions, this is completely normal:

- Denial - my child isn't doing anything to themselves, they don't mean it, it's just attention seeking.
- Anger - somebody must be making my child do this or bullying them. Why isn't the school sorting it out?
- Upset - why are they doing this to me? It makes me look like a bad parent.
- I am going to fix this problem - A bandage and a chat will do the trick. I will stop my child seeing their friends who must be influencing them.
- Why are they doing this - I will get to the bottom of this quickly and then everything will be alright.
- Disgust - how could they do this, it'll make me look really bad.

Be aware of your own emotions through this time and it is important you talk to someone about it - a friend or doctor.

If you feel:	Remember:
Denial	I am scared to admit that this may be happening but it is important I am here to help my child work through this difficult period.
Anger	I have a right to feel anger, anger can be a positive emotion in the right time but it will not help resolve what we have to face as a family.
Upset	My child doesn't want to hurt me, they are telling me that something is hurting them and need me to be brave and supportive.
Failure	I feel I have failed my child but this is not the case. What is important is that I am there now for my child to support in whatever way they need.
Disgust	I don't understand how they could be doing something like that but I will still try to support them.
Confused	I may never know or understand the exact reason for the self-harm but I know my child is having difficulties managing their emotions and I will be here to help them work things through.

Remember self-harm is a symptom of emotional difficulties. Supporting young people to learn to deal with their emotional issues in more appropriate ways is the key factor. Simply telling them to stop or asserting authority in how they deal with it will not help the young person and they may continue to self-harm in secret. Also remember, it does not mean you have failed as a parent.