

Helpful alternatives to reduce self harm

- Use a red water soluble felt tip to mark yourself instead of cutting.
- Rub ice on the parts of the body you feel tempted to cut.
- Put elastic bands on your wrists and flick them when you feel like cutting.
- Investing in a punch bag on which to vent your anger or frustration.
- Try physical exercise, such as swimming or running, which will provide you with a natural release.
- Make lots of noise either with a musical instrument or by banging pots and pans together.
- Write all your negative feelings on paper and then rip it up.
- Keep a diary and write down all your feelings and emotions in it.
- Call a friend and talk about how you feel.

Helpline Phone Numbers

NHS Direct	0845 46 47
Samaritans	08457 90 90 90
Mental Health Matters (5pm -9am)	0800 085 7027
Domestic Violence	0191 386 5951
Drug Misuse Helpline	0800 77 66 00
Drinkline	0800 917 8282
Connexions (13-19 year olds)	080 800 13219
End House (Young Persons) (13-25 yr olds)	0191 383 1414
Re: Store Young People	01207 588440
Debtline	0808 808 4000
Relate (Couple Counselling)	0800 980 5907

Text Helpline Numbers

Mind Text Helpline
text: yp(Space)help(space) followed by your message to [60003](tel:60003)

Useful Websites

www.nshn.co.uk
www.projectspear.co.uk
www.talktofrank.com

Tees, Esk and Wear Valleys
NHS Trust 

County Durham
Primary Care Trust 

County Durham and Darlington
Acute Hospitals NHS Trust 



Self Harm

Your Questions Answered

Patient / Carer
Information Leaflet

This leaflet was developed by the North Durham "Better Services for People who Self Harm" Collaborative.

This leaflet aims to provide some basic information about self harm for patients and carers. For more information please see the list or resources at the end of this leaflet.

What is self harm or injury?

Self harm, or self injury, describes a wide range of things people do to themselves that appear to be harmful but usually do not kill them.

These include:

- cutting or burning themselves
- hitting themselves
- hitting walls or other hard objects
- taking overdoses

Other common harmful actions like smoking, excessive drinking, driving dangerously, using substances like glue or taking drugs are NOT usually seen as self harm in this sense. Eating disorders may be thought by some to be a form of self harm but are not the focus of this leaflet.

Self harm is much more common than most people think, especially among adolescents and young people. Self harm is often done in private because people are ashamed or afraid.

Self harm can continue over many months or years without becoming dangerous, but sometimes it can result in death or permanent injury even if the person themselves does not necessarily intend this. Self harm needs to be taken seriously, but it is important to respond to it in a calm and helpful way.

Why might people self harm?

The underlying reasons why someone might self harm are often complex and may be difficult to understand. Different people self harm for different reasons at different times but it is often because of some difficulty they have had.

This may include anxiety, depression, bullying, being abused or family breakdown but can involve many other problems that people face in their everyday lives.

Self harm is often a way of coping. People who self harm sometimes describe it as giving them relief from overwhelming feelings and pressures. They can feel it helps to prevent them attempting suicide.

People can find it difficult to understand why they are doing it or why this is happening to someone they know.

Sometimes people who self harm are accused of attention seeking. They can also be considered to be a threat to others. This is not usually the case but can lead to unhelpful attitudes and responses from other people. Above all, most people who self harm need understanding, and their families and friends may need support.

Knowing someone is self harming can make people angry or upset. Not being able to stop someone hurting themselves or seeing someone bleeding or injured can be distressing.

Helpful attitudes and approaches

Helpful attitudes and approaches might include:

- Non judgemental acceptance and respect
- Acknowledge and accept the person's pain and distress
- Be supportive, calm and practical
- Listen respectfully – people who self harm are the experts of their own situation
- Treat the person with dignity
- Respect the person's right to confidentiality and privacy
- Don't take it personally
- Don't force things – trust takes time
- Never issue ultimatums

What treatment will I be offered if I have cut myself?

Medical staff should give you enough medicine so that you do not feel any pain when having your cut treated. Some cuts will need stitches but if the cut is small and not very deep, the doctor or nurse may offer to close the cut using medical glue or clips.

Will I see someone about why I harm myself?

If you have harmed yourself, you should be offered a meeting with a specialist doctor or nurse who may want to know about:

- how you are feeling
- what might be causing you to harm yourself
- your life at home
- whether you have had any thoughts about suicide

The doctor or nurse will try and help you understand your feelings and why you are harming yourself. You'll have a chance to talk about your feelings in your own words.

If you have taken an overdose you should attend your local A&E Department or GP. There are no safe limits for an overdose.