

## Additional useful information and key contact details

**Mind** is the leading mental health charity in England and Wales. You can call *MindinfoLine* on 0845 7660 163 or visit the website at [www.mind.org.uk](http://www.mind.org.uk)

**National Self-Harm Network** is an organisation led by people who harm themselves, which offers support and understanding. You can visit the website at [www.nshn.co.uk](http://www.nshn.co.uk) or write to them at NSHN, PO Box 7264, Nottingham, NG1 6WJ or by email at [info@nshn.co.uk](mailto:info@nshn.co.uk)

**Samaritans** have a crisis line open 24 hours a day. You can call them on 08457 90 90 90 or email [Jo@Samaritans.org](mailto:Jo@Samaritans.org) You can also visit their website at [www.samaritans.org](http://www.samaritans.org)

**42nd Street** is a mental health service in Manchester for young people aged 14 to 25, which offers support individually or in groups. You can call the helpline for information or support on 0161 832 0170 on weekdays from 1.30pm to 4.30pm

**Bristol Crisis Service for Women** is a charity for women in emotional distress, particularly those who harm themselves. You can call the national helpline on 0117 925 1119 (open Friday and Saturday evenings 9pm to 12.30am and Sundays 6pm to 9pm). You can visit the website and access a range of information leaflets at [www.users.zetnet.co.uk/bcsw](http://www.users.zetnet.co.uk/bcsw)

**The Basement Project**, based in Abergavenny, provides support groups for people who were abused in childhood and those who self-injure. You can call them for information on 01873 856524. You can visit the website and download information at <http://freespace.virgin.net/basement.project/default.htm>

## More information about the NICE guideline

The NICE guideline is produced by the National Collaborating Centre for Mental Health (NCCMH) on behalf of the National Institute for Clinical Excellence (NICE). You can look at the NCCMH website at [www.psychol.ucl.ac.uk/CORE/nccmh.html](http://www.psychol.ucl.ac.uk/CORE/nccmh.html)

### The self-harm guideline is available in four different versions

1. You can look at a booklet written for the general public online at <http://www.nice.org.uk/pdf/CG016publicinfoenglish.pdf> or you can ask for the booklet by calling the NHS response line on 0870 1555 455, quoting the number N0626.
2. You can see the NICE guideline, which is written for doctors, nurses and ambulance staff online at <http://www.nice.org.uk/pdf/CG016NICEguideline.pdf>
3. There is also a shorter version of this (a quick reference guide) available online at <http://www.nice.org.uk/pdf/CG016QuickRefGuide.pdf> Alternatively, you can ask for the booklet by calling the NHS response line on 0870 1555 455, quoting the number N0625.
4. All the research and background information for the guideline is available in a book. You can order it from the British Psychological Society on 0116 252 9551. You can also see how to download it at [www.bps.org.uk/selfharm](http://www.bps.org.uk/selfharm)

This leaflet is also available in a version for young people. Both leaflets can be downloaded from [www.mind.org.uk](http://www.mind.org.uk) where there are also details of how to obtain further copies. For more information on the issues in this leaflet, call *MindinfoLine* on 0845 7660 163.

## Self-harm: understanding the NICE guideline

### Information for adults

Written by the National Collaborating Centre for Mental Health in partnership with Mind



For better  
mental health

# Self-harm: understanding the NICE guideline



## What is the NICE guideline?

The National Institute for Clinical Excellence (NICE) has produced advice on how to treat and care for people who have harmed themselves, either by self-injury or by taking an overdose. It aims to improve the care people receive by giving advice based on the best evidence available to ambulance staff, doctors, nurses and other workers in the National Health Service (NHS) across England and Wales.

## What does the NICE guideline mean for my care?

The guideline recommends that certain things should happen when you receive emergency care from the NHS in the first 48 hours after you have harmed yourself. The most important recommendations are outlined below.

## Will I be treated with respect and understanding?

All healthcare professionals, including ambulance and emergency department staff, should be trained to understand and treat people who have harmed themselves. This means that you should be treated with the same care, respect and privacy as any patient, and staff should understand that you may be feeling distressed. If this does not happen, you have the right to ask healthcare staff why.

Staff should provide full information about the best treatments available. They should make every effort to check that you are able to understand the information given to you so that you can make a decision about whether to have treatment or about which treatment to have. This should happen before treatment starts and at each new stage of your treatment.

## What happens when I am seen in hospital?

If you have harmed yourself and are being seen in an accident and emergency department, you should be offered an initial assessment about your emotional and physical health before treatment starts. The nurse assessing you will want to make sure that you are able to make a decision about treatment. He or she should also ask you about how you are feeling, and about your personal and social circumstances. You should also be asked if you would like to talk to a professional who could help with any emotional or other problems you may have.

You should be offered any physical treatments you may need, regardless of whether or not you choose to have an initial assessment. A doctor or nurse should try to see you as quickly as possible. But if you have to wait for treatment, you should be offered an environment that is safe, supportive and does not make you feel more distressed. If you prefer, this could be a separate, quiet room (if available) with regular contact with a named member of staff.

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

If you need stitches, or other painful treatments, you should be offered enough anaesthetic or painkillers. If you have a superficial cut less than 5cm long, you should be offered a special medical glue that is used to close cuts, or adhesive strips if you prefer.

Depending on your circumstances, you may be offered advice on:

- treating yourself for minor cuts
- dealing with scarring
- other ways of coping with stressful thoughts
- reducing physical harm if you cut yourself again
- other sources of help and information.

## What treatment will I be offered if I have taken an overdose?

You may be offered a medicine called activated charcoal, either in the ambulance or at the hospital. It tastes quite unpleasant but will help to stop the poison being absorbed into your system. Activated charcoal should be given to you within one hour of taking the overdose, although it can still work up to two hours after. But the quicker it is taken, the better it works. You may then be offered further treatment depending on what you have taken and how unwell you are.

## Will I see someone about why I self-harm?

You should be offered the chance to talk to a specialist mental health professional (for example, a psychiatrist or psychiatric nurse) or social worker. You may be asked about why you have harmed yourself and whether or not you still feel like doing so. You may also be asked about your home life and social situation. You can decide not to talk to someone, but this process (known as a psychosocial assessment) has been shown to help people who have harmed themselves.

If healthcare professionals consider that you may benefit from further treatment or assessment, they should base this decision upon the psychosocial assessment, and not just on the fact that you have harmed yourself.