Alternatives to Self-Harm and Distraction Techniques

These are some ideas for helping people delay or avoid self-harm that you might wish to consider – they’ve all been suggested by people who self-harm. Some ideas might seem ridiculous, but others might work. Different people find that different things help, and it isn’t failure if you try something and it doesn’t help. You will be able to add things which you have discovered.

Expressing Feelings

Letting it out PHYSICALLY

- **Scream** as loud as you can
- **Hit** a cushion / punch bag / throw a cushion against a wall
- **Smash** a water melon
- Kick a football against a wall
- **Squeeze** ice really hard
- Squeeze a stress ball
- **Tear up** a newspaper/phone directory
- Play loud music and dance energetically – be as wild as you like
- Draw on the place you want to cut with red marker pen, fake blood or watered down food colouring
- **Write words** on yourself with a red marker pen
- Spend some **energy** - go for a walk/swim/go to the gym/ride a bike/go running

Trying to work out how you’re feeling...

- Ask yourself “Do I feel ANGRY?” ‘Do I feel anxious?’ ‘What about?’
- Ask yourself ‘What would the razor blade say if it could talk to me?’
- **Write a letter** to someone you’re angry with (hurt by etc.) saying how you feel (No need to send it.)
- Write a list of your **achievements**
- Write a letter to yourself saying ‘I love YOU because….’
- Make a list of things you’re thankful for
- Make a wish list

Talking about it....

- Talk to a friend
- Call the Samaritans or other helpline (see page 5)
- Allow yourself to **cry** (if you can)
Using your Creativity

- Draw / paint / collage / paper mache / finger paint / sculpt in clay - to express what you want to do or what you are feeling
- Write a poem / story / song / joke / autobiography / parody / musical
- Write a DIARY / journal or read old diaries (unless there might be triggers)
- Go to myspace.com and write an online journal
- Scribble a word again and again to say how you’re feeling e.g. ‘lonely’, ‘angry’
- Deface a magazine (preferably your own)
- Paint with red paint using your fingers
- Draw yourself in MS office
- Write a message in a self-harm newsgroup on the internet
- Take some photos
- Play an instrument / Sing to music as LOUD as you can
- Put on music which expresses how you are feeling
- Write out the soundtrack to your life if it were a film
- Imagine a colour which expresses your feelings then change it in your mind to another colour
- Make a memory box / scrapbook
- Write an alternative ending to a story
- Watch a foreign language channel and make up your own interpretations
- Create your own cartoon characters / legends
- Create a SECRET CODE

Comforting Yourself…

- Have a bath or shower
- Stay in bed
- Use aromatherapy oils
- Eat chocolate (or whatever)
- Have an ‘emergency box’ with whatever helps you cope
- Buy something special
- Massage your hands / arms / feet (or the area you want to harm)
- Stroke a pet / cuddle a teddy
- Smoke a cigarette
- Ask a friend to hold you
- Paint your nails / Have your hair done
- Have a cup of tea
- Rock / hug yourself
- Give yourself a henna tattoo
- Meditate / yoga
DISTRACTING yourself

Leisure Activities

- Watch television / video / DVD
- Play on a computer
- Go on the internet
- Learn a new skill (juggling / making balloon animals)
- Do puzzles / play chess / make your own puzzles
- Origami / Scobidous / make jewellery
- Sew / knit
- Go through a photo album
- Design a dream house
- Have a debate
- Build a Card house
- Make a paper chain of the days it's been since you last cut (add a new one every day)
- Find out how to put 8 queens on a chessboard without any of them being able to kill each other (There are 92 possible ways to do this)
- Make a T-shirt
- Look for pictures in the clouds

Getting out and about……..

1. Sweep the path
2. Wash your car
3. Do some gardening
4. Go for a drive
5. Go to an arcade or playground
6. Make a kite/fly a kite
7. Get on a train and go to the sea
8. Look at constellations

Being productive………..

1. Catch up on DIY / housework
2. Cook/bake something
3. Have a clear out – give your old stuff to charity
4. Re-arrange your room/decorate
5. Read/study
6. Give your pets a bath
7. Volunteer somewhere
8. Join a class
9. Think about what you’d like to change about your life and make a plan
Reasoning with yourself

"When you’re not feeling like self-harming, write a list of reasons to avoid self-harm. The list will be different for each person - it’s whatever makes sense to you. Look at the list when you feel like harming yourself. It could include things like:

☆ “I’ve managed for two weeks without harming. I don’t want to start again”
☆ “Once I start it’s difficult to stop”
☆ “I’ll regret the damage afterwards”
☆ “It doesn’t help in the long run. I can harm now but I’ll need to do it again in a couple of days.”
☆ “I don’t want to end up in hospital”
☆ “If I can hang on the need to self-harm sometimes passes”
☆ “There may be consequences I don’t want e.g. brain damage, paralysis”
☆ “Self-harm affects my relationships”

1. Learn CBT (Cognitive Behavioural Therapy) or DBT (Dialectical Behaviour Therapy) techniques. [http://www.rcpsych.ac.uk/mentalhealthinformation.aspx]

2. When you’re feeling good write yourself a letter you can read when you want to self-harm

3. Write down why you do not deserve to be hurt

Making yourself safe
- Try to identify things that prompt you to self-harm. If possible avoid them or prepare for them
- Avoid shops that sell things you might use to harm yourself
- Stay with a friend
- Ask GP to give you weekly prescriptions or pick up medication for two days at a time from the chemist
- Do not stockpile medication (prescribed or over the counter)

Reducing stress
- Do some relaxation exercises / listen to a relaxation tape
- Ask a friend to look after the children for a few hours
- Reduce your commitments in the next few days

Rewarding yourself for not self-harming
- Keep a chart – add a star for each day / hour you have not self-harmed
- If you do self-harm, just leave a space and start again

Delaying self-harm
- Keep things you harm yourself with in a locked cupboard or in a box with sellotape around it. It gives you time to think between wanting to self-harm and doing it.
- Phone Samaritans – arrange to ring again in an hour/ two hours and promise yourself you will not harm before then
- Use any of the suggestions for avoiding self-harm to try and delay it for a while

With many thanks to Blackpool SHUSH (Self-Help Uniting People who Self-Harm)
### HELP LINES

Don’t suffer in silence – there are help lines out there that can offer support...

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<tr>
<th>Help Line</th>
<th>Contact Information</th>
<th>Description</th>
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<tr>
<td><strong>Samaritans</strong> - Helpline 08457 90 90 90 (UK) 1850 60 90 90 (ROI)</td>
<td>Confidential emotional support for anyone, 24 hours a day, 7 days a week. You can also e-mail <a href="mailto:jo@samaritans.org">jo@samaritans.org</a> for support, or write to ‘Chris’ P.O. Box 9090, Stirling, FK8 2SA. Some centres also offer face to face support, usually by appointment.</td>
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<td><strong>Bristol Crisis Service For Women (BCSW) - Helpline 0117 925 1119</strong></td>
<td>National helpline for women in distress, especially women who self-harm. Open Friday and Saturday evenings 9 pm to 12.30 am and Sundays 6pm to 9pm.</td>
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<td><strong>Support Line - 0208 554 9004</strong></td>
<td>A confidential helpline providing emotional support to individuals of any age on any issue. Support line also has a data base of local services. Ring for helpline opening hours. You can also e-mail on <a href="mailto:infor@supportline.org.uk">infor@supportline.org.uk</a></td>
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<td><strong>Saneline - 0845 767 8000</strong></td>
<td>Offers practical care and support to anybody affected by mental health problems. Open noon to 11 pm Monday to Friday, noon to 6 pm Saturday &amp; Sunday.</td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>42nd Street – Helpline 0161 832 0170</strong></td>
<td>A mental health service in Manchester for young people aged 14 – 25. Their helpline offers support and advice, particularly around suicide and self injury. Open weekdays from 12.30 pm to 4.30 pm. web: <a href="http://www.fortysecondstreet.org.uk">www.fortysecondstreet.org.uk</a></td>
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<td><strong>Nightline (for University students) National organisation of NightLine student helplines in Universities across the UK. Visit the website to find out if your Uni has one.</strong></td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>No Panic - Helpline 0808 808 0545</strong></td>
<td>Support for people who experience panic attacks, and those with phobias, obsessive compulsive disorder, general anxiety disorder and who are withdrawing from tranquillisers. (10 am-10 pm every day) email: <a href="mailto:ceo@nopanic.org.uk">ceo@nopanic.org.uk</a>, web: <a href="http://www.nopanic.org.uk">www.nopanic.org.uk</a></td>
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