

# 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 its 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...

**Samaritans - Helpline 08457 90 90 90 (UK) 1850 60 90 90 (ROI)**

Confidential emotional support for anyone, 24 hours a day, 7 days a week.

You can also e-mail [jo@samaritans.org](mailto:jo@samaritans.org) for support, or write to 'Chris' P.O. Box 9090, Stirling, FK8 2SA. Some centres also offer face to face support, usually by appointment.

**Bristol Crisis Service For Women (BCSW) - Helpline 0117 925 1119**

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.

**Support Line - 0208 554 9004**

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 [infor@supportline.org.uk](mailto:infor@supportline.org.uk)

**Saneline - 0845 767 8000**

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 & Sunday.

**42<sup>nd</sup> Street – Helpline 0161 832 0170**

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: [www.fortysecondstreet.org.uk](http://www.fortysecondstreet.org.uk)

**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.

web: [www.nightline.ac.uk](http://www.nightline.ac.uk)

**No Panic - Helpline 0808 808 0545**

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: [ceo@nopanic.org.uk](mailto:ceo@nopanic.org.uk), web: [www.nopanic.org.uk](http://www.nopanic.org.uk)