

Talking about Self harm

A mini-guide to support anyone affected by self harm in West Sussex.

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This mini-guide was originally researched and written by volunteers from award-winning youth project **Right Here Brighton and Hove** and has been adapted for use by anyone affected by self-harm in West Sussex.

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NHS

Produced by
Right Here Brighton and Hove
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NHS Coastal West Sussex CCG,
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Understanding self harm

It can be a very lonely place to be in when you're self harming, but it is **more common than you may realise**.

A lot of people think self harm is either cutting and/or overdosing but a lot of things done in excess could be seen as self harm. **Examples** of these are: getting drunk, doing drugs, smoking, getting into fights and getting tattoos or piercings. There are also less obvious things such as rubbing skin, digging your nails into yourself or pinching yourself.

If you're concerned that any of the above applies to you, a friend or family member, **please don't panic!**

Self harm can be a strategy people use to **cope with what's going on in their life**. Self harm is especially common in young people which may be as a result of so much change going on physically / hormonally as well as all other changes young people are having to face.

When young people self harm it is **usually a sign that they are having a tough time and need support**. There are lots of services that can help (see our [Local Support Services](#) section.) Services won't force you to stop, but they will encourage and support you.

Tips for friends and family:

- Rather than trying to come up with a solution, it's more likely that they'll want you to **listen and support them** by letting them know it's okay to feel what they're feeling. Find more tips in our [Communicating](#) section.
- Focus on what's causing them to self harm rather than the self harm in itself, unless immediate medical attention is required: **How are they feeling? What's going on for them at the moment? Have there been any major changes in their life recently?**
- Trying to force someone to stop self harming can make them feel worse, as it can increase the emotions they're already trying to cope with and reduce their feeling of control.
- If they do want to stop self harming, we've included some suggestions in our [Ideas to Help](#) section.

Why do people self harm?

Everyone has problems during their life, and self harm can affect **anyone**.

Self harm may be used as a **coping mechanism**, and it is **a myth that self harm is always a sign of suicidal behaviour**.

Some underlying issues can lead to young people harming themselves. We call these **triggers**, and have listed some below.

If you combine any of these triggers with the change that is going on both physically and hormonally for young people, it's not surprising that it can be a difficult time.

- Struggling with **difficult thoughts, feelings and emotions**, or maybe feeling overwhelmed
- Problems with **family, friends or relationships**
- **Stress** (specifically exams and academic achievement)
- **Abuse** (emotional, physical, sexual or neglect)
- Being **bullied** (many different types including cyber bullying)
- **Self image** issues

When someone is struggling to cope or tell somehow else how they are feeling, self harm can be a way of dealing with - and expressing - difficult feelings.

For some people, it can lead to a **sense of control or emotional release**.

Some young people may not understand or know why they self harm, and that's okay. It's still important to get help.

There are many reasons why people self harm. Other people's lives may look picture perfect from the outside, but here are just a few people that self harmed when they were younger that might surprise you:

Angelina Jolie
Colin Farrell
Demi Lovato
Johnny Depp
Megan Fox
Nicole Scherzinger
Princess Diana

Communicating about self harm

If you are self harming...

...you might feel lonely, isolated and like you can't tell anyone about it - but **you are not alone**.

Some people perceive self harm as "attention seeking" behaviour, but it's clear that in most cases this is not true at all and most people feel they have to hide it. We really want to encourage you to talk about it and more importantly about how you're feeling.

This could be anonymously through services such as the **Samaritans** and **Tess** (find their details in our [Websites and Phonelines](#) section) or having a chat with a friend, family member, staff at school, college or university, GP, youth worker, or counsellor.

It's understandable that talking to someone might feel difficult (maybe even impossible) to start with. Sometimes writing, drawing or painting how you're feeling can help too. We're not saying it will fix everything, but usually it can really help to get it out - it can help you realise what's going on inside your head and how you're feeling, as well as helping others to understand why you may be behaving differently.

Here are a few ideas that might help you to start a conversation about how you're feeling or your self harm:

- **I'm finding (...) really hard right now.**
- **Can we have a chat about (...)**
- **I've been doing (...) to myself and I don't know why.**
- **If you've got a moment I could really do with a chat.**
- **Can I talk to you in private please?**

Self harm is a form of communication in itself

Self harm can be a way of expressing how you're feeling, whether this is intentional or not. It's not easy to talk about 'how you're feeling', 'what you're thinking' and 'what's going on for you'. This can lead to trying to find a way to cope with these things on your own. It can be very difficult to find the "right" words or words that can make/help people understand how you're actually feeling inside.

When talking to others about their self harm...

...it's helpful to be aware that self harm is likely to be a coping mechanism they've developed to help cope with and manage emotions. Check out [Keeping Yourself Safe](#) to encourage them to do this in the safest way possible.

We understand it's not an easy subject to broach but it's so important to give people a chance to talk about what they're doing - and more importantly **why** they're doing it.

It's really key to **listen, take them seriously**, and be as **open-minded** and as **non-judgemental** as possible whilst someone is disclosing their self harm to you or talking about their feelings or what's going on for them.

Probably the **key thing** to focus on (as long as they don't need immediate medical attention) is **why they're self harming**.

Phrases like this might help you to start the conversation:

- **I've noticed that recently you don't quite seem yourself, is there anything you'd like to talk about?**
- **Is there anything I can do to help?**
- **I can see that you've got/done (...) and I'm concerned about how you are.**
- **Are you being safe in your self harming?**

"Some people do it for attention... that doesn't mean they should be ignored. There are plenty of ways to get attention, why cause yourself pain? And if someone's crying for help, you should give them it, not stand there and judge the way they're asking for it."

Camelot Foundation & The Mental Health Foundation.
The Truth About Self harm:
For Young People and their Friends and Family, 2006

Keeping yourself safe

Trying to stop self harming can be difficult. To help keep yourself safe, there are different ways of self harming, some of which are safer than others such as using elastic bands or ice cubes.

Here is some more advice about keeping yourself safe.

- When you are self harming it's really important to look after yourself by using clean equipment and clean any cuts afterwards to reduce risk of infections.
- Think about the environment you're in whilst self harming: try to avoid dirty and dangerous situations and to be in a place near other people who could help you if necessary.
- Take time to understand and manage risks related to any substances you may use, and use a condom every time you have sex.
- If you have taken an overdose, seek medical attention. You can phone **999** for an ambulance or **111** for free information and advice if you're not sure it's an emergency. If you can, take the tablets or packaging of tablets with you so medical staff know what you've taken.

This mini-guide contains practical advice, services and websites to support young people affected by self harm, as well as those who care about them.

It has been created by young volunteers from the **RIGHT HERE** project, who talked to 16-25 year olds about their perceptions, beliefs and knowledge of self harm, and also to education and medical staff who work with 16-25 year olds.

We hope this guide will increase awareness and get people to talk more openly about self harm, and we really want it to help young people gain access to the services and support that are available to them, and that they deserve.

Ideas to help

Everyone has their own way of coping. Here are some things we've heard and found can help:

Distract yourself

Some people find it helps to distract themselves if they feel they may self harm. We understand the ideas below might not work for everyone, but they might help you:

- **Something fun:** listen to music, watch your fave tv show, do a puzzle (sudoko, wordsearch) or pop some bubblewrap!
- **Something creative:** painting, drawing or writing. Also, some people find drawing on yourself with a non-permanent red marker pen can help.
- **Something new:** read a different magazine, try yoga, learn an instrument, do some physical exercise like go for a walk or jog.
- **Something comforting:** allow yourself to cry, phone or meet someone you care about, sleep, cuddle a soft toy or pillow, or have a hot chocolate.

You'll find many more ideas at nshn.co.uk/downloads/Distractions.pdf

If you find it difficult, it can be helpful to start by distracting yourself for a short time, and build it up gradually.

Talking can...

...**help you** to understand what's going on, how you're feeling and to come up with ideas to feel better.

...**help others** to know how you're feeling and understand why you're doing the things you do.

Take a look at our [Communicating](#) section for ideas to get you talking.

Get more support

There are loads of services around to help you (see the [Local Support](#) section.) If the thought of going somewhere new feels scary, here some tips:

- Take a friend, family member or someone you trust with you.
- Think about what you want to say before you go: docready.org can be really useful for helping to start a difficult conversation.
- Check out the service's website to find out more and google the address to plan your route so you know where you're going.

Confidentiality

It can be difficult telling someone about self harm, especially if you're worried they will tell someone else. But talking to someone can often be a positive way of starting to work through what's on your mind, at the same time as giving that person an opportunity to help and support you in any way they can.

Usually what's said between you and a professional (teacher, youth worker, doctor, nurse etc) should be kept between you both.

However, if they are concerned about your safety, they may discuss with you the possibility of talking to someone else who could help. If you aren't sure what is confidential, ask. It's a long link to type, but this article might be useful: thesite.org/mental-health/self-harm/confidentiality-and-self-harm-5685.html

Talking to doctors / nurses

- Your parent or carer does not have to know and you have a right to privacy **even if you're under 16.**
- The only time they will need to break confidentiality is if you or someone around you is at severe risk of danger (for example, thought likely to act on thoughts of suicide).
- They should ask your permission before contacting anyone else, and let you know what is happening.
- Remember health professionals are not there to trick you or betray you. They are there to make sure you are listened to, supported and kept safe, and they have a duty to do what is in your best interests.
- Check out howcanifilm.com for more about your rights and docready.org to help you prepare.

Talking to a teacher

- If there is a teacher or any staff member you trust, do talk to them - they are there to help you and listen to you.
- They may not have the experience or training to be able to give you the best possible support, so they might need to refer you to a counsellor or other health professional to make sure you get all the support you need.
- They have a legal duty to pass certain information on (such as physical abuse or self harm) but this may not have to be to a parent/carer.

Websites and phonelines

Not all websites about self harm are helpful - we've spent time finding the most supportive websites out there, so you don't have to.

Add www. before all websites listed!

Self harm specific:

selfharm.co.uk
nshn.co.uk
lifesigns.org.uk
selfinjurysupport.org.uk
thesite.org/self-harm

Girls and young women up to 25 can text **Tess** anonymously on 07800 472 908 Monday-Friday 7-9pm.

Emotional support:

youngminds.org.uk
mind.org.uk
sane.org.uk or call 0845 767 8000 between 6-11pm
cibt.co.uk
bigwhitewall.com
childline.org.uk
Or call 0800 1111 (up to age 19)
samaritans.org
Samaritans provide anonymous support for anyone in crisis. Call 08457 90 90 90 or email jo@samaritans.org



findetgive.com for national mental health support services

Other specialist help:

b-eat.co.uk (eating disorders)
sexualhealthwestsussex.nhs.uk
talktofrank.com (drugs)

Help for parents / carers:

parentingtroubledteenagers.relate.org.uk/talk-to-someone free instant online chat with a counsellor about parenting issues
youngminds.org.uk/for_parents free helpline 0808 802 5544 open Mon-Fri 9.30am-4pm

right-here-brightonandhove.org.uk/parents - a guide for parents and carers who are concerned about the wellbeing of a young person

westsussexparentsforum.co.uk for parents and carers of children with learning difficulties and disabilities. 01903 726188

www.rcpsych.ac.uk/healthadvice/parentsandouthinfo/parentsandouthinfo/self-harm.aspx

Local support

You don't have to go through anything on your own. There might be someone you feel you can talk to at home or where you study. Below are other places where someone will listen. You can take a friend or family member with you to any of these places.

Dialogue Counselling

Free counselling for 13-25 year olds in Bognor Regis, Burgess Hill, Chichester, Crawley, Horsham, Lancing, Littlehampton, Shoreham-by-Sea and Worthing. **Call or text 07739 893707** community.counselling@ymcadlg.org

Your Space / FindItOut Centres

Advice and info for 13-25 year olds: yourspacewestsussex.co.uk

Add [/finditout](#) for FindItOut Centres, where you can talk to someone about apprenticeships, jobs, counselling, housing, sexual health, families and relationships, substance misuse etc.

Allsorts (based in Brighton) supports and empowers young people who are lesbian, gay, bisexual, trans* or unsure of their sexual orientation and/or gender identity. allsortsyouth.org.uk

BMEYPP (based in Brighton) is the Black and Minority Ethnic Young People's Project. bmeyp.org.uk

Child and Adolescent Mental Health Service (CAMHS)

Chichester – 01243 813405
Worthing – 01903 286754
Horsham – 01403 223344

Mind mental health charity coastalwestsussexmind.org

Talk to your doctor!

Before you go, visit docready.org to prepare your checklist and watch howcanifilm.com to learn your rights. If your doctor's surgery is closed, you can get medical advice by calling **111**.

CRI Substance Misuse

Outreach support for 10-17 years olds 0300 303 8677 Option 1
01903 230600 or cri.org.uk

West Sussex Young Carers

youngcarers@westsussex.gov.uk
westsussex.gov.uk/youngcarers

Worth Domestic Violence Advisors 0330 222 8181 or 07834 968539 worthservices.org

Saturn Centre supports anyone over 14 who has been sexually assaulted. 01293 600649 or saturncentre.org

If you or someone you know has hurt themselves badly and needs urgent help, go to A&E or call 999 for an ambulance.