

Everybody's Mental Health Matters



Self Harm / Self Injury

What is self harm?

Self harm and injury are terms used when someone inflicts physical harm to themselves. This can be cutting, burning, picking, biting or scratching skin, hair pulling, banging the head or other body part. Eating disorders can be considered a form of self harm as can misuse of alcohol, cigarettes and illegal drugs. Prescription / over the counter medicines can also be misused, overdosing can be a form of self harm without the person intending to commit suicide.

Who self harms?

People who self harm generally have a lot of emotional distress. They may be under a lot of pressure / stress, experienced a difficult childhood, abused in earlier life (physically, emotionally or sexually). They might have been neglected, separated from someone they loved, suffered a bereavement, been bullied, harassed, assaulted, isolated, put under intolerable pressure, made homeless, sent into care, into hospital or to other institutions.

Feelings associated with self harm can be anger, frustration, guilt, resentment, despair and low self esteem.

Why do people self harm?

People often find it difficult to explain their reasons for self harming but many regard their behaviour as a way of surviving or a way of coping with overwhelming emotional pain.

To control emotions:

- To escape from depression, emptiness, feelings of shame or unreality.
- Relieve tension, anger, pressure.
- To feel physical pain, reflection of emotional pain.
- Thoughts of hurting others replaced by intent to hurt oneself

To fit in with beliefs and thoughts:

- To punish yourself because you are a 'bad' person.
- Maintaining negative beliefs '*I'm worthless*', '*I'm weird*', '*I deserve it*'
- To escape from feelings of guilt.

To communicate:

- Visual sign of emotional pain
- To punish others through their own body.
- To let people know how bad things are (however some people will keep their self harming private and hide injuries.)

If a person is self harming they may...

- Make excuses for injuries.
- Have visible scars.
- Keep razor blades or sharp objects in their room.
- Cover up their body, long sleeves in summer etc.
- May be withdrawn or distant.
- Secretive.

Help and support

- Keep a diary of what's going on when you feel the need to self harm, how you were feeling, how you felt after self harming. This will help you to understand your own behavior and how you deal with emotions
- Talk about your feelings with someone supportive and who you trust, friend or family. Join a support group, talking to people with similar issues can ward off feelings of isolation.
- Talk to a professional, GP, Counselling, Cognitive behavioral therapy can help to deal with underlying issues.

Further Information

National Self-harm Network (NHSN) - Survivor-led organisation supporting those who self-harm - PO Box 7264, Nottingham NG1 6WJ

web: www.nshn.co.uk

www.selfharm.org.uk

www.siari.co.uk

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