



«Harmless

THE
TOMORROW
PROJECT

Information and support

Harmless and The Tomorrow Project

0115 880 0280 (administration line only – call for information about how our services can support you)
www.harmless.org.uk

YoungMinds Parents Helpline

0808 802 55 44 (9.30am – 4pm weekdays)
www.youngminds.org.uk

NHS 111

Open 24/7, can provide mental health support

ChildLine

www.childline.org.uk
0800 1111 (24 hours, ages up to 19 years old)

HopeLine247

www.papyrus-uk.org
0800 068 41 41 (24 hours, ages up to 35 years old or if you are concerned about someone aged up to 35)

Samaritans

116 123 (Open 24/7 for all ages)
www.samaritans.org

0115 880 0280
info@harmless.org.uk
www.harmless.org.uk

 HarmlessUK

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Harmless CIC, 1 Beech Avenue, Nottingham NG7 7LJ

«Harmless

the centre of excellence for
self harm & suicide prevention

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WORKING TOWARDS A BRIGHTER FUTURE



Information for
Families & Friends



This leaflet is designed for friends and family supporting someone who self harms or feels suicidal. You may feel helpless, unsure or confused about these issues, but here is some general information and advice.

What is self harm?

Self harm is the term used to describe when someone hurts themselves as a way of coping with their emotions. This may include cutting, burning, bruising, taking overdoses, and hair pulling. This is not an exhaustive list, and many of us take part in harmful behaviour at times of stress (for example, increased drinking or smoking).

People may feel calmer and more in control after self harming. It may act as a release from a build up of difficult feelings, or may act as a way of expressing anger through self-punishment. Sometimes people find it easier to care for physical pain than emotional pain so having a physical injury helps them care for themselves and outwardly express how they are feeling.

Self harm is a coping strategy – it is a way of surviving and managing emotional pain and stress, which may include managing suicidal feelings. Sometimes people who self harm may also feel suicidal and attempt to take their own lives, however the two are very different and it is important not to make assumptions – be open to talking about the difference with the person you are supporting.

What is suicide?

Suicide is a decision that someone makes to end their life when they feel overwhelmed by their circumstances. They may feel that what they are facing is too much to cope with, and that there is no hope of things getting better.

Suicide is not selfish; rather, it is often something that people think about when they feel there is no other option. It is a last resort.

No matter how impossible life is feeling, with the right help at the right time, people can overcome their difficulties. But we know how devastating suicide is for the people who are supporting someone in crisis.

Although thoughts of self harm or suicide may be very strong, we believe it is possible to get through them with support. Many people feel suicidal or self harm at some time in their life, and are able to recover and move forward.

Caring for someone who self harms or feels suicidal

At Harmless and The Tomorrow Project, we know how difficult it can be to support a friend or family member who is self harming or feeling suicidal.

You might be feeling on-edge and hyper-vigilant, and you might be wanting to monitor everything your friend / family member does to try to keep them safe. You might be neglecting yourself because of how much you're needing to prioritise their feelings and safety. You might be struggling to understand how and why they are feeling this way. You might be experiencing feelings of anger, sadness, frustration, blame, regret, or helplessness.

Your experiences are valid, and you deserve support through this difficult time too. Many of our team have been carers for loved ones who self harm or feel suicidal, and are here to help.

What can I do to help them?

- Be alert to signs that someone is struggling to cope. They may seem withdrawn and low, may not be taking care of themselves, and may talk about not seeing a point in living or feeling useless.
- If you notice these signs, let the person know that you are here for them. You could say 'I've noticed you seem to be struggling lately, would you like to talk about it?'.
 - If you're worried about whether someone is having thoughts of self harm or suicide, ask about this clearly and directly. 'Are you having thoughts of self harm?', 'Are you having thoughts of suicide?'. This shows them that you are a safe person to talk to about this.
- If your friend / family member has recently been bereaved by suicide they may be more vulnerable to suicide themselves. Be open to asking how they are and offering a listening ear.
- Encourage the person you are concerned about to get some help – no matter how big or small they think the problems are, it is okay to ask for support. There are contact details on the back of this leaflet.
- It can feel overwhelming and frightening supporting someone who is self harming or feeling suicidal. Be sure to take good care of yourself and get support if you need it.
- Many people who self harm or feel suicidal feel ashamed and isolated. Being open to talking about difficult feelings without judging or putting them down is a really important part of supporting.
- Remain as hopeful and as positive as you can. The person you're supporting is likely feeling hopeless about their situation – seeing you remain hopeful might be reassuring for them.