

SELF HARM AWARENESS DAY 2026

Connection Is Coping: Finding Support Together

Sunday 1st March 2026

#SHAD2026 • #ConnectionIsCoping



Information Pack



www.harmless.org.uk

Information Pack

WHAT IS SELF HARM?

Self harm refers to any situation in which a person intentionally injures themselves, regardless of the underlying reason or intended outcome. It can take many forms, including but not limited to:

- Cutting or scratching
- Burning with a flame or something hot
- Causing bruising to the body
- Taking overdoses of tablets or medication
- Inserting objects into the body
- Hair pulling (also known as trichotillomania)

This is not an exhaustive list, but illustrates some of the more common behaviours associated with self harm.

WHY DO PEOPLE SELF HARM?

There is no single reason why people self harm. It is a deeply personal behaviour, and the factors that drive it vary from person to person. For many, self harm can be a way of coping – helping them manage overwhelming emotions, distress or stress. Some people use self harm to feel more in control of their emotions or a difficult situation, to self-soothe, or to reduce intense emotional arousal.

It may also stem from feelings of self-hate or a desire to punish oneself. Importantly, self harm is not the same as a suicide attempt. For many, it is a strategy they use to try to cope and survive extremely difficult feelings.

WHO SELF HARMS?

There is no straightforward answer to this. The reality is that anyone can be at risk of self harm at some point in their life, depending on their experiences and how these experiences affect them personally. People self harm for many different reasons and in many different ways, and what leads one person to harm themselves may not cause the same level of distress in someone else.

WHAT CAUSES PEOPLE TO SELF HARM?

Many different factors can cause distress and may lead someone to harm themselves. Issues that can trigger the onset of self harm, or a period of increased self harm, may include bullying, trauma, isolation, abuse, pressures at school or work, financial worries, bereavement, or difficult relationships. However, no personal experience should be dismissed, as what affects one person deeply may impact another differently.

There does not always need to be a specific triggering event. Sometimes people experience a period of lowered self-esteem, heightened distress, or emotional overwhelm that leads them to self harm.

THE LANGUAGE THAT WE USE

It is advisable not to describe someone who self harms as a 'self harmer', as this labels the person solely by their self harm. Doing so can overshadow what is causing them to self harm, and limits opportunities to better understand the whole of their distress. Additionally, it can feel that they are being defined by their self harm, and reduces opportunities to recognise and explore their broader identity.

ABOUT SELF HARM

- Self harm is not attention-seeking or manipulative
- Self harm is not a mental illness – it is a symptom of internal stress or distress
- Self harm is not just a young person's problem
- Self harm is not a suicide attempt, but about staying alive
- Self harm is a symptom of emotional distress – it is not the problem, but it would suggest that the person is struggling with something else
- Self harm is not a problem that can't be solved – people can learn to manage their emotions in a different way
- People self harm for the respite it gives them from their emotions, not for the pain of the harm
- People who self harm are not a danger to others

The severity of self harm is not directly related to the level of distress that the individual is feeling. The fact that someone has harmed themselves is what is significant, not what they did or how severe their harm was.

WHAT CAN HELP?

Finding support for the feelings or experiences that contribute to self harm can be an important step towards change. Many people benefit from speaking with a trained professional, such as a psychotherapist or counsellor, who can help them explore what they are going through and develop healthier coping strategies. For some, opening up to a trusted friend or family member can also provide meaningful relief and support.

It can be helpful to start noticing the feelings and situations that arise before, during and after the urge to self harm. Understanding these patterns may make it easier to identify personal triggers and explore safer ways to cope with them. Our website (www.harmless.org.uk) offers a range of ideas and resources that many people find useful when trying to reduce or avoid self harm.

SELF-HELP COPING STRATEGIES

Diary

Keep a diary to express yourself and explore some of the thoughts and feelings you experience. Having a place to practise putting your emotions into words can be really helpful. It can also enable you to notice any patterns in your thoughts and feelings, and how these relate to urges to self-harm. Developing an understanding of these patterns can support you in feeling more in control in the future.

Talk to someone

Speaking to someone about how you're feeling can help in several ways. Sharing your thoughts may lessen the intensity of strong emotions, and it can also open the door to care and support. You might choose to talk to a friend or family member, or you may prefer the anonymity of a helpline. Try thinking of someone you feel safe talking to, or someone who may be able to help.

Try the 10 minute rule

This can be a useful technique. When you notice an urge to self harm becoming stronger, try postponing the action for ten minutes (or a shorter time if that feels more manageable). Telling yourself *not* to do it can sometimes intensify the urge, but *postponing* it may feel more achievable. After the time has passed, check in with how you are feeling and decide whether to postpone again. You can continue repeating this process for as long as is helpful.

DISTRACTION TECHNIQUES

If you are feeling...

Anger / Stressed

- Hit a pillow to release some energy
- Put on loud music and sing / shout to express your emotions, especially if the song lyrics relate to what you're feeling angry about
- Do physical activity to release some of the energy (such as running or stamping around)
- On a piece of paper or card, write down why you are feeling that way and then tear it up
- Use lavender oil in a bath or on your pillow. Lavender oil is a scent which can induce feeling calmer
- Clean or tidy to release some energy by moving your body

Disassociated / Spaced Out

- Stamp your feet on the ground. Feel the difference between hard and soft ground beneath your feet
- Have a hot bath, take particular notice of the temperature of the water and the smell of the products you use. Noticing these can bring you back to the present
- Concentrate on your surroundings – describe what you can see and hear around you. Use essential oils (smells) and sounds to focus you
- Touch things warm and cold, smooth and rough. Noticing how these textures feel can bring you back to your surroundings



Inner Pain / Sadness / Loneliness

- Talk to someone – call a friend or a helpline
- Make yourself feel comfortable (use pillows and blankets to comfort you physically)
- Make yourself a hot drink or your favourite food
- Look at photographs of people you love
- Go to a favourite place (attached to a positive or happy memory)
- Watch something on TV that will make you laugh. Laughter often activates parts of the brain that release endorphins, which can reduce sadness

Out of Control / Panicked

- Concentrate on a simple task – this can help to slow your thoughts down
- Write an action plan of things you'd like to achieve and the steps you can take to achieve them
- Gardening and cleaning can help to concentrate on a simple task, and also move your body to release energy
- Take a walk from where you are to a specific place. Take your time, concentrate on your footsteps and try to slow your breathing
- Take a deep breath in through your nose for four seconds. Hold it for four seconds, and then release out of your mouth for four seconds. Notice your stomach rising and falling with each breath





SUPPORT SERVICES

GP

Your GP may be able to offer support for your self harm, and make referrals to appropriate services. If you have a good relationship with your GP, then this might be a good place to start.

Local Mental Health Team

Referrals are usually taken from your GP. Your mental health team may assign you a social worker or psychiatric nurse to provide specialist emotional and practical support, and access to medications.

Counselling Service

There may be a counselling service in your local area or a counsellor may be attached to your GP surgery. Counsellors can provide you with a safe space to talk, support you in establishing goals, and develop approaches to address emotional distress. They can also help you learn skills in coping and communication, and promote positive changes in behaviour that nurture improved mental well-being.

Psychotherapy

There are different forms of psychotherapy and psychotherapists that will be able to help you. Usually you have to speak to your GP first, but they may be able to offer you help over a longer period of time. Therapists will help by working in a similar way to a counsellor, reflecting on the drivers to your self harm and moving towards alternative coping strategies.

SUPPORT FOR SELF HARM

Services like Harmless can offer support and information about self harm and the experiences that may have led you to this point. This can be a helpful place to start if you are feeling unsure about seeking help or are wondering who to turn to. If you would like to talk through your options for getting support, or if you want one-to-one specialist help from people who truly understand self harm, please don't hesitate to contact us.

Try to remember that self harm does not have to be forever. It may feel as though it will always be part of your life – or it might feel frightening to imagine moving forward without it – but everyone at Harmless understands how difficult this can be. We believe there is always hope for things to be different.

TAKING STEPS TOWARDS RECOVERY

Moving forward from self harm can be a challenging process, but recovery is entirely possible. There are many different things that may help you take steps in the right direction, and what matters most is exploring and finding the approaches that feel most helpful for you. You may also discover that different strategies are useful at different times, depending on what is behind or driving the self harm.

This leaflet has been developed by people with both personal and professional experience of self harm, and is intended to introduce some basic ideas that might support you. Try to remember that even if these particular suggestions don't work for you, there are many other ways to begin your recovery. Don't be discouraged, and feel free to contact us to explore how else we can help.



INFORMATION & SUPPORT (UK)

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

0800 1111 (24 hours, ages up to 19 years old)

www.childline.org.uk

Hopeline247

0800 068 41 41

(24 hours, ages up to 35 years old or if you are concerned about someone aged up to 35)

www.papyrus-uk.org

Samaritans

116 123 (Open 24/7 for all ages)

www.samaritans.org



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