

What is self-harm?

Self-harm is when someone intentionally hurts themselves as a way to cope with difficult emotions, overwhelming thoughts, or distress. Common forms include;

- Cutting, scratching, or hitting
- Hair pulling
- Burning
- Taking overdoses or self-poisoning (more serious and potentially life-threatening)

It's not attention-seeking. Self-harm is often a private behaviour and may be used to;

- Regain a sense of control
- Release emotional pain
- Express feelings that the young person can't verbalise
- Punish themselves due to feelings of guilt or shame

Sometimes there's no single cause; it can be due to many pressures building up.

Useful videos:

The following video titles on YouTube may offer useful guidance;

- 'What Can I Do as a Parent of a Child who Self-Harms?'
- 'Self-Harm and Suicidal Thoughts: A Parent and Carer Workshop'



Seeking support:

If self-harm is frequent, increasing, or accompanied by suicidal thoughts, contact the school or seek professional support immediately.

In-school support

- The Pastoral Manager or Head of Year for your child
- Mr Todd (Student Mental Health and Personal Development Lead)
- A member of the school's safeguarding team

When the school is made aware of a student self-harming, a safety plan will be written in conjunction with the student and their parents/carers.

External support

Websites;

- Mindworks (Surrey): www.mindworks-surrey.org
- YoungMinds: www.youngminds.org.uk
- Harmless: www.harmless.org.uk
- SelfharmUK: www.selfharm.co.uk
- Mind: www.mind.org.uk
- CALM (Campaign Against Living Miserably): <https://care.thecalmzone.net/dashboard>

Phone numbers;

- Papyrus HOPELINEUK (for suicide prevention): 0800 068 4141
- CYPS Crisis Line: 0800 915 4644
- NHS 111 (for out-of-hours advice)
- Emergency Services (999) if you believe your child is at immediate risk

Mental Health Support

Leaflet 5



Information to support students if you are concerned that they may be self-harming

Signs to look for:

Some young people go to great lengths to hide self-harm. Be mindful of:

- Unexplained cuts, bruises, or burns
- Wearing long sleeves even in hot weather
- Avoiding PE or changing in front of others
- Increased isolation or mood swings
- Expressions of hopelessness, shame, or worthlessness
- Blood stains or signs of sharp objects being misused

If you notice any of these warning signs, it's important to respond with calm, care, and support - not panic or judgement. Here are some steps you can take:

- Start a gentle, private conversation
Choose a quiet moment to express your concern without making accusations.
- Listen more than you speak. Give your young person space to talk. Avoid trying to immediately 'fix' things.
- Avoid guilt, punishment, or ultimatums. Self-harm is often a coping strategy, not attention-seeking.
- Keep them safe. If needed, reduce access to sharp objects or other tools used to self-harm.
- Look after yourself too!

How to help:

The following strategies could be used to support young people who are self-harming;

Stay calm and open

- Avoid reacting with panic or anger
- Say something like: 'Thank you for telling me. I'm here for you'.

Create a safe space to talk

- Let them talk at their pace, and listen without judgement
- Avoid jumping to solutions right away. A good starting point could be 'I've noticed you've been a bit withdrawn lately - do you want to talk about anything?'

Focus on the feelings, not just the behaviour

- Ask: 'what's making you feel like this?' instead of 'why did you do that?'

Set boundaries without punishment

- Let them know you care and will help them stay safe, but don't threaten or shame

Encourage healthier coping strategies:

- Journaling, art, exercise, talking to someone or using distraction techniques can be helpful

The 'why' question:

It's rarely about 'wanting to die' - it's more often about managing emotional distress.

Possible underlying reasons:

- Mental health issues (for example, depression, anxiety)
- Bullying, peer pressure, or friendship breakdowns
- Identity struggles (such as sexuality or gender)
- Family conflict or breakdown
- Trauma or abuse (both past and/or present)
- Academic stress or perfectionism

Working with school:

The school want to work in partnership with families and offer a compassionate response. We may be able to provide:

- Mental health and well-being sessions
- Regular check-ins with a trusted adult
- A safe space or 'time out' card
- Referrals to external counselling or mental health services
- Support through the safeguarding and pastoral teams

Parents and school staff working together can make a huge difference.