

SELF HARM

A parent's guide to supporting a child who is self-harming



You matter, you are loved,
you are not alone...

SELF HARM - A PARENT'S GUIDE TO SUPPORTING A CHILD WHO IS SELF-HARMING



Many of us struggle to regulate big and difficult feelings and this can lead to us getting overwhelmed and reaching out to express these feelings. Self harm is an unhealthy way we may have learnt to express and deal with difficult emotion.

Remember that often self harm is about trying to learn a way to cope with difficult situations.

You might be feeling a mixture of emotions about finding out your child is self harming – fear, anger, upset, guilt, worry and more. It is normal to feel all of these emotions and be concerned about your child and how to help them. We have put together this guide to support you in supporting your child at this difficult time.

- ✔ Try not to appear shocked when a child discloses to you that they are self harming. They will already be very anxious about sharing this with you, so respond in a calm way, thanking them for sharing. This will likely be very difficult for you, due to your own mix of emotion. If you need to, take a moment for yourself before you respond.

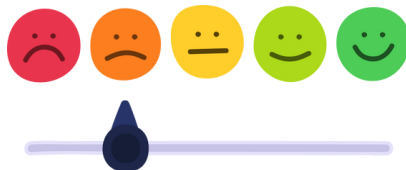


✓ Don't tell them to stop. At present, self harm is the strategy they are using to try and cope. If this is removed from them, without support in replacing the coping strategy with a healthier one, it could escalate a child's emotional state.

✓ Seek support for yourself too - this is a very difficult topic to navigate on your own. Reach out to your own support network - freinds, family, your child's school, Bridge the Gap etc.

Remember getting angry at a child for self-harming can make them feel worse.

We have a FREE online course for parents that explores how we can support a child who is struggling. You can access this by scanning the QR code below - we feel this is helpful and can offer more strategies to support you as a family at home.



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SUPPORTING YOUR CHILD

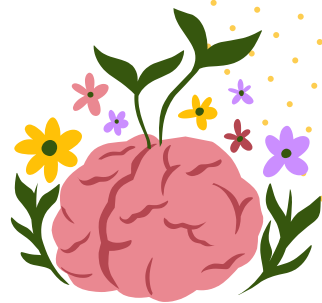
So how might you be able to help?

Two of the biggest things we need for our mental health to feel stable are connection and control. If in doubt, always strip it back to these two things. Think about ways in which your child feels more in control – giving them more choices for example. Think about simple ways to improve your connection with them; spend time doing something together that they enjoy and they can choose. Or simply sit and watch TV together one evening. Be interested in what they are interested in – this is the simplest way you can build that connection with them.

Below are some ideas in how you might want to focus on these two areas.

Power of 10 minutes

This might seem a short amount of time, but when we break down the time we spend with our children – solely with the focus on them, it doesn't amount to that much. Especially as teens! This 10 minutes is a simple way to introduce regular contact time with them, ideally at the same time each day. When the agenda is simply to BE with them.



Feeling in control and feeling connected helps for our own mental health too.

“Connection gives purpose and meaning to our lives and without it there is suffering”

Brene Brown



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Safe 12 touches

To feel connected to one another as humans we use our sense of touch. Increasing this at times of distress is research proven to reduce tension and improve connection. These touches do not need to be huge hugs (though hugs are great too!) but can simply be a straightening of the collar, squeeze of the knee or ruffle of the hair. Not every child likes touch - be aware of this for your child.



Calm Harm is an NHS approved app to help children who have self-harm urges. Please scan the code above to watch a video that explains how to utilise this app.



Young Minds are a national charity supporting children's mental health. Scan the code above to watch a video made with other parents who have supported a child through self-harm.

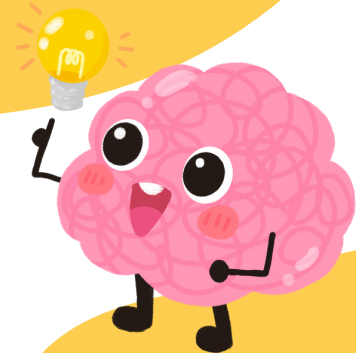


WAYS TO HELP

Having a safety plan in place for when your child is struggling is incredibly important. Complete this with them and share it with people who can help them keep themselves safe. Download a copy of the Bridge the Gap safety plan as a guide from our website.

It might also be helpful to create a relaxation kit of ideas to support too. A mixture of items that make your child feel good such as old photos to look at, bath bombs, notebooks to write in and more. For more idea's of what to add to a relaxation kit, check out our website: www.jwbridgethegap.com

Give your child a copy of the following pages to help them choose some coping strategies that might support them during this difficult time. They're all different, so different strategies will work for different children.



Where to access more help

CalmHarm app - www.calmharm.co.uk
www.kooth.com - online counselling access
www.youngminds.org.uk - online support
SHOUT - 85258 - crisis text service
Samaritans: 116 123 - helpline
Papyrus: 0800 068 41 41
Childline: 0800 1111

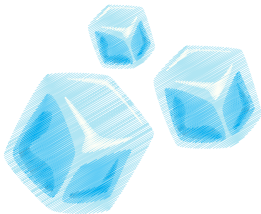
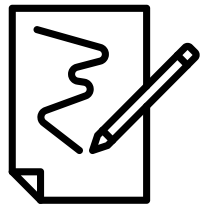
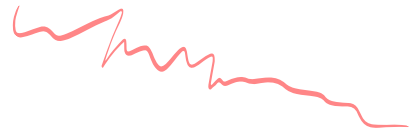
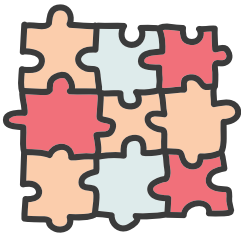
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SELF-HARM REDUCTION

- Holding ice cubes
- Elastic bands around the wrist
- Scribbling on skin with red pen
- Tearing paper
- Slap bands
- Squeezy toys
- Scribbling
- Cold water splashing/running over wrists
- Scent - breathe in essential oils on a ribbon for example



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SELF-HARM SAFETY



- Establish a safety/crisis plan.
- Check that wounds do not need medical attention.
- Ensure they have helpline numbers such as Childline.
- Help them to identify a support network.
- Educate them on the importance of sanitising and not sharing instruments used to self-harm.
- Ensure they know that there is never a safe way to self-harm with poisons.
- Discuss the importance of avoiding alcohol and drugs when self-harming.
- Keep a first aid kit to hand
- Maintain treatment for wounds.
- Be aware of when injury needs immediate medical attention.



CONCERN AROUND SUICIDAL THOUGHTS

Suicidal thoughts and feelings can affect individuals of any age, including children. It's important for all parents to know warning signs and provide support. Here are some signs to be aware of:

1. **Expressing Hopelessness:** Your child might verbalise feelings of worthlessness, hopelessness, or that life is not worth living.
2. **Withdrawal and Isolation:** They may withdraw from friends, family, and activities they once enjoyed. Increased isolation and detachment can be a sign of distress.
3. **Sudden Mood Swings:** Noticeable changes in mood, such as persistent sadness, irritability, anger, or sudden bursts of elation or heightened mood, can indicate underlying emotional struggles. It's essential to assess whether the newfound optimism is genuine or if it masks underlying distress.
4. **Changes in Behaviour or Routine:** Significant changes in sleep patterns, appetite, or academic performance without apparent cause.
5. **Talk of Death or Suicide:** Direct or indirect references to death, dying, or suicide, even in a casual manner, should be taken seriously.
6. **Giving Away Possessions:** Your child might start giving away prized possessions or making statements about not needing them anymore.

CONCERN AROUND SUICIDAL THOUGHTS

How to Support Your Child:

1. **Encourage Dialogue:** Foster open and honest communication with the teenager. Encourage them to express their thoughts and feelings without judgment or criticism.
2. **Seek Professional Help:** Encourage your child to speak with a mental health professional, such as a G.P, therapist or counsellor, who can provide appropriate support and treatment.
3. **Stay Connected:** Maintain regular communication and involvement in your child's life. Be present and attentive to their needs and experiences.
4. **Establish Safety Measures:** Implement safety measures to reduce access to potential means of self-harm and create a supportive environment that encourages help-seeking behaviour.

Accessing Help:

- **Emergency Services:** In case of immediate danger or crisis, call emergency services or take your child to the nearest accident and emergency.
- **National Suicide Prevention Lifeline:** lines are open every day from 6 pm until midnight, offering a safe haven for anyone who needs someone to talk to 0800 689 5652.
- **Crisis Text Line:** Text SHOUT to 85258.
- **Consult a Mental Health Professional:** Reach out to a mental health professional or your G.P. for guidance and support.



