

What is self-harm?

Self-harm is a general term for when someone purposefully causes harm to themselves. This can include causing harm through alcohol and drug misuse, putting themselves at risk in dangerous situations and neglecting their personal and physical needs.

The most recognised form of self-harm is self-injury. **Self-injury** is when someone purposefully causes injury to their body, usually without wanting to end their life.

People may self-injure by:

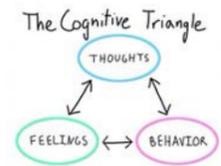
- Cutting
- Burning
- Biting
- Scratching
- Bruising
- Pinching

Why do people self-harm?

- To **cope with and express intense feelings** – sadness, anxiety, shame, disgust, anger, grief, emptiness
- To **relieve emotional tension** and pain
- To **communicate** to others that they need support
- To **escape** from or forget something
- To **punish** themselves
- As an **alternative** to or to **prevent** suicide

What causes and keeps self-harm going?

Some people self-harm because they have low self-esteem and have very negative and critical beliefs about themselves. Self-harm may also be linked to depression, a stressful life event, and past experiences. Self-harm can also become a coping habit that is difficult to break.



What can help?

Get to know your self-harm

It can be really helpful to learn about what triggers you to self-harm. To do this you could:

⇒ Keep a **self-harm diary**

In your diary, keep a record of:

- ⇒ **When** you self-harmed
- ⇒ **What was happening** just before you self-harmed
- ⇒ **Specific thoughts** you had
- ⇒ **How you felt** before, during and after self-harming

Notice your thought patterns

Those who self-harm tend to have **negative and self-critical thought patterns**. The first step to changing your thought patterns is **noticing them**. To practice this you could:

- ⇒ Use thought records
- ⇒ Keep a journal
- ⇒ Identify which thought patterns you notice in yourself

Once you can notice your negative thought patterns, you can learn to **challenge** them.

Coping Strategies

Coping strategies can help you when you are trying to **stop** or **reduce** your self-harm.

Strategies include:

- ⇒ Using self-harm **alternatives**
- ⇒ Self-care and distraction activities
- ⇒ Grounding Techniques
- ⇒ Muscle Relaxation
- ⇒ Guided Meditation
- ⇒ Make your own “What I will say to myself” cards
- ⇒ Make a self-care box with a few items you can turn to for comfort