

Self harm –

Looking beyond the  
scars to the real hurt



**Barnardo's**

CYMRU

RHOI'R DYFODOL YN ÔL I'N PLANT  
GIVING CHILDREN BACK THEIR FUTURE

## Worried about self harm?

Self harm is a general term used to describe someone deliberately injuring themselves. People can self harm in a range of ways including:

- **cutting**
- **swallowing harmful substances**
- **banging parts of the body**
- **burning**
- **bone breaking**
- **scouring**
- **poisoning**
- **scratching/picking**
- **wound interference**
- **hair pulling**

Barnardo's believes that self harm is a way of coping with or expressing unbearable feelings. When we work with young people who self harm we always try and help them develop other ways to cope, but we know that for some young people this can take a long time. Our support to a young person who continues to self harm may include giving practical advice on keeping safe and reducing harm.

Here are some things you may want to think about if you or someone you know is self harming.

### If you are self harming...

- **Try and understand why you self harm** – try and learn as much as you can about why you self harm. Some people keep notes of what is going on in their lives when they feel the need to harm themselves. Others find it helpful to talk through why they self harm with a person they trust. Understanding why you self harm can be the first step towards finding a way to stop.
- **Finding other ways to cope** – you might find it easier to stop self harming if you can learn new ways to deal with unbearable feelings. Everyone is different, so finding a new coping strategy that works for you might take time. The organisations listed in the pack can offer advice on coping strategies.

- **Deciding to get help** – it is sometimes easier to talk to someone who doesn't know you and has been trained to help. The first person you contact might not be able to give you the support you need; if this happens don't give up, it does matter that you try again. If you don't know who to contact, the organisations listed in this pack can offer information, advice and support on self harm and put you in touch with someone to talk to.
- **Keeping safe** – if you are not able to stop self harming then try and keep safe. Learn about how to avoid infections and how to recognise when you need medical attention. For example, if you are cutting yourself use something clean, preferably sterile which hasn't been used by other people. Be careful not to harm yourself if you have taken drugs or alcohol, as this makes it much harder to stay safe.

*If your life is in danger it is important that you get help as soon as you can.*

### If you know someone who is self harming...

- **Understanding self harm** – self harm affects many young people. It is not attention seeking; people who self harm often take care to hide their injuries and keep their self harm a secret. Self harm is rarely an attempt to commit suicide; it is far more likely to be a way of trying to stay alive and cope with painful feelings.
- **Acknowledge your own feelings about self harm** – it can be very distressing when someone close to you is self harming. You might feel angry, frustrated, confused and unsure about what you can do to help. Try not to deal with your own uncomfortable feelings by panicking or blaming the other person.
- **Keep an open mind** – self harm is a way of coping with or expressing painful feelings. Whilst this can be difficult to understand, someone who is experiencing self harm deserves kindness, compassion and support. Being uncritical of the person who is self harming can make a huge difference.

- **Offer support** – if someone close to you is self harming, you can help by making time to listen, and taking them seriously. You might be able to support them to find new ways of coping, or contact other people who can help. Remember it may be difficult for someone to stop self harming or find alternative coping strategies; be patient.
- **Helping someone to keep safe** – if you feel that someone's life is in danger it is important to get help as soon as you can. It is always best to do this with the person who is self harming. However, if this is not possible, let them know that you had to tell someone and why.
- **Look after yourself** – make sure you get the support you need. Remember that you are not responsible for the self harm and that offering support in a sensitive way is unlikely to make things worse.

Organisations like Barnardo's and the ones listed in this pack offer information, advice and support to young people who self harm and to anyone who is concerned about them.

