

# SELF HARM



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## WHAT IS SELF HARM?

Self harm is a deliberate act of hurt and an intense way of dealing with emotional pain. It's sometimes known as 'cutting' but can be carried out in other ways such as self-poisoning, hitting, burning, scalding and picking skin. However, it's important to focus on how the person is feeling rather than how they do it. Broadly speaking it also includes misusing drugs or alcohol and eating disorders.

## WHY DO PEOPLE SELF HARM?

There are lots of reasons and everyone's experience is different. Examples include:

- ♥ **To communicate feelings of distress because people don't always have the language to explain what's going on**
- ♥ **To release pain and tension**
- ♥ **For punishment because a person believes something is their fault (even though most of the time it isn't)**
- ♥ **For control as sometimes a person feels they don't have control over other things in their life**
- ♥ **To distract from overwhelming feelings**
- ♥ **To cope with an external factor like bullying, exams, abuse, relationship problems or a family breakdown**

It's important to note that someone who self harms doesn't intend to die, rather the opposite and to simply feel alive. In addition, people don't do it to be 'attention seeking' as it's an expression of emotions not attention.

## WHAT CAN SOMEONE DO IF THEY WANT TO STOP?

Understanding patterns of self harm behaviour is a good start. This can involve looking at particular triggers that set off the urge and then find distractions or coping strategies to replace the behaviour. Writing a feelings diary can help as can exercise and getting creative. If in doubt, speak to a trusted adult or go to your GP to find out about local support services.