

worried about self-injury?

*A Young Minds Booklet*



## who is this booklet for?



This booklet aims to help you to understand more about self-injury, and help you find support for yourself or someone you know.

It includes information about:



- ★ What self injury is and why people do it (pages 3-5)
- ★ Thinking about stopping, and getting help (pages 6-14)
- ★ How friends and family can help (pages 15-18)
- ★ Useful addresses and contact numbers (page 19)



## what is self-injury?



Self-injury is a way of dealing with very difficult feelings that build up inside. People deal with these feelings in various ways. Here are some examples:

Cutting or burning themselves, bruising themselves, taking an overdose of tablets, pulling hair, or picking skin.

Some people think that the seriousness of the problem can be measured by how bad the injury is. This is not the case - a person who hurts themselves a bit can be feeling just as bad as someone who hurts themselves a lot.

Self-injury can affect anyone. It is a lot more common than people think. Many people hurt themselves secretly for a long time before finding the courage to tell someone.





## why do people do it?



"I think control's a big thing. You can't control what's happening around you, but you can control what you do to yourself."

Everyone has problems in their lives and often people look for help. But sometimes it's hard to cope or even to put feelings into words. If they get bottled up inside, the pressure goes up and up until they feel like they might explode. This is the point where some people injure themselves.

"I didn't think there was any way out of my situation, so I took loads of tablets. I felt so bad I just wanted to die... and I nearly did. Now things are different, and I'm so glad to be alive."



## what makes people so stressed?

There are lots of things:



When a lot of problems come together, they can feel too much. If you're also feeling vulnerable, it's hard to cope as well as you normally do.





## thinking about stopping



There are lots of reasons why you might want to stop injuring yourself, although you might not know what else to do to help you cope. Here are some feelings that you might recognise...

*Embarrassed*  
...in case  
people think  
you're weird

*Depressed*...about  
anything ever  
getting better

*Afraid*...that  
you might  
end up  
dead

**Helpless**...  
you don't  
know what to  
do for the  
best

*Hating  
yourself*...  
for not  
being  
what  
people  
want

**GUILTY**...because  
you can't stop harming  
yourself, even if  
you want to

**Isolated**... you don't  
know who to talk to

**UPSET**...you  
can't keep your  
feelings in...or may  
be you can't let  
them out

*Worried*...  
in case people  
think you're 'just  
attention-seeking'

*Out of control*...you  
might not know why  
you hurt yourself  
and wonder if you're  
going mad

**SCARED**...  
because you  
don't know why  
you do it...  
it's getting  
worse

"It helps a lot when I can be with someone I trust. I need people to understand me, support me. I need to be treated normally - just like anyone else. Not like a mad person. I'm not mad. I've just got problems because of what happened in my past. Something happens - and suddenly all the memories and feelings come back."

When self-injury becomes a way of coping with stress it is a sign that there are problems that need sorting out. Help or support may be needed from family, friends, or others.



## helping yourself

If you have worries that make you want to injure yourself, you might want help to change. This section is about what you can do to help yourself.

### *thinking about why you do it*

Lots of people don't know why they harm themselves and it can be scary to become aware of how you feel and why. Stopping self-injury is easier if you can find other ways of coping. To do this, you'll first need to have a clear idea of why you do it. Many people find it useful to talk to someone who is trained to help.

Here are some questions that may be helpful for you to think about:

- ✧ What was happening when you first began to feel like injuring yourself?
- ✧ What seems to trigger the feeling now?
- ✧ Are you always at a certain place or with a particular person?
- ✧ Do you have frightening memories or thoughts and feel you can't tell anyone?
- ✧ Is there anything else that makes you want to hurt yourself?

### *what helps you not hurt yourself?*

What helps you to cope when you feel upset? Some people find it helpful to be with a friend, talk to someone they trust or make a phone call. Others find it helps to do something they enjoy, listen to music or write feelings down in a diary.

What helps you?





## deciding to get help

Sometimes, however hard you try to stop injuring yourself on your own, you can't.

"The feeling of wanting to hurt myself would build up. I could put off doing it for a while but I couldn't last forever. I knew I had to get help."

If you feel like this, it probably means that you need to talk to someone you can trust. This needs to be someone who will listen to you, talk about how you feel and give practical help. There could be a real risk that you could harm yourself permanently or perhaps even die.

If you feel your life is in danger it is very important to get help. You can make an emergency appointment to see your doctor.



"Cutting myself is such a private thing. I find it hard to talk to other people about how I feel. They don't understand. They think I'm seeking attention - that's the last thing I want."

*who can you trust to listen?*

Brother  
 Aunt  
 Sister  
 Social worker  
 Friend's parent or carer  
 Youth worker  
 Uncle  
 parent or carer  
 School nurse  
 Grandparent  
 Doctor  
 Friend  
 Teacher







When you have thought of someone to talk to, it helps to be prepared:

1. Where and when would you tell them?
2. Would you tell them face to face, by phone, by letter, by email or text?
3. What would you say?
4. You could practice by saying it out loud, somewhere you feel safe
5. Picture how the person might respond if you told them



Think of a way to look after yourself if they respond in a way which isn't what you'd hoped. Remember, the first person you contact might not be able to help. This may not be their fault - or yours. Don't give up - it does matter that you try again.



*what if you can't talk to someone you know?*

If there is no-one you feel you can trust at the moment, you could try a telephone helpline. They can make you feel more relaxed and able to speak than you might think - and it's up to you when you finish the conversation.

It's sometimes easier to talk to someone trained to help, who doesn't know you.

There are a lot of places that offer advice and help. Some addresses are given at the end of this booklet. You could contact a youth counselling service (Youth Access, page 19, can tell you which one is nearest to you).

Your doctor or school nurse should be able to advise you about what support is available locally. They could refer you to someone who has experience of helping people who self-injure.





"What helped was having someone to talk to who was reliable and didn't rush me. I haven't done anything to myself for ages now. Sometimes I feel like it, but I don't need to do it any more, and the feeling goes."

The person you see will want to help - and won't think you are stupid, mad or wasting their time. The service is confidential (they should explain what this means and also the rare times when they will have to tell someone else) - no-one else will know what you've talked about. They are used to talking to people who have all sorts of worries, even if you're not sure what to say.

Although it can take a lot of courage and determination, it's important to keep trying. You will find the right person to help you in the end.



## friends and family - how you can help

"Cutting was always a very secret thing... You feel so ashamed, so bad about yourself. You feel no one will ever understand."

If you are worried about someone who is self-injuring and want to help, this section tells you some things you can do.

Friends and family have a really important part to play.

You can help by:

- ✓ Noticing that someone is self-injuring
- ✓ Offering to listen and support
- ✓ Getting help when it's needed







It may be difficult to understand why someone injures themselves. You may feel shocked, angry or even guilty. It can also be hard to know how to help.

Here are some suggestions:

- ✓ Keep an open mind - don't judge or jump to conclusions
- ✓ Make time to listen and take them seriously
- ✓ Help them to find their own way of managing their problems
- ✓ Help them work out who else can help
- ✓ Offer to go with them to tell someone, or offer to tell someone for them
- ✓ Carry on with the ordinary activities you do together
- ✗ Don't be offended if they don't want to handle things your way
- ✗ Don't tease them - respect their feelings
- ✓ Support any positive steps they take



*what to do if the situation looks dangerous*

"She made me swear I wouldn't tell anyone. I knew if I did she would have hated my guts. On the other hand, if I didn't, she could have died and I would have felt it was my fault. I did tell someone, but she wouldn't speak to me after."

Someone may tell you that they are hurting themselves and ask you to keep it a secret. This can put you in a very difficult situation. Of course it's important to respect their wish for privacy. But if you think their life is in danger it is important to get help as soon as you can.

You may be able to work out together who would be the best person to tell. If not, try and let them know that you had to tell someone, and why.





## remember that your feelings matter too



- ✓ Look after yourself - make sure you get the support you need
- ✓ Remember - even those trained to work with people who self-injure need support, so it's ok if you do too
- ✓ Try to carry on with your other activities and relationships
- ✓ You don't have to be available for them all the time
- ✓ If they hurt themselves it is their responsibility, not yours, even if they say it is



## useful addresses and contact numbers

### The Samaritans

08457 90 90 90 (24 hours)  
 Republic of Ireland 1850 60 90 90  
 Textphone: 08457 90 91 92  
 email: [jo@samaritans.org](mailto:jo@samaritans.org)  
[www.samaritans.org](http://www.samaritans.org)  
 or write to Chris, PO Box 90 90, Stirling FK8 2SA  
 Confidential 24 hour emotional support service for any person in distress, crisis or at risk of suicide

### Youth Access

1 - 2 Taylors Yard  
 67 Alderbrook Road  
 London SW12 8AD  
 020 8772 9900 (Mon-Fri 930am - 1pm and 2-4.30pm)  
 email: [jenny@youthaccess.org.uk](mailto:jenny@youthaccess.org.uk)  
 Provides details of local free and confidential counselling for young people aged 11-25 throughout the UK

### ChildLine

Freepost 1111  
 London N1 0BR  
 Freephone 0800 1111 (24 hours)  
[www.childline.org.uk](http://www.childline.org.uk)  
 ChildLine is the UK's 24 hour helpline for children and young people with any problem. Lines can be busy but please keep trying

### Mindinfo Line

08457 660163 (Mon - Fri 9.15am - 5.15pm)  
 email: [info@mind.org.uk](mailto:info@mind.org.uk) [www.mind.org.uk](http://www.mind.org.uk)  
 Provides local and national contact, support and information on all mental health issues. Also provides booklets and factsheets

### National Self Harm Network

PO Box 7264  
 Nottingham NG1 6WJ  
[www.nshn.co.uk](http://www.nshn.co.uk)  
 This service can provide information and support to people who self harm

### The Young People & Self-Harm Information Resource Website

[www.selfharm.org.uk](http://www.selfharm.org.uk)  
 Provides information on a wide range of activities and initiatives that relate to young people and self harm

### Youth 2 Youth

020 8896 3675 (Mon & Thu 6.30pm - 9.30pm)  
 email: [help@youth2youth.co.uk](mailto:help@youth2youth.co.uk)  
[www.youth2youth.co.uk](http://www.youth2youth.co.uk)  
 Helpline service for young people by young people via phone, email and on-line chat (under 19)

### Careline

020 8514 1177 (Mon - Fri 10am - 4pm, 7pm - 10pm)  
 National confidential crisis telephone counselling for children, young people and adults. Careline can refer callers to other organisations and support groups throughout the country

produced by YoungMinds, registered charity no. 1016968  
artwork: W. Grimby; reprinted 2003; © YoungMinds 2003

We  
would like to thank  
42nd Street for permission to  
use quotes from their book 'Who's  
hurting who?'. The book is available  
from 42nd Street, 2nd Floor, Swan  
Building, 20 Swan Street, Manchester  
M4 5JW. 0161 832 0170.

We would also like to thank  
everyone who commented  
on drafts of this  
booklet.



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