



Parents' Information: **Self-harm**



Self-harm can take many different forms but the most common ways young people hurt themselves are:

- cutting
- burning
- non-lethal overdoses
- scratching or picking at wounds
- banging, pinching or biting
- risk taking behaviours.

Why are they doing it?

There are a wide range of reasons why people turn to self-harm and every single case is different. Some common themes are:

- to take control of something in their lives
- as a release or to communicate feelings
- to feel physical rather than emotional pain
- to punish themselves
- they don't feel they have anywhere else to turn.

Beginning to understand some of the reasons that young people harm themselves is an important first step to being able to offer meaningful support.

What can I do to help?

The most important thing you can do is to listen. Try to create opportunities where your son or daughter can talk to you openly and try to respond calmly to anything they do choose to share with you. Discuss practical ways you can help; even simple things like a lift to school can often make a lot of difference and help your son or daughter understand that you're on their side. The other thing you can do is to remind your child that you care about them and you want to help. It's likely that their self-esteem is very low at the moment and they may believe that nobody cares about them. Reminding them in words or finding ways to show you care through your actions can help your child to begin to feel a little better about themselves.

What other help is available?

Never feel that you have to face these issues alone; help is available through your child's school or GP. There are also some excellent sources of information available online. Sites including www.youngminds.org.uk and www.selfharm.co.uk offer valuable support and advice to young people and their parents. **Childline (0800 1111)** and the **Samaritans (08457 909090)** are available 24/7 365 days a year and they can offer support to your child – or to you – on a wide range of issues. Make sure you look after yourself as well as your child. Identify someone you can talk to in order to help safeguard your own wellbeing.

Why can't I just tell my son or daughter to stop?

Whilst it's upsetting to know that your child is intentionally harming themselves, it's important to support them to manage their behaviour over a period of time. As self-harm is a coping mechanism, suddenly removing it can cause someone to turn to more extreme measures – or simply to adopt a new coping mechanism such as an eating disorder or misuse of drugs or alcohol. You can reduce the risk your child is causing to themselves by ensuring they have access to first aid supplies and understand how to manage wounds and infections. They also need to know that they can talk to you if they need more help with an injury and that they will be treated confidentially by A&E should the need arise.