

MY FRIEND SELF-HARMS

SUPPORT & INFORMATION

A guide for the friends of those who self-harm

What is this leaflet about?

This leaflet is for people who have found out that their friend is self-harming or they suspect they are. This leaflet can help you answer:



- What is self-harm?
- How can I support my friend?
- Is what I'm feeling normal?
- What can I do to support myself?

What is self-harm?

Self-harm is a behaviour that is done to intentionally cause harm to the self. There are many different forms of self-harm. The most common are cutting and overdose, but it can take other forms too.

Overdose
Cutting
Drinking
Poisoning
Punching
Insertion

Binding **Rubbing** **Burning**
Bruising **Sleep-deprivation**
Overeating **Bone-breaking**
Pinching **Undereating**
Scratching

This is not an exhaustive list. It is important to know that the severity of the self-harm does not reflect the severity of the feelings behind it.

It is estimated that about one in ten young people will disclose that they have self-harmed at some point.



Sometimes the person who self-harms may never come forward, or may hide it for a long time.

People self-harm for a range of reasons. For example, they might...

- feel...** alone, worthless, ugly, overwhelmed, misunderstood, nothing
- want to...** communicate emotional pain, connect to others, feel something, get care, regain control
- be...** stressed, unhappy, having relationship or family problems

Some might not know why they self-harm, they just know it helps



How can I support my friend?

"My friend self-harms!"

Your friend may already have told you that they self-harm or you may suspect it. If they do confide in you, be calm and listen to what they have to say. Ask where they want to go from here and what you can do to best support them.

If you think your friend might be self-harming and want to discuss it with them, be gentle when you talk to them: you could say, "I've noticed that you're struggling, do you want to talk about it?" Tell them your concerns and explain why you think they might need help. Some may find this a relief and will want to discuss what they're going through with you. Others won't want to engage in the discussion, in this case make it clear that if they need to talk you are there for them.

"I want to help them stop"

As self-harm is often used as a coping mechanism, stopping self-harming can be difficult and can take a long time. Try to avoid putting demands on their self-harm, or refusing to help if they self-harm again. Doing so may mean they withdraw or lie about the self-harm. Remember, it is not your responsibility to stop them self-harming. Your only responsibility is to be a friend.

"I don't know how to support my friend without supporting the behaviour."

Their self-harm may upset you, and that is understandable, and okay. However, acknowledging and accepting that it is their decision to self-harm will make them feel more comfortable when talking to you. Try to show understanding by listening to what they have to say and avoid judging the self-harm behaviour.

"I can't understand why they self-harm, their life is great!"

For many self-harm is a coping strategy for dealing with strong emotions. It may be hard for you to understand their reasons, but it is important to acknowledge that this is how they are feeling.

"I think my friend needs help!"

You might find that your friend does not want to seek help. This is their choice and you cannot force them to do so. What you can do, is be clear with them about your concerns and explain why you think they need help. If you are very worried about your friend's safety, it is okay to ask for help from someone else (see sources of support).

Try to do normal activities with your friend

Try to keep doing the normal things you and your friend have always done. This will help to show your friend that they don't just have to get support from you, but they can also have fun and enjoy themselves. It may take time for you to feel comfortable with this, but it may help maintain your friendship.

Let them go at their own pace

You may feel like you want them to tell you exactly how they're feeling, and get them to stop self-harming, and this is normal. Be aware that this may be the first time they've spoken to anyone about their self-harm. It is important to let them go at their own pace, and not push them to talk or change their behaviour. This may take time, and it's normal that you may find this difficult.



Heath, Gavin & Rodham (2015)

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Is What I'm feeling normal?

Useless Guilty Shockful Exhausted
Helpful Sad Lonely Concerned
Helpless Worthless Isolated
Angry Burdened
Confused Responsible
Anxious Scared

You might feel like you are the only one supporting your friend

You might feel so worried for your friend that you think you always have to be there for them. It is important to remember that you don't have to support your friend alone and it is a good idea to make sure that you have trusted people to whom you can turn to for support, this is not a betrayal of their trust.

You might not feel able to talk to anyone

Your friend may have asked you to keep their self-harm a secret, or you may feel that it's not something you should talk about with others. You may feel that it would be a breach of their trust to talk to others. Remember, if you feel it is getting too much, it is okay to break a friend's confidence and get help for yourself.

Your friend shares different things with different people

Hearing that your friend has told different people different stories can leave you feeling annoyed, betrayed, confused or angry. These are all normal feelings. However, try to remember that your friend may still be learning how to talk about their self-harm, particularly if it is something they've kept hidden for a long time. This may mean that they tell different people different stories.

You feel unable to talk about your own issues

Finding out that your friend self-harms may make you feel that you can't talk to them about your problems. If you feel comfortable in doing so, sharing your feelings may show your friend that they are not alone and others have difficulties as well. They may even be able to help. If you don't feel comfortable, talk to those you feel can support you.

You might doubt whether what you are doing is right

You may feel like you want to help, but don't know how. Just being someone who will listen to them can help a lot. It can be a good idea to ask your friend about what they want. If you are worried, then you can talk to those who can give you practical advice about supporting a friend, such as a counsellor.

What can I do to help myself?

Be aware of your own wellbeing

It is normal to feel overwhelmed when supporting your friend. If you're starting to struggle or are finding it difficult to cope, talk to someone you trust (e.g. other friends, family, teachers, support lines, counsellors)

Be aware of your limits

You may feel that you should always be available to your friend, and this is normal. However, it is important to know what support you feel you can provide. Be clear about when you are and are not available. This will help you to create time to look after yourself. In looking after your own wellbeing you are also more able to provide meaningful and consistent support to your friend.

Make some time for yourself

When you provide support for someone else, it is important that you make some time for yourself. This may feel counter-intuitive but it is also important that you make time for yourself. Keep doing activities that you enjoy doing. By caring for yourself you are also in a better position to support your friend.

Seeking support

There is nothing wrong in wanting support for yourself. If you do decide to seek help, focus on what support you want. If you want some more advice about self-harm, consider talking to services for self-harm, or look at online help pages. If you want someone to talk to and to vent at, consider contacting listening lines. If you feel overwhelmed or want advice about coping with your situation, consider contacting counsellors.

And finally, you can only do so much to help your friend. It is not your responsibility to stop them self-harming.

Sources of support

Support Services

Self-Injury Support

A national service providing information, and support via text, phone, and email.
www.selfinjury.support.org.uk
0800 800 8088

Self-Harm UK

A site dedicated to young people affected by self-harm with information, support, and personal stories.
www.selfharm.co.uk

Samaritans

A confidential listening service
www.samaritans.org
08457 90 90 90

Self-harm information

LifeSigns

User-led site providing information and leaflets about self-harm
www.lifesigns.org.uk/

National Self-Harm Network

Online support forum providing crisis support, information, and resources
www.nshn.co.uk/

Mental health advice

Young Minds

Online information & support for issues affecting young people
www.youngminds.org.uk/

Get Connected

A support service and helpline for young people providing information on a range of issues
www.getconnected.org.uk

Mind

A charity providing mental health information & support
www.mind.org.uk

Youth Access UK

Directory of support services across the UK
www.youthaccess.org.uk

