

'THE SILENT SCREAM'



Self-harm

**Guidance for young people, parents and
school staff**

**L Darlow
September 2012**

What is self-harm?

Self-harm describes a wide range of things people deliberately do to themselves that appear to be harmful but usually does not kill them.

These include:

- cutting or burning themselves
- hitting themselves
- hitting walls or other hard objects
- taking overdoses

Sometimes self-harm is called self-injury.

Who self-harms?

Self-harm by young people is not unusual. It is often hidden because it is done in private or because people are ashamed or afraid. Both male and female self-harm. Princess Diana, when she was under periods of distress, cut both her arms and legs.

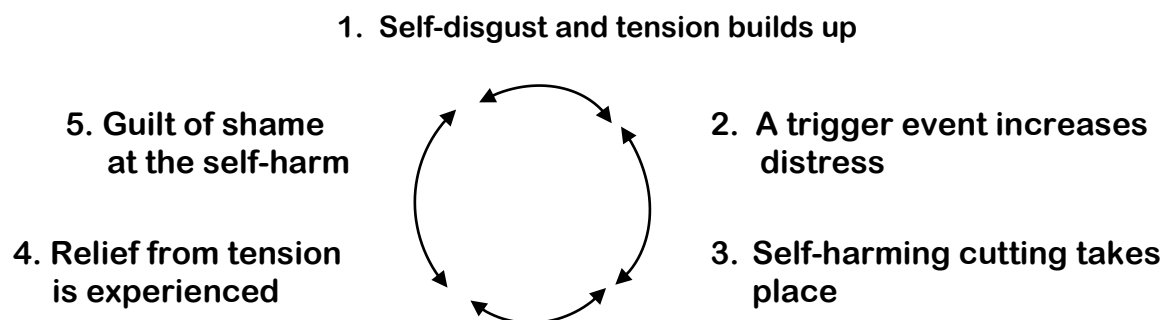
Why self-harm?

Self-harm is about a lack of self-esteem and even self-hatred. Acts of self-harm are a sign of distress. This distress may be caused by bullying, frequent changes of home, lack of parental emotional warmth and physical contact, hospitalisation and surgery before the age of 5, end of a romantic relationship, bereavement, anxiety, depression, being abused or family breakdown but can involve many other problems that young people face in their everyday lives.

Self-harm is not attention seeking behaviour. Someone recently said, 'if it was attention I wanted, I would take off my clothes and walk down the street!'

Self-harm is often a way of coping. Young people who self-harm sometimes describe it as giving them relief from overwhelming feelings and pressure. They may feel it helps to prevent them attempting suicide.

What is the cycle of self-harm?



A trigger event may be something which provokes a particular feeling or memory or may be something which increases the sense of low self-esteem or self-loathing. If a young person wishes to change their behaviour and find other ways of coping it is possible to interpret the cycle of self-harm.

How can you help someone who has harmed themselves?

First, make sure they are safe. Don't panic. Give them something to treat their injury such as a plaster or bandage, or help them by treating it yourself.

If it is serious, or something you cannot assess, such as an overdose, call the emergency services. If this injury is not life threatening aim for advice from NHS Direct on 0845 4647.

Second, listen and try to understand why the person is doing it. Don't jump to judgements. Don't accuse them of attention seeking. Don't make the situation worse by being angry.

Offer but don't force help

Remember self-harm may be a way of coping, so stopping the self-harm is not always the best thing to aim for immediately. Safety and understanding are more important in the short term.

How to cope with the scars?

Living with scars can be difficult. Young people may worry about other people's responses to their scars. It is up to them how much and to whom they speak about their scars. If they don't want to talk about it, then they assertively need to say so. They might make up a funny story how they got them. Scars can show strength – 'I coped, I'm still here'. The regular use of bio-oil can reduce the appearance of scars.

Further information

@Ease

Website: www.rethink.org/at-ease

Telephone: 0207 330 9100/0207 330 9101 – Monday to Friday 10am-3pm

E-mail: advice@rethink.org.uk

Bristol Crisis Service For Woman

Website: www.users.zetnet.co.uk/bcsw

Telephone: 0117 925 1119 (helpline) – Friday and Saturday 9pm-12.30am

LifeSIGNS

Website: www.lifesigns.org.uk

National Self-harm Network

Website: www.nshn.co.uk

E-mail: nshncg@hotmail.co.uk

Orchard Lodge Young Peoples Unit

Telephone: 0800 132 737

Self-harm

Website: www.selfharm.org.uk

Young Women's Centre (Self-harm Project)

Telephone: 01382 228555 (self-harm helpline) – Monday to Friday 10am-4pm

Wednesday and Friday open until 7pm

How to break the cycle of self-harm?

Remember different things work for different people

Do something relaxing	Try to think of other ways of expressing your feelings	Talk it out	Get involved in an activity	Set up a contact circle
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <input type="checkbox"/> Have a bath <input type="checkbox"/> Listen to music <input type="checkbox"/> Listen to a relaxation tape <input type="checkbox"/> Make your own relaxation tape and take control <input type="checkbox"/> Join a yoga class <input type="checkbox"/> Breathe slowly and deeply (concentrate on breathing out) Imagine breathing out all your problems and breathing in peace. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <input type="checkbox"/> Watch a weepy video <input type="checkbox"/> Punch or kick a pillow <input type="checkbox"/> Tear up newspapers <input type="checkbox"/> Shout or scream <input type="checkbox"/> Write your feelings in a diary/journal <input type="checkbox"/> Paint how you feel <input type="checkbox"/> Draw a picture of the wound you want to create <input type="checkbox"/> Draw (in water-soluble red pen) on the parts you'd like to cut <input type="checkbox"/> Bite into a piece of ginger root or an unpeeled lemon <input type="checkbox"/> Put your fingers in frozen food (like ice cream) <input type="checkbox"/> Squeeze ice cubes tightly in your hands <input type="checkbox"/> Flick yourself with an elastic band <input type="checkbox"/> Cut a piece of material with a razor or scissors 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <input type="checkbox"/> Phone a friend <input type="checkbox"/> Phone a stranger helpline e.g. The Samaritans <input type="checkbox"/> Talk face to face with others e.g. youth worker, teacher, friend, family member <input type="checkbox"/> Join a self-help group <input type="checkbox"/> Meet regularly with a counsellor/mentor <div style="background-color: #333; color: white; padding: 5px; text-align: center;"> Try physical exertion in moderation </div> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <input type="checkbox"/> Swimming <input type="checkbox"/> Games where something is hit e.g. join a tennis or badminton club 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <input type="checkbox"/> Computer games <input type="checkbox"/> Craft activities <input type="checkbox"/> Charity work <input type="checkbox"/> Clubs <input type="checkbox"/> Sports groups <input type="checkbox"/> Do things with friends <div style="background-color: #333; color: white; padding: 5px; text-align: center;"> Feel loved (if you feel comfortable with physical contact) </div> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <input type="checkbox"/> Ask for hugs from family and friends <input type="checkbox"/> Hug your pet <input type="checkbox"/> Hug cuddly toys <input type="checkbox"/> Smile at other people 	<p>This is a list of telephone numbers of people who are willing to listen arranged in a circle. When you feel distressed phone each number in turn until you find someone who is in and has time to listen</p>