

Deliberate Self-harm & Suicide Prevention

Factsheet



What is self-harm?

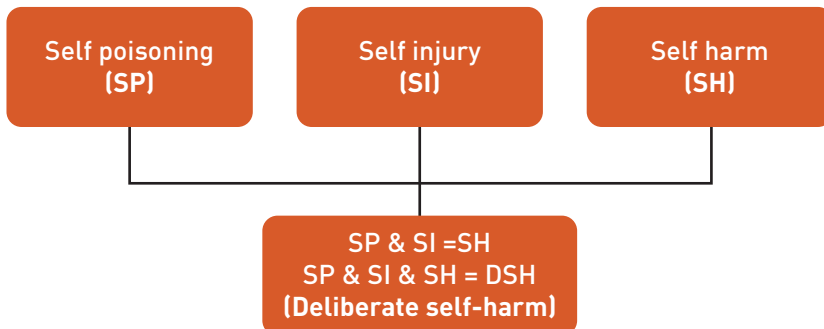
Self-harm is a complex subject encompassing many different forms of behaviour but basically it is a means of coping with intense emotional distress or pain by the infliction of injury to one's own body.

It can affect anybody at any time in life but studies have shown that it is more prevalent among young people.

Self-harm is most common in children over the age of 11 and increases in frequency with age. It is uncommon in very young children although there is evidence of children as young as five trying to harm themselves.

Self-harm is more common amongst girls and young women than amongst boys and young men. Studies indicate that, amongst young people over 13 years of age, approximately three times as many females as males harm themselves.

Self-harm acts



Self-poisoning (SP)

- Overdosing on prescribed or non-prescribed drugs
- Swallowing toxic substances
- Harm imminent

Intent unclear

- Suicide attempt
- Cry for help?
- Temporary escape from overwhelming emotions?

Childhood experiences linked to self-harm

- Sexual, physical and/or emotional abuse
- Neglect and deprivation (physical and emotional)
- Loss of a parent (through death or separation)



- Parental illness or alcoholism
- Severe lack of communication in the home (particularly about feelings, problems and needs)
- Chronic childhood illness or disability

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Self-injury (SI)

External	Internal
<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Cutting• Burning• Scalding• Skin-picking• Hair-pulling• Self-hitting• Self-biting• Harm immediate and imminent	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Inserting objects into vagina or anus (non-sexual intent)• Harm immediate and imminent
Intent clear	
<ul style="list-style-type: none">• To counteract - suicidal feelings• To calm - relieve overwhelming emotional turmoil• To castigate - self-punish• To control - anger and rage, and episodes of dissociation (e.g., feeling disconnected)• To communicate - what cannot be expressed in words	

Self-harm (SH)

Examples	
<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Smoking• Alcohol misuse• Drug misuse• Food misuse• Promiscuity	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Prostitution• Excessive risk taking• Overworking• Gambling• Harmful long-term
Intent unclear	
Individual may be oblivious to or in denial of the long-term harmful effects.	

Life experiences which may underlie self-harm

People who injure themselves have often suffered (and sometimes continue to endure) extremely traumatic or stressful life experiences and circumstances.

Life experiences linked to self-harm

- High expectations
- Bullying & rejection
- Racial harassment or oppression
- Fear, shame or oppression about sexuality

Adult experiences linked to self-harm include

- Abuse by partner
- Rape or sexual assault
- Lack of support
- Loss of a child or infertility
- Loss of a partner (death or relationship breakdown)
- Suffering serious illness
- Institutionalisation prison / hospital
- Unemployed / no money
- Homelessness or poor housing
- Being alone with a baby or young children or other caring responsibilities
- Involvement in prostitution or sex work

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Suicidal behaviour?

Suicidality	The overarching term relating to risks, thoughts, intention and behaviour.
Suicide	The act of ending your life intentionally.
Para suicide	Attempt that does not result in death and may be the use suicide methods to self-harm or injure.
Suicide ideation	Thinking about or planning either suicide or attempted suicide.

Possible reasons for suicide

- Suffering from depression or other mental illness
- Life changing events (e.g. bereavement, bullying, split from partner)
- Someone close to them has taken their own lives
- Using illegal drugs or drinking heavily
- Life changing experiences
- Financial difficulties
- Onset of retirement
- Physical and debilitating illness
- Advancing Age
- Unemployment

Risk factors associated with suicidal thoughts

- Previous attempt
- Low socio economic status
- Previous psychiatric treatment
- Certain professions
- Low social support
- Significant life events, loss or break-up
- Institutionalised e.g. prison or care
- Unhappy change in circumstance
- Painful illness
- Family history
- Abuse
- Living in isolation
- Self harm incident

What is suicide?

It's the act of ending your life intentionally



Methods of suicide

- Drug overdose
- Hanging
- Bleeding
- Drowning
- Suffocation
- Electrocutation
- Jumping
- Firearms
- Vehicular
- Impact
- Poisoning
- Immolation
- Starvation
- Explosion

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Determining Risk

Historical	Previous attempts, overdose, trauma, family or friends suicide.
Personal	Mental illness, PD, physical illness, depression, disassociation.
Dynamic	Things happening now that increase risk, relationship break down, substance misuse, shame/ humiliation, court, family contact.
Triggers	Things know to precipitate risk, alcohol, arguments, anger, being let down.

Protective factors

- High self-esteem
- Social connectedness - supportive family and friends
- Good history of coping and problem solving skills
- Sense of hopefulness, reasons for living and optimism
- Perceptions of positive health and participation in sporting activity
- Access and involvement in health treatments
- Limited access to means
- Regular future talk
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How to respond

- Just listen - validate, normalise and acknowledge
- Elicit hope, optimism and confidence

“Suicidal thinking is a normal response by normal people to an abnormal set of circumstances”

Henden, 2008

Self harm resources

National Inquiry

www.selfharmUK.org

Child line

www.childline.org.uk

Mind

www.mind.org.uk

National Children's Bureau

www.ncb.org.uk

National Self-Harm Network

www.nshn.co.uk

Young Minds

www.youngminds.org.uk/professionals

www.youngminds.org.uk/parents

www.youngminds.org.uk/young people

General resources

GP surgeries

NHS Direct

0845 4647

www.nhsdirect.nhs.uk

Child line

0800 1111

Samaritans

08457 909090

Parent line Plus

0808 800 2222

Sane line (mental health problems)

08457 678 000