



What is self-harm?

- > Self-harming is a behaviour and not a mental illness.
- > Self-harm is when someone deliberately hurts or mutilates their body without meaning to die (although death may still occur).
- > Self-harm often begins in teenage years and can be a way of communicating or coping with distress.
- > Not all people who self harm are suicidal.
- > There are many reasons why someone may self harm including a cry for help, a way of coping with stress, a symptom of a mental illness like depression, and/or it may show someone is thinking of suicide.

TALK

What to look for

There are many different types of behaviours that can be considered self-harming. These include:

> **Self-cutting:**

eg cutting of upper arms/wrists/thighs

> **Self poisoning:**

eg swallowing excessive amounts of prescribed or illegal drugs

> **Self-burning:**

eg using cigarettes or lighters to burn the skin

There are other behaviours that are not formally considered to be self-harming behaviours but are "risk taking" behaviours that can lead to personal harm. Some examples are train surfing, driving cars at high speed, illegal drug use, or repetitive unsafe sexual practices whilst knowing of safe sex practices.

What can you do if you self harm?

Try to talk to someone about it. Telling a trusted adult can help to make sure you are safe and that you get medical assistance if you need it. If you repeatedly self harm it is best to get some psychological treatment

The best way to help someone you know that is self harming is to encourage and support them to seek professional help.

(counselling). One aim of counselling is to help you to feel better and find safer and more helpful ways of coping. If you are having suicidal thoughts you should see a professional or call your local hospital or a help line (such as Kids help line on 1800 55 1800 or Lifeline on 13 111 14)

Counselling usually involves helping to increase problem solving, communication and coping skills. Sometimes this can take time so it's best to keep at counselling even if you think its not helping the first couple of times. Sometimes it can be difficult to accept counselling after self harming

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because you might be feeling guilty, angry, and/or ashamed. Trying to be open to counselling or support can assist you to feeling less overwhelmed and stressed in the long run. If you are not finding counselling helpful it is important to let your counsellor know, that way you may decide to change the goals or approach or even arrange to see a different counsellor.



What causes self-harm?

In most instances when someone self-harms it is an attempt to relieve, control or express distressing feelings. People self harm for different reasons and sometimes it can be difficult to put the reasons into words. Some people who self harm may not know other ways of telling people about their emotional pain, and some may feel a sense of control over pain when they self harm.

Research suggest some people are more at risk of self harming and they include people who have experienced emotional, physical or sexual abuse, or stressful and highly critical family environments, and young people who suffer from a mental illness, such as depression.

How can you help a young person who self harms?

Some people just stop self harming, others can continue in a fairly safe way and others can place themselves at risk of dying. The best way to help someone you know that is self harming is to encourage and support them to seek professional help. Try to help the young person feel safe to discuss the self harm. Try to remain calm and maintain an open attitude recognising the young person may feel ashamed of their actions.

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It is important not to be critical or get angry when discussing these issues.

It is important that you ask the young person whether he/she feels suicidal. Call your local hospital or mental health service if you think the young person is suicidal, to get professional help.

Initial treatment involves dealing with any immediate medical complications of self-harm, if present. Call an ambulance (000) or take the person to the accident and emergency department of the local hospital if the person needs urgent medical attention.

Supporting someone who self harms can be a stressful experience so getting support for yourself is also recommended.

Advice and Referral

If you are working with a young person who is repeatedly self-harming and you are not sure what to do, it is always best to contact someone with experience in this field and discuss the situation with them. It is also important you assess the young person's risk and if the young person is suicidal you need to call your local hospital or mental health service. Remember that someone's risk does not always stay the same so it is best to check regularly. Call an ambulance (000) if the young person requires urgent medical attention. If a young person refuses referral for further support it is important that workers explain the boundaries of their relationship with their client and the limits of confidentiality. If the young person continues to be at risk and requires more than the worker feels capable of providing, referral should be considered, with or without the young person's consent.

Services at Orygen Youth Health - Clinical Program (OYH-CP) **www.oyh.org.au**

Orygen Youth Health Clinical program is able to assist some young people (15-24) with anxiety disorders who live in Western or Northwestern Metropolitan Melbourne.

To make a referral or get some advice contact the **OYH-CP** Triage worker on 1800 888 320 or via the paging service on 03 9483 4556.

For children and teenagers under 15 years of age living in Western or Northwestern Metropolitan Melbourne contact RCH Mental Health Service on 1800 445 511.

For further information regarding mental health and information in other languages visit:

- > **www.betterhealth.vic.gov.au**
 - > **www.sane.org.au**
 - > **www.healthinsite.gov.au**
 - > **www.ybblue.com.au**
 - > **www.beyondblue.org.au**
 - > **www.reachout.com.au**
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