



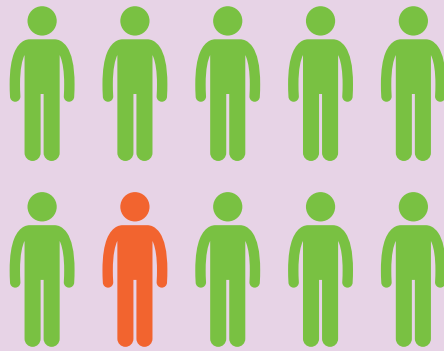
headspace
National Youth Mental Health Foundation

Self harm



What is self harm?

Self harm refers to people deliberately hurting their bodies. Common types of self harm among young people include cutting (e.g. cutting the skin on arms, wrists or thighs), burning the skin, picking at wounds or scars, self-hitting, or deliberately overdosing on medication, drugs or other substances that cause harm.



About

10%

of adolescents say they have self harmed at some point in their lives¹.

For some young people self harm is a one-off event, but for others it becomes a repeated behaviour that can be hard to change.

Why do people self harm?

Most self harm is in response to intense emotional pain or a sense of being overwhelmed by negative feelings, thoughts or memories.

For some young people it may seem there is no other way of dealing with what is going on, or expressing what they are feeling. Self harm may offer temporary relief but it does not help a person to overcome a problem over time.



Some people are more likely to self harm than others, including those who have experienced emotional, physical or sexual abuse or have a mental health problem such as depression. It is usually a build up of negative, stressful life events rather than one event that triggers self harm in young people.



Self harm and suicide



There is an overlap between self harm and thinking about suicide however not everyone who self harms is suicidal. Sometimes people do very risky things and accidentally die or seriously injure themselves as a result of their self harm.

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What can you do if you self harm?

It is important to know that there is support available if you are self harming. Seeking help when problems begin to develop is really important and a good first step is telling a trusted family member, friend or teacher what you are going through.



How can I help a young person who self harms?

The best way to help someone is to provide support and encourage them to ask for professional help.

Be as open with the person as possible and try to make them feel safe to discuss their feelings. Remain calm while recognising they might feel ashamed of their actions and worry about your judgements. Do not try to make ultimatums or force the person to stop, this could make things worse.

Ask the person directly if they are considering suicide and call your local hospital or mental health service if you think they are. Call 000 or take the person to the emergency department of the local hospital if they need urgent medical attention.



Supporting someone who self harms can be a stressful experience so consider if you need to get some advice or support for yourself.

Not ready to talk to someone you know?

You can contact **eheadspace** to talk to a counsellor online or on the phone, talk to your general practitioner (GP) or call a helpline for confidential support (e.g. Lifeline 13 11 14 or Kids Helpline 1800 55 1800).

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If you need immediate medical attention, call 000.



There are health professionals at **headspace** centres who can provide counselling to help you develop effective coping skills to deal with your problems, so that you don't have to rely on self harming.



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For more information, to find your nearest headspace centre or for online and telephone support, visit headspace.org.au

References: Moran B., Coffey C., Romaniuk H. et al. (2012). The natural history of self-harm from adolescence to young adulthood: a population-based cohort study. *Lancet*, 379(9812): p. 236-243

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