

SANE

FACTSHEET

SELF-HARM

QUICK FACTS

- Self-harm means any behaviour which involves the deliberate causing of pain or injury to oneself — usually as a way of trying to cope with distressing or painful feelings.

WHY DO PEOPLE HARM THEMSELVES?

Self-harm is often a response to feelings of extreme psychological distress or emotional pain. It may provide short-term relief from these feelings, but it doesn't allow the person to learn other ways of responding to the challenging emotions.

While people who self-harm may not intend to end their lives, the consequences of this behaviour can be serious, and it needs careful assessment and care by a health professional.

HOW DO YOU GET HELP IF YOU SELF-HARM?

Self-harm is often a sign that the person needs support. It is very important to see a GP or other health professional for an assessment and diagnosis, and to discuss a treatment plan. Treating the underlying causes will help make a long-term difference to reducing and stopping the impulse to self-harm.

Treatment is likely to involve seeing a psychologist who is an expert in this area, and will know how to best help the person, as well as help them to help themselves.

It's a good idea to prepare for seeing a doctor by talking to a trusted person about the self-harming behaviour. This might be a family member or friend, or a suitable person at school or work. It's also helpful to request a longer appointment, so there is time to talk, and take along some simple notes – for example, detailing how long the self-harming has been going on, and any other feelings or events which may be associated with it.

Because self-harming behaviour is risky and possibly life-threatening, do not hesitate to call emergency services on 000 if necessary.

Related: [How to help in a crisis](#)

ARE THERE ALTERNATIVES TO SELF-HARM?

It can be hard for people who self-harm to stop it by themselves. That's why it's important to talk to someone and see a doctor. It can help to try alternatives to self-harm which can relieve distress in the short term. These include:

- **Delay:** for example, put it off until you have spoken to someone
- **Distract:** for example, go for walk, play a game
- **Divert:** for example, find an activity which has a similar effect to self-harm, but without causing injury, such as punching a pillow, drawing on arm instead of cutting, squeezing an icecube
- **Deep breathing:** or other relaxation method

These are not solutions to self-harm but can be useful as short-term alternatives while receiving treatment, and should be discussed with the treating doctor or psychologist.

HOW DO I HELP SOMEONE WHO SELF-HARMS?

People who self-harm may be secretive or feel ashamed about their behaviour. It helps to talk calmly and non-judgmentally about your concerns.

- Encourage the person to see a doctor or other health professional about the self-harming
- Suggest options for getting help, rather than directing the person what to do
- Do not hesitate to call emergency services on 000 if you think the person is at risk of serious injury
- Remember that you cannot stop someone from self-harming and it is not your responsibility when they do. You can only do your best to encourage them to get help

GETTING SUPPORT

If you need to speak with someone now, contact:

- [Kids Helpline](#) - 1800 55 1800
- [Lifeline](#) - 13 11 14
- [Suicide Callback Service](#) - 1300 659 467
- [SANE Counselling Services](#) - 1800 18 SANE (7263)

Call 000 for urgent medical attention or in an emergency.