

## Think about other things;

When you feel anxious or upset, doing something you enjoy or trying to think about other things can be a way to help you stop hurting yourself. You could try:

- Phoning a friend
- Writing down your feelings in a diary
- Listening to music, drawing or reading
- Going for a walk or a run, dancing, exercising or playing sport
- Counting down slowly from 10 to 0
- Breathing slowly, in through the nose and out through the mouth
- Focusing on objects around you and thinking about what they look, sound, smell, taste and feel like.

## If you still want to hurt yourself try:

- Finding a safe punching bag like some pillows
- Putting your hands into a bowl of ice cubes for a short time or rubbing ice on the part of your body you feel like injuring.
- Using a red felt tip marker or lipstick to mark your body instead of cutting
- Putting a rubber band around your wrist and flicking it
- Putting sticking plasters on the parts of your body you want to harm



## It can be hard to stop:

Self-harm can be really hard to stop. It may take time and there are likely to be ups and downs along the way. Sometimes, however hard you try on your own, you just can't cope with your feelings. If you can't stop wanting to hurt yourself its best to get help from someone you can trust. This means finding someone who you can talk to about your problems and who can give you practical help.

### USEFUL CONTACTS / HELPFUL ORGANIZATIONS

SAMARITANS – 24 hour confidential phone line for people who are in despair and need someone to talk to.  
Tel: 1850 60 90 90 email: Jo@samaritans.org

AWARE (DEPRESSION AWARENESS) – operates a helpline service, providing a listening ear for people in distress and their families. (10am-10pm) Tel: 1890 303 302

CHILDLINE – offers 24 hour support for children and young people in distress. Tel: 1800 66 66 66

BODYWHYS – Bodywhys offers support, information and understanding for people with eating disorders, their families and friends.  
Tel: 1890 200 444 email: alex@bodywhys.ie

*Developed by the  
Regional Suicide Resource Office  
of the  
Health Service Executive - South  
Supported by the  
National Office for Suicide Prevention*

*Ref No. 10-06-0051*

*This leaflet was adapted from information from the  
National Children's Bureau (U.K.)*

# Deliberate Self Harm



Information for  
Young People



Feidhmeannacht na Seirbhíse Sláinte  
Health Service Executive

## What is self-harm?

Self-harm is when someone deliberately hurts or injures him or herself. This can take a number of forms including:

- Cutting
- Taking overdoses of medicines or tablets
- Punching oneself
- Throwing their bodies against something
- Pulling out hair or eyelashes
- Scratching, picking or tearing at one's skin causing sores and scarring
- Burning
- Inhaling or sniffing harmful substances
- Driving dangerously
- Excessive use and abuse of alcohol and/or drugs

Some young people self-harm on a regular basis while others do it just once or a few times. For some people it is part of coping with a specific problem and they stop once the problem is resolved. Other people self-harm for years whenever certain kinds of pressures or feelings arise.

A few people who self-harm may go on to complete a suicide, generally this is not what they intend to do. In fact, self-harm can be seen as the 'opposite' of suicide as it is often a way of coping with life rather than of giving up on it.

Self-harm is often also referred to by other names such as deliberate self-harm, attempted suicide, para-suicide, self-mutilation and self-injury.

## Why do Young People harm themselves?

Young people who self-harm have often had very difficult or painful experiences or relationships. These may include:

- Bullying or discrimination
- Losing someone close to them such as a parent, brother, sister or friend
- Lack of love and affection or neglect by parents or carer's
- Physical or sexual abuse
- A serious illness that affects the way they feel about themselves.

Other young people may start to self-harm as a way of dealing with the problems and pressures of everyday life. Pressure can come from family, school and peer groups to conform or to perform well (e.g. getting good exam results). Young people can be made to feel angry, frustrated or bad about themselves if they cannot live up to other people's expectations.

Young people who self-harm may have low self esteem. For some this may be linked to poor body image, eating disorders, or drug misuse. Understanding why young people self-harm involves knowing as much as possible about their lives and lifestyles.

Peer pressures may occasionally be a cause for self-harm. Young people may find themselves among friends or other groups who self-harm and may be encouraged or pressurised to do the same.

## Reasons young people have given for self-harming include:

- When the level of emotional pressure becomes too high it acts as a safety valve—a way of reliving the tension
- Cutting makes the blood take away the bad feelings
- Pain can make someone feel more alive when feeling numb or dead inside
- Punishing oneself relieves feelings of shame or guilt
- When its too difficult to talk to anyone, it's a form of communication about unhappiness — a way of acknowledging the need for help
- Self-harm gives a sense of control when other parts of life may not.

## Understanding why you do it

Stopping is easier if you can find other ways of expressing or coping with your feelings. To do this, you need to understand what makes you do it. It may be useful to think about

- What was going on in your life when you first began to harm yourself
- How you feel just before you want to harm yourself
- Whether you would find it useful to keep a 'mood' diary, writing down your feelings at different times
- Whether you are always in the same place or with a particular person
- If you have any bad memories or thoughts that you can't tell anyone

