

Myths and facts about cutting and self-harm

Because cutting and other means of self-harm tend to be taboo subjects, the people around you—and possibly even you—may harbor serious misconceptions about your motivations and state of mind. Don't let these myths get in the way of getting help, or helping someone you care about.

Myth

People who self-harm are trying to get attention.

Fact

The truth is that people who self-harm generally do so in secret. They aren't trying to manipulate others or draw attention to themselves. In fact, shame and fear can make it very difficult to come forward and ask for help.

Myth

If the wounds aren't bad, it's not that serious. If the wounds are minor, there's nothing to worry about.

Fact

The severity of a person's wounds has very little to do with how much he or she may be suffering. Don't assume that because the wounds or injuries are minor, there's nothing to worry about.

Myth

People who self-injure are crazy and/or dangerous.

Fact

Self-harmers usually do not want to die. When they self-harm, they are not trying to kill themselves—they are trying to cope with their pain. In fact, self-harm may be a way of helping themselves go on living. However, in the long-term, people who self-harm have a much higher risk of suicide, which is why it's so important to seek help.

Delaying self-harm

- When you feel the urge to self-harm, try putting it off for 5 minutes, then increase it to a 6 minute delay the next time, then 7 minutes etc.
- Try putting the items you would self-harm with in a difficult to access safe place or in a box with sellotape around it. It gives you time to think about self-harming.



References

Cutting and self-harm: Helpguide.org
Self harm : Royal College of Psychiatrists
Young Minds

Further reading

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How do I stop hurting myself?



Alternatives to self-harm and distraction techniques

What is self-harm?

'Self-harm, or self-injury, describes a wide range of things people deliberately do to themselves that appear to be harmful but usually do not kill them. Self-harm is not usually a failed attempt at suicide, but it can still be very hard for parents or carers.

Cutting the arms or the back of the legs with a razor or knife is the most common form of self-harm, but self-harm can take many forms, including burning, biting, hitting or taking overdoses.

A young person may self-harm to help them cope with negative feelings, to feel more in control or to punish themselves. It can be a way of relieving overwhelming feelings that build up inside, when they feel isolated, angry, guilty or desperate.'

Young Minds 2014

Try to work out how you are feeling

Ask yourself 'do I feel angry? Anxious/ what about?'

Talk to someone about your feelings.

Write a letter to someone you're angry or hurt with, saying how you feel (no need to send it)

Write a list of your achievements.

Write a letter to yourself saying 'I love me because...'

*Dear me,
I love me
because
I'm great.*

Comfort yourself



- Have a bath or shower.
- Have an emergency box with whatever helps you cope.
- Buy something special for your self.
- Massage your hands/arms/feet, or the area you want to harm.
- Stroke a pet or cuddle a teddy.
- Paint your nails or get your hair done.
- Try relaxation, meditation or yoga.
- Ask someone you know well to hug you or hug yourself.



Let it out physically

Scream as loud as you can.

Hit a cushion.

Squeeze a stress ball.

Squeeze ice really hard.

Listen to music and dance energetically.

Draw on the place you want to cut with red marker pen or fake blood.

Write words on yourself with a red marker pen.

Chew on ice cubes. Chew on raw ginger.

Place an elastic band around your wrist and ping it when you have the urge to self harm.

Spend some energy—go for a walk, run, walk, or bike ride.



Reward yourself for not self-harming

Keep a chart—add a star for each day/hour you have not self harmed.

If you do self-harm, just leave a space and start again.



Distracting yourself

Watch TV, a DVD or play a computer game

Message or ring a friend.

Meet up with a friend.

Talk to someone about how you feel.

Learn a new skill (juggling, loom bands, sewing, knitting).

Look for pictures in the clouds.

Tidy your room. Have a clear out.

Help out with the household chores.

Try baking a cake or cooking tea.

Think about what you'd like to change about your life and make a plan.

Make a paper chain of the days it's been since you've self-harmed and add a new link every day you don't self harm.

