

# 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.