

Self-harm

NORFOLK
LGBT+
PROJECT

SUPPORT INFORMATION ADVICE

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What is self-harm?

Self-harm is an act of hurting yourself deliberately. Self-harm can impact people of any occupation, age, and gender.

It can take several forms:

- Skin cutting with a blade or razor
- Punching, banging your head, or hitting yourself
- Burning yourself
- Dietary self-punishments such as disordered eating, starving, or bingeing
- Alcohol or drug misuse
- Engaging in risk taking behaviour deliberately or putting yourself in danger on purpose
- Hair pulling
- Self-neglect
- Self-sabotaging scenarios
- Poisoning yourself
- Overdosing

Many people who engage in self-harm do so in more than one way. Someone who self-harms may not be aware that other behaviours they exhibit fall into the same patterns.

Why do people self-harm?

People engage in self-harm for a variety of reasons; some are listed below. Not all self-harm will follow the same patterns or motivations, and the reasons may change alongside life circumstances. Self-harm is usually a tool the person uses to keep their feelings under control, rather than to get a response from people.

- To feel in control.
- To release stress, tension or create focus.
- As a mechanism to cope with traumatic life experiences.
- To feel something other than numbness/dissociation.
- Feelings of self-loathing or self-hatred leading to justification of self-punishment.
- Repeating a past behavioural coping mechanism in new challenging circumstances.
- To push away suicidal or negative thoughts.
- To turn emotional pain into physical pain.
- To communicate/ make visible the mental pain someone is in without verbalising it.
- To calm or self-soothe in extreme distress.
- To feel in charge or in control of what happens to an individual's body.
- As a result of experiencing obsessive thoughts, or compulsions to do so.

To empathise, remember many of us can engage in self-harming behaviours at times of great stress (for example, over-indulging, smoking, or drinking to excess).

“

I self-harmed for years to cope with gender dysphoria. It didn't start when I was a child, as most people assume when they see my scars – I started self-harming as an adult. I hated my body, and I didn't feel in control of it. Self-harming was a visible change to my body that let me see it could change, that time passed and it stopped me doing worse. It's hard to explain, but you're only thinking about the short-term not the long-term, just getting through each day, when you're depressed.

”

“

I struggled with self harm the whole of my teen years as a coping mechanism to deal with how much self hatred I was feeling. It became an extension of my eating disorder where my eating disorder fuelled my self hatred, and the only way I could see to cope with that was by physically hurting myself. I felt like I needed something to physically show the inner turmoil I was feeling, and it ended up becoming a muscle reflex every time I was feeling a negative emotion which made it so hard to stop.

”

Warning signs of self-harm

- Withdrawing and becoming isolated.
- Talking in a self-deprecating manner.
- Wearing long sleeves or trousers in hot weather, refusing to get changed with others, refusing to swim or show parts of their body they were previously okay revealing.
- General absence: taking more time off work, school, or activities.
- Insecurity. Needing constant reassurances or feedback
- Neglectful of their appearance, unwashed or unkempt.
- Challenges or trauma in relationships, friendships, or home life.
- Unpredictable or impulsive behaviours.
- Scars, fresh cuts, or wounds.
- Bruises.
- Broken bones.
- Patches of missing hair.
- Depression.
- Out of character mood swings.
- Increased anxiety or agitation.

Talking about self-harm

There are lots of reasons someone may not feel able to talk about having self-harmed.

- They may be afraid of social stigma – that people’s reactions or judgements and think that people’s behaviour towards them will change.
- They might not recognise their behaviour as self-harm.
- They may think it’s not bad enough to discuss.
- They see it as helpful and don’t want to lose a coping mechanism.
- They may have concerns that telling a professional could result in interventions they don’t want, or complicate their treatment for other health conditions.
- They may not want to distress people.
- They may feel shame or guilt for self-harming.
- They may have had bad reactions disclosing in the past.
- They don’t want to talk about the emotional pain behind the self-harm.

Any of the above may influence a person’s decision making regarding disclosing self-harm experiences.

If you are self-harming and concerned about any of these, know that your concerns are understandable. There will be things that cause you to worry in talking about self-harm, but there are many benefits of confiding in someone.



It's important to identify who you feel will offer appropriate support. It might be a trusted friend, a family member, a professional, or someone with similar experiences. Some benefits of talking about your self-harm can include:

- Finding out you are not alone. Remember so many forms of self-harming behaviours are easy to conceal – more people than you think are going through similar experiences.
- Gaining support networks or new friendships through recovery.
- Improving your existing relationships through shared trust and honesty.
- Understanding. Talking about your experiences can help those around you understand you better.
- Reducing feelings of shame and the energy put into hiding self-harm can go elsewhere. You may find it easier to relax.
- It can help to see the behaviour as a pattern, and to acknowledge it is happening.
- It might help you grow in confidence to access more resources, support groups, and learn more about why we self-harm.
- By taking the first steps by reaching out for help you are taking control of your self-harming behaviours. You may find it talking about it has positives you don't expect.
- Just by talking about your feelings and experiences you are making a difference in reducing the amount of misunderstanding around the topic for others.



Managing self-harm

With support it is possible to develop new behavioural coping mechanisms and in the long-term, to recover from self-harm. The goal of managing self-harm is not to support self-harm, but to acknowledge that there isn't a quick fix.

Self-harm can be something we justify. We may come up with reasons not to address it, why it is helpful for us, or why it isn't the right time to stop. One of the most important things regarding self-harm management is developing a self-awareness of how, why, and when we self-harm. We may need to acknowledge some difficult things as part of this process, such as acknowledging it is something we struggle with and it's not something we can just give up easily.

It can help to talk about this with a professional, someone you trust, or, if you don't feel able to talk about it yet, start by writing it down.

Managing self-harm is a process that requires a lot of time and effort, but it can change your patterns of behaviour. The process itself can be rewarding. Knowing yourself better can build your self-esteem, your confidence, and you can help support others who feel the same as you do by taking the first step and sharing your experience with someone.

Self-harming is not something to be ashamed of, you may be using this as a coping mechanism but there are other options and support for you.

You are not alone

Self-harming became my silent best friend, it is the only way that I can describe it, I wasn't very good at talking about my feelings or thoughts and when times were tough I self-harmed and felt so much better for it but over time it became tiring and frustrating as I couldn't get out of this vicious cycle. My first step to recovery was acknowledging to myself that self-harming wasn't a negative thing but at the same time I knew that it was not a long-term solution to dealing with things. I found people that I could trust to talk to, people who didn't judge me but listened and treated me as a human being.

People might use self-harm for lots of reasons, but what I would say to other LGBTQ people is that it doesn't have to be your only option. I found it difficult to talk out loud about it at first and found using a text support service really useful. This gave me a little more confidence to then talk out loud about it. It was nice that the person didn't have a really extreme reaction: they acknowledged the feelings I had which led me to self-harm and that was really important. I started to feel less guilty or embarrassed and was able to find alternatives. I still have urges now, but I find I can manage them much better.

So, there was no easy way to talk about self-harming, well not to me. Over time I have slowly come to terms with how I dealt with emotions during my teenage years. It all started when I had a traumatic event which triggered off many negative emotions and pain. During this time, I engaged in different self-harming options. I turned to drugs which overall made me feel better for short periods of time but after that time had worn off, the pain felt worse. I began cutting parts of my body to inflict pain on myself as a release as this was different to the internal pain I was feeling. I've been asked why I chose to self-harm and ultimately the answer that always came out was that I deserved to feel pain. Whereas no one deserves to feel pain, no one deserves to go through traumatic events which lead to this way of coping. There are other options available and talking is always a good one. There might be people who don't understand and it's about finding the right people for you but talking has got me along way now and helped me come to terms with these traumatic events.

How can we support you?

Our aim is to support you the best way we can, we tailor the support that suits your needs.

The Zoom logo, consisting of the word "zoom" in white lowercase letters on a blue rectangular background.

1:1 appointments online



We can arrange a time that suits us both



07526635616



referral@norfolklgbtproject.org.uk



1:1 face to face appointments



Using messenger or Face Time



www.norfolklgbtproject.org.uk

10 Cathedral Street
Norwich
Norfolk
NR1 1LX

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info@norfolklgbtproject.org.uk
www.norfolklgbtproject.org.uk

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