

Understanding that self-harm is not a failed suicide attempt, it is a way of carrying on with life.

Understanding that self-harm is not “just attention-seeking”, but a way of coping with great pain.

Understanding that self-harm is a sign of distress, not madness, and is a sign that someone is trying to cope with life as best as they can.

Understanding that being listened to and being helped to explore feelings may be the best deterrent and help to prevent someone self-harming.

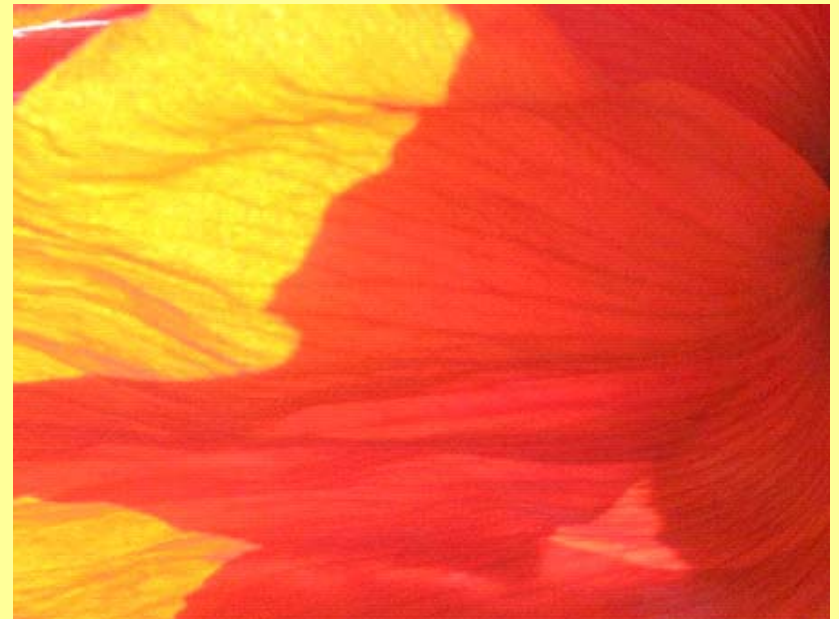
If you are someone who self-harms, talking about your feelings and your life can give clues to the problems you need to work on and the support that you need to do this.

**Practical assistance:** People who self-harm often know how to dress their own wounds and will do so. If this is not the case, and you are in a service area, find a member of staff to assist. Otherwise proper medical attention should be sought.

**Further reading:** “Life After Self-Harm – A guide to the future” by Ulrike Schmidt and Kate Davidson – Brunner-Routledge.

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# THE HAVEN



# ABOUT SELF-HARM

## **SELF-HARM – WHAT IS IT?**

Self harm can take many forms and the most usual is probably cutting. Some people also burn themselves, punch themselves or hit their bodies against something.

Many of us engage in self-harming activities which are not usually seen as such e.g. smoking. Smokers say it helps to cope with stress and that harm is a by-product. Self-harmers say that self-harm is a way of coping with stress and that injury is a by-product. Many people cope with their problems in a way that is risky and harmful to themselves such as alcohol or drug misuse, eating difficulties or overwork. They may do this to numb or distract themselves from problems or feelings they cannot bear to face.

When we speak of self-harm in this information leaflet we are talking about a very direct form of self-injury.

## **SELF-HARM – WHO DOES IT?**

Dr. Crowe, Crisis Resolution Unit, Bethlem Maudsley Hospital reports 1 in 200, that is .5% of the population.

Local research with people who have a personality disorder diagnosis has shown:

88% have engaged in self-harm  
54% were female and 34% were male  
Cutting 64%  
Other types of self-harm 48%

## **SELF-HARM – WHAT CAUSES IT?**

There are powerful reasons why people self-harm and it is usually a way of coping with great emotional pain. Self-harm has been linked to unresolved trauma and someone may have suffered painful experiences, in childhood or adulthood, like neglect, abuse or great loss. They may have been criticised and silenced, rather than supported and allowed to express their needs and feelings. Some who self-injure come from chaotic or violent families or have experienced emotional or physical cruelty.

Self-harm can help to release unbearable tension which may be caused by anxiety, grief or anger. It puts the pain outside where it feels easier to cope with. It can relieve feelings of guilt or shame, or make someone feel real and alive, or more in control, and it can be a way of showing that someone has suffered great pain.

## **SELF-HARM – WHAT DOESN'T HELP?**

Self-harm is sometimes a secret shame and those who self-injure do not always disclose this fact. If self-harm is evident, being judged and told that one is attention seeking can be particularly unhelpful. To say self-harm is attention seeking is to say that person is not worthy of attention. It is dismissive.

## **SELF-HARM – WHAT CAN HELP?**

Understanding that someone who self-harms is not a danger to others but is directing hurt and anger against themselves.