

Self-Harm

Condition:

Children who self-harm are not necessarily mentally ill, but rather are usually experiencing extreme distress which may be as a result of abuse, depression, relationship problems, bereavement, family breakdown or other difficulties.

Self-harm is most common among young people. They often feel that by self-harming they have a sense of control over that part of their lives. Alternatively it can be a release of emotion or even a 'punishment' for feelings of guilt.

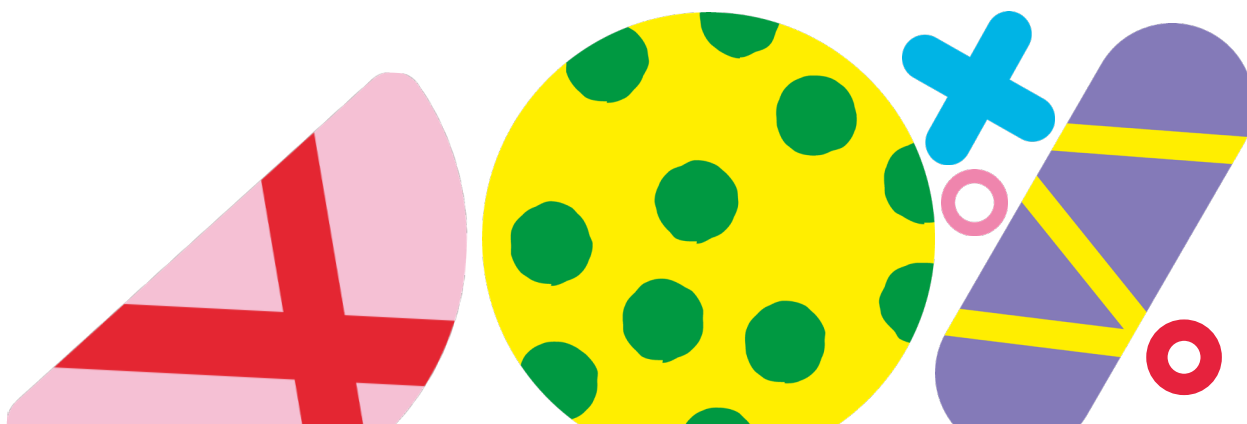
Self-harming can occur in a wide range of ways, but cutting (using a sharp blade or razor to cut lines onto the arm, hand, leg or other parts of the body) is a common example. Burning the skin with a lit cigarette is another example.

Problem Areas:

- In some cases the signs of self-harm are hidden so it can be hard to spot.
- The range of reasons for a young person self-harming can be wide and complex.
- It may be linked to other mental health issues.

Support strategies for your Group:

- It is possible that you will be the first person to be aware that a child or young person is self-harming. Be sensitive and do not highlight the issue in front of the rest of the group.
- When you do discuss this with the child/young person, remember to have another adult with you (or at least in visual range). This is good practice at all times but especially with a vulnerable child or young person. Make sure that both of you are people that the child/young person trusts and feels comfortable with.
- Allow the young person to talk about how they feel. Take them seriously, listen attentively, don't allow yourself to be distracted, and respect their feelings.
- Be honest about your feelings, but try to react in a clear and calm way. Explain that their behaviour upsets you but that you want to help.
- Never criticise or blame a young person for self-harming. This may make them feel even more alone and increase feelings of shame and guilt.





- Don't ask them to promise never to self-harm again. Some young people will continue to self-harm over a long period of time.
- Encourage the young person to seek help for the underlying cause of their self-harming.
- In many cases it is important to keep knowledge of the young persons self-harming confidential so that they feel they can trust you and keep you informed. However if you believe that the young person is in serious danger, is being abused, or could take their own life, then follow your safeguarding policy or contact ThirtyOne:Eight for advice.

Further information:

Youthscape
ThirtyOne:Eight

www.selfharm.co.uk
<https://thirtyoneeight.org>

'Invited to Belong' has been developed in partnership between Urban Saints and Youthscape.



Youthscape

www.urbansaints.org/invitedtobelong