

Self-Harm

Introducing the Topic:

- Self-harm is a topic that evokes strong feelings and attitudes among young people and also adults. While many of us are sympathetic towards those who self-harm we may find it difficult to empathise and understand why young people choose to harm themselves.
- Yet it is not uncommon, with estimates suggesting that between 1 in 12 and 1 in 15 young people self-harm in UK.
- Many of us feel ill equipped to respond or support friends who may be self-harming and young people directly affected are afraid or unsure of where to get help and support. They may be ashamed or embarrassed by their behavior and try and keep their self-harming hidden from others as long as they can.
- These activities have been developed by young people who have personal experience of self-harm. They want their peers and their teachers to be better informed, to have increased empathy towards young people who may be self-harming and to have a better idea of how they can support or signpost young people who are self-harming.
- In view of the sensitivity of this topic and the likelihood that there may be young people in the class who are affected directly or indirectly by self-harm it is wise to agree ground rules for the session which establish confidentiality but discourage personal disclosures during the session. Young people should also be encouraged to refrain from expressing very discriminatory views and try and keep a more open mind. There should also be acknowledgement that this may raise personal issues for some young people and it is helpful to suggest who they can approach to discuss individual concerns that arise from the session.

Definition of Self-Harm:

- Self-harm describes a range of things that people do to themselves in a deliberate and usually hidden way. It can go on for a long time without being discovered and can involve:
 - cutting or scratching
 - burning
 - scalding
 - hitting or breaking bones
 - hair pulling
 - swallowing toxic substances or objects.

Although some very young children and some adults are known to self-harm and it often continues from childhood into adulthood, the majority of people who self-harm are aged between 11 and 25 years.

Why do young people self-harm?

Self-harm is a symptom of underlying mental or emotional distress. Young people who self-harm mainly do so because they find it helps relieve distressing feelings and helps them cope with problems in their lives. It is rarely about trying to end their life.

A wide range of factors may be involved. Very often there are multiple triggers, or daily stresses, rather than one significant change or event.

Factors can include:

- feeling isolated
- academic pressures
- suicide or self-harm by someone close to the young person
- family problems, including parental separation or divorce
- being bullied
- low self-esteem.

But self-harm is not a good way of dealing with such problems. It provides only temporary relief and does not deal with the underlying issues.

References:

<http://www.nshn.co.uk>

National Self harm network information and a moderated online forum

<http://www.mentalhealth.org.uk/publications/truth-self-harm>

Good downloadable leaflet

[http://www.youngminds.org.uk /](http://www.youngminds.org.uk/)

Excellent website with good information, personal stories and factsheets

<http://www.thesite.org/healthandwellbeing/mentalhealth/selfharm>

Lots of really good information and moderated online forums

<http://www.selfinjurysupport.org.uk/tess-text-and-email-support-service>

Confidential text/email service for girls and young women

<http://www.thecalmzone.net>

Offers information and a helpline and text service to young men

http://www.youngminds.org.uk/for_children_young_people/whats_worrying_you/self-harm/what_self-harm

Young Minds is a trusted source of information on all aspects of mental health including Self-harm