

## Common Myths and Misconceptions

**Self harm is attempted suicide - all people who self harm are suicidal - WRONG!**

People often associate self harm with attempted suicide, however this is rarely the case. Self harm is a coping mechanism and its function is predominantly to prevent suicide rather than being a suicide attempt.

**Self harm is just attention seeking - WRONG!**

Self harm is often seen as a cry for help, a ploy to gain attention or as manipulation. However, more often than not self harm is a very private and hidden behaviour that does not involve anyone else. Many people take great care to hide their injuries or scars through shame, embarrassment or fear. Individuals who do let people know about their self harm may do this as they feel they have no other way to communicate how they are feeling - self harm for these individuals may be a cry for help.

**Self harm is the problem - if we stop this then the person will be fine - WRONG!**

Self harm is rarely the problem, but a solution until other issues are resolved. It is the reasons that lay behind the individual's self harm that needs to be addressed in order to aid a recovery for self harm.

**They must like the pain - WRONG!**

It's not about liking pain. It's a way to cope with thoughts and feelings and to regain control of how you feel. A lot of the time, people who self harm don't actually feel any pain due to adrenaline, instead they feel release.

## Helpful Stuff!

[www.thesite.org](http://www.thesite.org) - website targeted at young adults offering support, information and advice

[www.nshn.co.uk](http://www.nshn.co.uk) - National Self Harm Network (Helpline 08006226000) Support, empowerment and education around the subject of self harm.

[www.firstsigns.org.uk](http://www.firstsigns.org.uk) - FirstSigns Self Injury Guidance and Network Support. Online user lead voluntary organization. Provides information and support for people of all ages.

Childline - 0800 11 11. Confidential support service for children and young people.

CAMHS Outreach Team - Google CAMHS to find local and national statutory clinical services

[www.harmless.org.uk](http://www.harmless.org.uk) - provides support, information, resources and training to friends and families of self harmers.

**ALWAYS DIAL 999 IF YOU ARE SERIOUSLY CONCERNED ABOUT A PERSON'S SAFETY. IT'S BETTER TO BE SAFE THAN REGRET NOT TAKING ACTION LATER**



Created by Wadebridge School using resources from 'SummerHouse'

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**Wadebridge School Pastoral Support**

## Self Harm in Young People

### The Facts

**A Guide to Supporting and Understanding Self Harm**



# What is Self Harm?

'Self harm can take many different forms and as an individual act is hard to define. However in general self harm is the act of deliberately causing harm to oneself either by causing a physical injury, putting oneself in dangerous situations and/or self neglect' (National Self Harm network 2010)

The phrase 'self harm' is used to describe a range of things that people do to themselves in a deliberate and usually hidden way. It can involve:

Cutting, burning, scalding, banging or scratching one's own body, breaking bones, hair pulling, biting, swallowing poisonous substances or objects e.g. bleach, broken glass, and self neglect, to name a few.

## The Facts!



'It is estimated that around 1 in 10 young people in the UK will deliberately try and harm themselves in some way; this suggests that at least 3 people in every secondary school classroom self harm at some point' (www.selfharm.co.uk\_2014)

The UK has one of the highest rates of self harm in Europe, at 400 per 100,000 population (The Mental Health Foundation 2010)

Self harm is not about ending life (suicide), but more about coping with difficult feelings and experiences in life. It can therefore be seen as a way of staying alive. (National MIND 2010)

In 2013 the Independent newspaper reported a rise of 30% in reported incidence of self harm among children and young people.

## What's It All About?

For some young people self harm can serve many important functions. Self harm is primarily a way of coping, and in some cases it may feel like the only way to deal with feelings that are so distressing.

Common reasons given by young people about why they self harm:



**Relief of Feelings** - through hurting themselves, a person may be able to release feelings that feel unbearable when kept inside.

**Distraction** - self harm can help a person cope by providing distraction. The Physical pain of an injury can take the focus away from an emotional pain that feels much worse.

**Self Punishment** - some people may hold feelings of self-hatred or self-blame. When such feelings are very powerful, people may punish themselves through self harm to reduce their guilt.

**Cleansing** - for people who see themselves as dirty, often as a result of abuse, self harm may be a way of symbolically ridding themselves of the contamination they feel.

**Control** - potentially most common - a desire for control. Self harm is a way of regaining control; they control the injuries to their own body. Staking claim to one's own body.

**Communication** - self harm is primarily carried out to regulate feelings rather than to gain a response from others. Some will never show or tell people about their injuries. However, in some cases it may be used as a form of communication if something is too hard to talk about.

**Comfort and Nurturing** - self harm can be experienced as calming and comforting. This can come from the release of tension, but also it provides an opportunity to seek care and nurture from others.

**Making one's body unattractive** - some people may harm their own bodies in a bid to make themselves unattractive to other people; keeping them away. This often happens if someone has been abused sexually.

**Feeling real or alive** - sometimes people's life experiences leave them feeling numb, dead inside or unreal. Hurting one's self is a way of breaking through these feelings and actually experiencing something that makes them feel alive again.

As you can see a person who self harms may have a complex reason as to why they do it.

## How We Help?

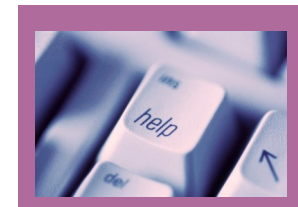
Here at Wadebridge School we have our Pastoral Support Partners who are fully trained and experienced in dealing with self harm and the issues around it.

We have clear links with the CAMHS (Child and Adolescent Mental Health Service) team and with the charity MIND. Our school counsellor is also on hand to offer support.

When it is brought to our attention that a student is potentially self harming we have an effective intervention programme that we put in place. We offer support, guidance and sign posting, and the young persons safety and wellbeing is always at the forefront of our practice.

## How Can You Help?

- \*Open up methods of communication - make yourself approachable. Give them the option to come and talk to you if they want to.
  - \*Learn as much as possible about self harm.
  - \*Try to be understanding and non judgmental.
  - \*Show them that you care.
  - \*Be positive; try to focus on the good, their strengths etc.
  - \*Stay calm - don't 'freak out' or get angry. It won't help.
  - \*Offer ideas for distraction. Talk about things not related to self harm - watch a film together, go for a walk.
  - \*Get help with dealing with and understanding self harm.
- Also get support for your own emotions. CAMHS, GP and Counselling services can help.



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