

Knowing someone close who self-harms

When you first discover someone close to you has been self-harming, you may feel a mixture of anger, shock, guilt, worry and sadness. This is understandable. Don't panic or over-react.

You can help someone who self-harms by:

- Being supportive and getting practical help for the injury if needed.
- Staying calm and in control of your own feelings.
- Educating yourself about self-harm.
- Letting the person know that you understand they are suffering pain and distress, even if you do not know why.
- Treating them with respect and not judging them (they are more than their self-harm acts!).
- Encouraging them to begin to focus on the triggers for their self-harm and the underlying problems behind it rather than focusing on the behaviour or injury itself.

Accessing helpful services

If you are thinking about self-harm or suicide you can take the following steps:

1. Go to the Emergency Department in the nearest General Hospital.
2. Contact your GP.
www.icgp.ie or in the Golden Pages.
3. Contact a psychologist (01) 472 0105 or www.psihq.ie or a psychotherapist (01) 902 3819 or www.psychotherapy-ireland.com

Useful Contacts/Helpful Organisations

- **Samaritans** 1 850 609 090
www.dublinsamaritans.ie
- **Pieta House** (01) 601 0000
www.pieta.ie
- **SOS** 1 890 577 577
www.suicideorsurvive.ie
- **Teenline** 1 800 833 634
www.teenline.ie

Further resources and electronic versions of this and other leaflets are available at www.svhf.ie/clinical-psychology-service.html



Self-Harm Reach Out and Get Help!

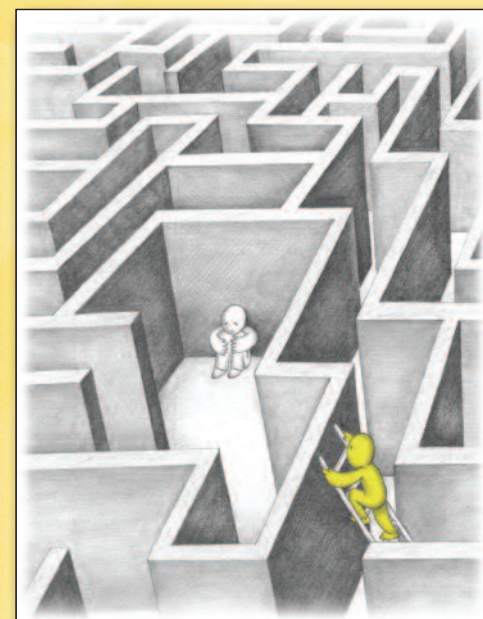


Illustration by Alan O'Reagan

What is self-harm

- Self-harm is a term used when someone injures or harms themselves on purpose.
- It is a coping mechanism that enables a person to deal with intense emotional distress.
- It often provides short-term relief. **The underlying emotional issues remain.**

Self-harm can take many forms:

- Cutting/burning/hitting.
- Pulling hair or picking skin.
- Eating or drinking dangerous substances.

What it is not:

- Attention seeking. Most people actually try to hide their injuries.
- A failed suicide attempt. Many people who self-harm see it as a way of staying alive. Sometimes people who self-harm do not know whether they were trying to injure themselves or attempt suicide.

Why do people self-harm?

Self-harm is a way of dealing with very difficult feelings that build up inside.

Self-harm can be a way of:

- Feeling more in control.
- Relieving overwhelming tension in the body and emotions like anxiety, anger, pain or hurt.
- Punishing oneself.
- Overcoming feelings of numbness.
- Expressing desperate feelings.

Alternative ways of dealing with pain/anger

It is not easy to stop self-harming. It takes time and effort.

Learning to wait for the emotion to pass can be useful. There are various ways you can distract yourself or find alternative behaviours when you feel a strong urge to hurt yourself. Remember all emotions do pass.

Finding a support person (peer, friend, relative or professional) to help you through this difficult time can also be effective. Do not go to someone you know will make things worse.

Give yourself time to understand the root cause behind self-harm. Often counselling or psychotherapy can help with this.

Distract yourself

- Use activities, like household chores.
- Go for a walk outdoors.
- Be in the company of others.

Use your 5 senses

Be kind and gentle with yourself. Do everyday things or things you enjoy and pay attention to them. For example:

- **Use Vision**
Look at something beautiful, such as nature.
- **Use Hearing**
Listen to music, pay attention to sounds.
- **Use Smell**
Spray fragrance, put on lotion.
- **Use Taste**
Have a good meal, chew minty gum.
- **Use Touch**
Brush your hair, take a warm shower.

Reduce the risk

Try to minimise your contact with the means for self-harm, or situations when you tend to self-harm.