

Self Injury

Kooth's support guide for young people

What is self-harm and self-injury?

Self-harm, or self-injury, is when someone intentionally harms themselves. There are lots of different reasons why someone may self-harm, but it is often a way to cope with something difficult or distressing.

Many people say that they feel self-harm can help them to release emotions, or physically show how they are feeling inside. Although self-harm may feel helpful in the short term, people often say that it is less helpful in the long term, as it causes other difficulties for them and does not address the cause of their distress.

Self-harm can be dangerous and lead to life-changing injuries, or worse. Remember, if you are struggling with self-harm, you can reach out for support and look for ways to help you reduce your behaviours and urges.

Possible alternatives you might find helpful

There are lots of things we can do as alternatives to self-harm. Something that works for someone else might not work for you, so it's a good idea to give a range of alternatives a try. Likewise, it's helpful to build ourselves a toolbox of alternatives so we can feel better equipped for different situations.

1

Try to explore how you're feeling.

Self-harm can often be used as a coping mechanism when we're feeling, remembering, or experiencing something that is overwhelming, intense, or difficult for us. Trying to understand what we're feeling, and why we're feeling that way, can help us manage how we react to the situation. But how can we do this?

2

It can be helpful to write things down.

Sometimes it can feel like we have nothing to say, but once we're able to make a start, we might surprise ourselves by how much we can write down. Getting our thoughts and feelings out of our heads and down on paper can help organise them. This can help show us which thoughts we might keep circling back to.

This writing can be in any format you want - maybe a narrative, a poem, or a song.



3

Try using art to express emotions.

You could also choose to get your feelings down in drawings, or expressive paintings. You could even tear up the finished piece if you find it to be overwhelmingly distressing!

4

Try to talk to someone about how you're feeling.

If you feel able to, speaking to someone can be a good way to figure out how you're feeling. Whether that be a trusted friend or an adult, putting feelings into words and trying to explain them out loud can help us realise what's going on inside.

5

Try to monitor your self-harm urges.

There are also a number of apps and tools available that can help you record self-harm urges. You can then try and find patterns, between sleep levels, life events, and your self-harm triggers.

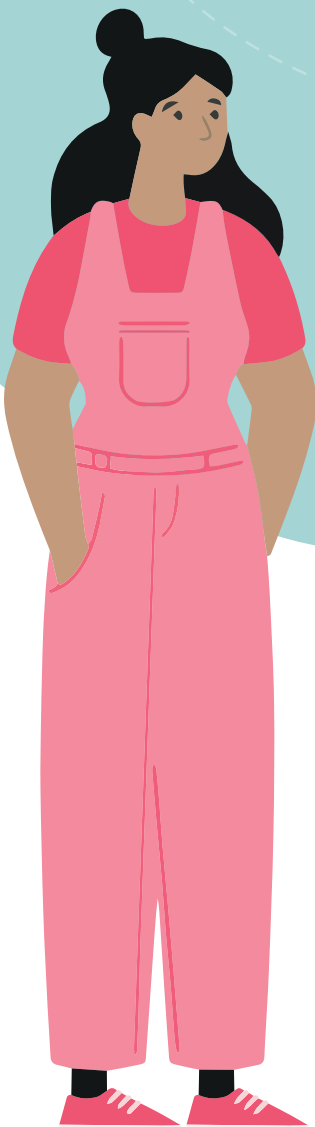


5

Try to comfort yourself safely.

Sometimes we can replace our actions with comforting, soothing activities to help calm our thoughts and feelings. These can include all sorts of things like:

- **Having a nice warm bath or shower**
- **Wrapping yourself up in cosy blankets**
- **Putting on your favourite TV show or movie**
- **Reading a book**
- **Spending time with your pet, if you have one.**
- **Letting yourself cry without judgement or guilt - crying can feel very therapeutic and help us get our pent-up emotions out**
- **Using your senses for soothing -some scents are naturally soothing and others may be linked to soothing memories**



6

Try some distraction and delaying techniques.

Delaying self-harm urges can be a really helpful skill. You could try setting a timer for a minute to see if you can delay acting upon your thoughts. Filling this time with any of the above ideas could help the time pass faster and easier.

Once your minute timer goes off, you can try for another minute, and repeat. You could even extend the time to two minutes, five minutes, 10 minutes, and onwards. Delaying a self-harm urge by several minutes can be enough to actually help that urge fade away.

We can unknowingly feed into our urges by suppressing them, focusing on them, or planning to act on them. If we can accept our urges and ride them out, they can often pass on their own. This technique is known as 'Urge Surfing' and can be a helpful way to process what you're feeling without acting upon your urges.

You could try following the steps below the next time you feel an urge to self-harm:

Step 1.

Notice the thought, feeling, or urge.

Step 2.

Accept those feelings and think about what's happening physically - what does that urge feel like in your body at that moment?

Try to notice the quality, position, boundaries, and intensity of the sensation.

Does the sensation feel tight, or loose?

Does it have a temperature associated with it?

Step 3.

Breathe it out and give your brain and body a chance to pause and plan.

Step 4.

Widen your attention and watch your urge whilst taking some regular breaths. Do you notice any changes in the size or intensity of the urge?

Step 5.

Imagine the process of physically riding out the urge.

Be kind to yourself.

Remember to be kind and supportive to yourself. We can often become self-critical about the way we think, act, or feel, but this in turn can increase our feelings of shame, anxiety, and distress.