

## What can I do if I self-harm and want to stop?

### Get talking

You could try to **talk to your friends/family**. If you're worried about them misunderstanding or judging you, why not test the waters with a casual: "You know, I've been feeling quite unhappy/angry/worried lately" and see how responsive they are to hearing about your thoughts and feelings.

If you find it difficult to open up or to find the words you need to express what you are really feeling, don't be put off. It may take some time and practice so be patient with yourself and don't worry if you don't get it right first time. You might also need to be patient with the person you are talking to as it might be very unfamiliar and difficult for them too.

They may feel upset or angry about what they're hearing but this doesn't necessarily mean that they won't want to help. Try to allow them their emotions without feeling responsible for them or taking their reaction personally.

If you can't or don't want to talk to the people around you, you could always...**call a helpline**: just talking to someone anonymously about how you are feeling can help you organise your own thoughts and feelings and alleviate the loneliness that can come from being troubled.

SANE's helpline **SANEline is open every day** to talk to a trained volunteer. If you prefer writing, you can always write your thoughts and experiences down and **email a SANEmail volunteer** ([sanemail@sane.org.uk](mailto:sanemail@sane.org.uk)). Writing is also a good way to **express your thoughts and feelings**.

Expressing is important because it makes thinking easier and helps to acknowledge your feelings. Having an audience can be great, but it's not necessary. If you would like to express to someone, you could **find other people who have self-harmed and share your experiences with them**.

There are **support groups** for self-harm, some of them local ones who facilitate **face-to-face** meetings and others that use the **Internet** to connect people with experience of self-harm.

For example, [Bristol Crisis Service for Women](#) has a list of local support groups on its website, and the [National Self Harm Network](#) hosts message boards and forums for people who self-harm.

Watch out for negative effects. While helping others can be very therapeutic, people who self-harm may be vulnerable to excessive sense of responsibility ("I don't really feel up to it but I *have to* visit my forum because such-and-such depends on me") and feelings of guilt ("Such-and-such is self-harming, maybe it's my fault because I said ... in my last message.").

If you notice that your involvement with an internet support group is causing you stress, withdraw for a while. You won't help anyone by making yourself ill.

### **Learn how to manage the urge to harm**

If you catch yourself early, it is often possible to **distract** yourself before the need to harm becomes overwhelming. Concerted effort to focus on some pleasant activity can help some. If you find that you're too far into the state that leads you to self-harm normally, it can still be possible to **substitute** another activity for self-harm.

If you think it might be the sight of blood that makes self-harm work for you, you could emulate it by melting ice cubes made with red juice on your skin; if pain is important, maybe the pain caused by eating a hot chilli will do? (These two suggestions are taken from [an information leaflet produced by the Royal College of Psychiatrists.](#))

### **Get professional help**

Some people who have sought help from professionals for self-harm have not been treated with the kind of compassion they deserve. But health care providers are increasingly aware of what self-harm is all about and your GP might be able to refer you to a helpful talking therapy, such as **cognitive-behavioural therapy (CBT)** or **psychotherapy**.

You could also ask them about **mindfulness-based therapies** such as **dialectical behaviour therapy (DBT)** and **mindfulness-based cognitive behaviour therapy (MBCBT)**. Mindfulness training focuses on awareness of the present moment, and on paying attention to thoughts, emotions and sensations in a non-judgmental way. In this way, mindfulness training can also help you to...

### **Get inquisitive**

Try to become interested (rather than just scared or distressed) about what is going on with you. Ask yourself what self-harm is doing for you, and see if you can work out what kinds of situations or thoughts typically lead to you feeling the need to harm.

While you are thinking about this, try to think about yourself with kind curiosity rather than worrying about how 'wrong' you feel.

And when you discover something new, see if you can use this new knowledge to help yourself. If you think your insight would make this report better, tell us about it!