

## Self-Injury: Information for parents

From a bystander's viewpoint self-injury can seem incomprehensible and pointless. It's a complex phenomenon, and it's not unheard of for people who engage in the act to feel confused about why they do it. Self-injury serves many different functions, and often there is an overlap. However, in a nutshell, one of the primary reasons people self-injure is to alleviate acute emotional pain. One of the reasons they choose this coping mechanism can be because they lack the skills to express their emotions in a healthier way. Seen in this way, self-injury is a maladaptive coping mechanism which can temporarily make people "feel better" and more able to cope with life.

### Safety Issues

If you find out your daughter or son is self-injuring, first and foremost, try to remain calm (even if you don't feel calm). Getting angry, shouting, or being judgemental is likely to aggravate the situation. If his or her wounds are fairly minor, provide a sterile gauze bandage or plaster, and a dose of "tender love and care". If the wounds are deeper, or won't stop bleeding, they may need stitching and should be seen by a health care professional. It's also important to recognise that even though your son or daughter's wounds are self-inflicted, he or she may well be in a state of shock. Apply firm, direct pressure to the cut with a sterile bandage, clean cloth or paper towel to stem the flow of blood, and seek advice from your GP, take your daughter or son to casualty or, if necessary, call an ambulance.

### Generally

Strive to be accepting and open-minded. Let your daughter or son know you are there for them, and reassure them that they are loved. Provide an ear to listen, a shoulder to cry on, a hand to hold, and focus on the person rather than the injury. Assure them that it's okay to talk about their need to self-injure, and reassure them that they have your support even if you don't understand why they are doing it or what they are going through. Offer to assist them in seeking professional help. For example: GP, counsellor, therapist, or community psychiatric nurse, but avoid taking control—many self-injurers struggle with control issues. Try not to take it as a personal affront if your son or daughter cannot talk to you because you are too close to them.

Avoid giving ultimatums. For example: "stop or else . . ." as they rarely work, and may well drive the behaviour underground, or prompt your daughter or son to turn to more dangerous methods to hurt themselves. Self-injury has a highly addictive quality about it, and if a person feels the need to self-injure they will normally find a way, come what may. It is important that the decision to stop comes from the person themselves.

### Disclaimer

MOSaC is unable to screen all these resources for professional soundness, effectiveness or suitability for individual cases. Therefore this information is provided as an aid to you, rather than a recommendation by us. We hope it is useful. We welcome any positive or negative feedback you may have. If you know of any other resources that may be of help please do let us know. Some resources may require a fee.

## Dealing with your own feelings

Be honest with yourself about how your daughter or son's self-injury is affecting you. It's not unusual to feel hurt, devastated, heartbroken, shocked, angry, sad, frightened, guilty, responsible, hopeless, or powerless. It's not easy knowing that a loved one is hurting him or herself, and it might be worth considering seeing a counsellor or therapist for yourself if you are struggling to cope with strong emotions or feel in need of support.

(Extract taken from [www.siari.co.uk](http://www.siari.co.uk), April 2006)

## References

Sutton, J. (2005). *Healing the Hurt Within: Understand Self-Injury and Self-Harm, and Heal the Emotional Wounds (2nd ed)*. Oxford: How to Books.

## Self-Harm Books

### 'A Bright Red Scream: Self-Mutilation and the Language of Pain'

Marilee Strong (Virago)

### 'Bodily Harm: The Breakthrough Healing Program for Self-Injurers'

Karen Conterio, et al. 1999.

### 'Cutting: Understanding and Overcoming Self-Mutilation'

Steven Levenkron.

### 'Cutting: The Risk - Self-Harm, Self-Care and Risk Reduction'

National Self-Harm Network, 2000. Contact: MIND. Tel: 0844 448 4448.

### 'Making Sense of Self-Harm'

Lois Arnold & Anne Magill. Contact: The Basement Project, PO Box 5, Abergavenny NP7 5XW. Tel: 01873 856 524.

### 'National Self-Harm Network Information Pack'

The National Self-Harm Network, 1998. Contact: MIND. Tel: 0844 448 4448.

### 'Self-Harm Behaviour and Eating Disorders: Dynamics, Assessment, and Treatment'

John L., Ph.D. Levitt (editor) et al. 2004.

### 'The Language of Injury: Comprehending Self-Mutilation'

G. Babiker and L. Arnold, 1997. Published by BPS books.

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**'The Self-Harm Help Book'**

Lois Arnold and Anne Magill, 1998. Contact: The Basement Project, PO Box 5, Abergavenny NP7 5XW. Tel: 01873 856 524.

**'The Hurt Yourself Less Workbook'**

National Self-Harm Network, 1998. Contact: MIND. Tel: 0844 448 4448.

**'Understanding Self-Harm'**

MIND Publications. Contact: MIND mail order service, 15-19 Broadway, London E15 4BQ, Tel: 0844 448 4448. Free to those on benefits from the MIND Infoline: Tel: 08457 660 163. Email: [publications@mind.org.uk](mailto:publications@mind.org.uk). Web: [www.mind.org.uk](http://www.mind.org.uk)

**'Vicious Circles: An Exploration of Women and Self-Harm in Society'**

D. Harrison, 1995. Published by Good Practices in Mental Health.

**'Women and Self-Harm: Understanding, Coping and Healing from Self-**

**Mutilation'** Gerrilyn Smith, et al. 1999. Published by The Women's Press. Contact: MIND. Tel: 0844 448 4448.

**'Working with Self-Injury'**

Lois Arnold and Anne Magill. Contact: The Basement Project, PO Box 5, Abergavenny NP7 5XW. Tel: 01873 856 524.

**'Working with Self-Harm'**

M. Smith (Handsell Publishing, 1998). Contact: MIND. Tel: 0844 448 4448.

**Healing the Hurt Within:**

**Understand Self-Injury and Self-Harm, and Heal the Emotional Wounds**

By Jan Sutton 2nd edition (Revised and expanded) 560 pages ISBN: 1845280369

## Self-Harm Books for Young People

**'Deliberate Self-Harm in Adolescence, (Child and Adolescence Mental Health)'**

Claudine Fox & Keith Hawton

**'Hurting Inside'**

Lois Arnold & Anne Magill. Contact: The Basement Project, PO Box 5 Abergavenny NP7 5XW. Tel: 01873 856 524.

**'What's the Harm: Book for Young People who Self-Harm'**

Lois Arnold & Anne Magill, 1997.

**'Who's Hurting Who?'**

42<sup>nd</sup> Street. Contact: 42<sup>nd</sup> Street, 2<sup>nd</sup> Floor, Swan Building, 20 Swan Street, Manchester M4 5JW. Tel: 0161 832 0170.

**'Worried about Self-Injury? A Young Minds Booklet'**

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Contact: Young Minds, 102-108 Clerkenwell Road, London EC1M 5SA. Tel: 020 7336 8445; fax: 020 7336 8446; Email: [publicaffairs@youngminds.org.uk](mailto:publicaffairs@youngminds.org.uk); Web: [www.youngminds.org.uk](http://www.youngminds.org.uk). **Helpline 0800 0182138**

## Useful Contacts for Self-Harm

**Basement Project (Bristol & South Wales):** PO Box 5, Abergavenny NP7 5XW. Tel: 01873 856524. Web: [www.freespace.virgin.net/basement.project](http://www.freespace.virgin.net/basement.project). Provides information nationally on self-harm and abuse, wide and comprehensive range of publications, co-ordinate the self-injury forum {a national newsletter for people who self-harm and those who work with them}. Provides women's and children's groups in Gwent.

**Bristol Crisis Service for Women:** PO Box 654, Bristol BS99 1XH. **Tel: 0117 925 1119. Web:** [www.users.zetnet.co.uk/bcsw](http://www.users.zetnet.co.uk/bcsw). Charity responding to needs of women in emotional distress with a particular focus on self-injury. Have a UK helpline (open Fridays and Saturdays from 9pm to 12.30am, and Sundays from 6pm to 9pm). Offers telephone counseling and information on support groups as well as training and a wide range of publications. Self-help journal for young women also available. Telephone during helpline opening hours or write with sae.

**Careline: Tel: 0845 1228622** (Mon-Fri 10am-1pm, 7pm-10pm). National confidential crisis telephone counseling for children, young people and adults. Careline can refer callers to other organizations and support groups throughout the country.

**Childline:** FREEPOST 1111, London N1 OBR. **Freephone: 0800 1111 (24 hours).** [www.childline.org.uk](http://www.childline.org.uk). Childline is the UK's 24-hour helpline for children and young people with any problem.

[www.lifesigns.org.uk](http://www.lifesigns.org.uk). Online support group.

**MIND Infoline:** Information on mental distress and treatment, including self-harm. **Tel: 0845 766 0163** (Local call rate). Mon-Fri 9.15am-4.45pm. **Email: [publications@mind.org.uk](mailto:publications@mind.org.uk). Web: [www.mind.org.uk](http://www.mind.org.uk).**

**National Self-Harm Network:** PO Box 16190, London NW1 3WW; **Web: [www.nshn.co.uk](http://www.nshn.co.uk). Email: [info@nshn.co.uk](mailto:info@nshn.co.uk).** Survivor-led organization committed to campaigning for the rights and understanding of people who self-injure. Provides a list of national and local resources and advice leaflets.

[www.palace.net/~llama/psych/injury.html](http://www.palace.net/~llama/psych/injury.html).

**People Understanding Self-Harm (PUSH).** **Tel: 0870 770 0740.** Contact: PUSH, C/O Zion CRS, 339 Stretford Road, Hulme, Manchester M15 4ZY. **Email: [selfhelpservices@yahoo.co.uk](mailto:selfhelpservices@yahoo.co.uk); Web: [www.selfhelpservices.org.uk](http://www.selfhelpservices.org.uk).** Self-help support group run by and for women who self-harm. Serves Greater Manchester, but enquiries welcome from anywhere in the UK.

**Project SPEAR:** PO Box 1465, First floor, 1 Milton Road, Swindon SN1 IJE. **Email: [info@projectspear.com](mailto:info@projectspear.com). Web: [www.projectspear.com](http://www.projectspear.com). Tel: 01793 520 111.** Self-help/self-preservation correspondence course and monthly self-help newsletter for all people who self-harm.

**Saneline:** (Open from 12 noon to 2am, 365 days a year). **Tel: 0845 767 8000; Email: [info@sane.org.uk](mailto:info@sane.org.uk); Web: [www.sane.org.uk](http://www.sane.org.uk).** Offers information, advice and an emotional and crisis support for people experiencing mental distress, and those supporting them.

[www.selfharmalliance.org](http://www.selfharmalliance.org).

[www.selfinjury.freeserve.co.uk](http://www.selfinjury.freeserve.co.uk).

[www.siari.co.uk](http://www.siari.co.uk). Self-Injury And Related Issues.

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**SHOUT:** Newsletter for women who self-harm and supporters. C/O Box 654, Bristol BS99 1XH.

**South London & Maudsley NHS Trust Crisis Recovery Unit,** Bethlem Royal hospital, Monks Orchard Road, Beckenham, Kent BR3 3BX. National service for individuals who harm themselves. Inpatients Unit (referrals to Consultant Psychiatrist via own psychiatrist). **Tel: 020 8776 4273.** Outpatients service (at Maudsley Hospital, Denmark Hill, London SE5)-referrals via GP/psychiatrist). **Tel: 020 7919 2371.** No emergency service.

**The Samaritans: Tel: 08457 90 90 90** (24 hours); Text phone: 08457 90 91 92; **Email: [jo@samaritans.org](mailto:jo@samaritans.org)** or write to Chris, PO BOX 90 90, Stirling FK8 2SA. Confidential 24 hour emotional support service for any person in distress, crisis or at risk of suicide.

**The Young People & Self-Harm Information Resource Website: [www.selfharm.org.uk](http://www.selfharm.org.uk).** Provides information on a wide range of activities and initiatives that relate to young people and self-harm.

**Youth Access:** Will put you in touch with young people's counseling and support projects in your area. **Tel: 0208 772 9900.**

**Threshold Women's Mental Health: Infoline: 0808 808 6000.** Threshold, 14 St. Georges place, Brighton BN1 4GB. **Email: [infoline@thresholdwomen.org.uk](mailto:infoline@thresholdwomen.org.uk). Web: [thresholdwomen.org.uk](http://thresholdwomen.org.uk).** Infoline is open Mondays 10am-12pm & 2pm-4.30pm, Tuesdays 2pm-4.30pm, Wednesdays 10am-12pm & 2pm-4.30pm, Thursdays 2pm-4.30pm. Confidential mental health information for women.

**Waves:** Newsletter for women abused in any way in childhood and supporters. C/O 82 Colston Street, Bristol BS1 5BB.

**Youth 2 Youth: Tel: 020 8896 3675** (Mon & Thu 6.30pm-9.30pm). **Email: [help@youth2youth.co.uk](mailto:help@youth2youth.co.uk). Web: [www.youth2youth.co.uk](http://www.youth2youth.co.uk).** Helpline service for young people by young people via phone, email and on-line chat (under 19).

NHS Direct: Tel: 0845 4647. [www.nhsdirect.nhs.uk](http://www.nhsdirect.nhs.uk)

### *Penfriend Network*

**SASH (Survivors of Abuse and Self-Harming):** 20 Lackmore Road, Enfield, Middlesex EN1 4PB.

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