

### Deliberate Self-Harm

Many young people have thoughts about hurting themselves and some actually do it. When someone wants to hurt themselves (but doesn't want to end their life), it's called deliberate self-harm (DSH). There are many ways that young people choose to hurt themselves. Common ways are cutting themselves with blades, glass or another sharp object; burning themselves; biting or picking at their skin; banging their head against the wall; or hitting themselves.

#### Why do young people want to hurt themselves?

- Self-harm is not about wanting to die or about wanting attention;
- Self-harm can be a way of coping with painful thoughts and feelings;
- Self-harm can give the person some else to focus on other than the thoughts and feelings that they find overwhelming;
- It can provide them with sometime "real" or physical to focus on, rather than thoughts and feelings which can be harder to understand or recognise;
- It can help ground someone when they are feeling "zoned out";
- It can help them express how they are feeling;
- It can them feel in control when everything around them feels out of control;
- Self-harm often happens in private but sometimes it can be used to communicate high levels of distress.
- Self-harm can provide a sense of relief.

#### What can you do to help someone who self-harms?

- Don't get angry with them – many young people don't want to talk about their self-harm as others have got angry at them for doing it.
- Be non-judgemental – telling them "it's stupid" or that they "shouldn't be doing it" won't make them stop. It will probably make them feel worse and make them want to do it more.
- Don't force them to stop as it may be helping them cope and by forcing them to stop you may actually increase their risk of hurting themselves worse.
- Help them to work out how the self-harm helps them and try to find other ways that they can get that same feeling (e.g., if it relaxes them, can they do a relaxation technique? If it gives them a different sensation to focus on, can they find a different way to feel that"?)
- Help them develop and find ways to manage their feelings before they get overwhelmed so that they don't need to self-harm.
- Work with them to develop a plan to reduce their self-harm.
- Check about suicidal thoughts as they may also be having suicidal thoughts.

- Be validating and supportive of their feelings (see Validation resource for more information about this).

### **Things you might want to put in a plan to reduce self-harm**

If you are working with a young person and they want to stop or cut down their self-harm, here are some things that you could talk to them about to help them.

- What are the triggers for self-harm?
- What are some things that the young person can do to make it harder for them to self-harm (e.g., how do they make it harder to find the things they use to self-harm; what can they do instead; how can they delay to act on the urges to self-harm)?
- What are the strategies they have they make them feel happier or more relaxed?

### **What are some strategies that other young people do rather than self-harm?**

- Draw on themselves instead of harming themselves.
- Talk to someone who “gets it”.
- Writing or drawing about their feelings.
- Exercise.
- Gaming or reading a book.
- Yelling or screaming into a pillow.
- Doing relaxation or mindfulness.
- Crying.
- Squeezing ice cubes until they’ve melted or their hands have gone numb.
- Having a cold shower, going for a swim, or jumping in a cold pool.
- Eating something really spicy or really sour.

If you are concerned about a young person who you think might be self-harming, please contact your Clinical Advisor or [help@twb.org.nz](mailto:help@twb.org.nz) for more information and support

### **Helpful TWB resources**

1. Working with young people to develop a coping plan
2. Keeping on top plan
3. Validation resource