

SURVIVORS AND SELF-HARM/SELF-INJURY

Myths about self-harm:

Self-injury is a failed suicide attempt

It is a way of coping with life, not a bid to die. Injuries are seldom life-threatening. A survivor may want to kill her feelings - not herself.

It's attention seeking, ignore it

Everyone needs attention. For some, self-injury is a desperate physical attempt to draw attention to the mental and emotional pain they are suffering. This should not be ignored, it is important to give the survivor attention and to listen to what she has to say.

On the other hand, many people who self-injure hide their injuries from others. It has far more to do with coping than seeking attention.

The attention that self-injury receives is likely to be negative. Seldom does it lead to helping a survivor feel better about herself or relieving the distress that it caused.

Self-injury is a sign of insanity

This is not true. It is a sign of distress and of someone trying to cope with their life, despite great pain. Many survivors who self-injure lead successful lives, have careers, partners, family and friends.

Someone who self-injures is a danger to others

Self-injury is often very private and not openly discussed due to the negative response it receives. Someone who self-harms is no more likely to be a danger to others as anyone else.

Minimising the harm

Avoid drugs and/or alcohol if you think you are likely to self-harm, so you don't accidentally inflict a more severe wound than you intended. Prevent infection by using something clean when you cut. Never share what you use

to self-injure. Try to avoid areas where there are major veins and arteries close to the surface. Make sure your tetanus jabs are up to date.

Put burns under cold water for twenty to thirty minutes. Burns and scalds can be more severe than you think - the pain can be far worse later. Cling film, loosely covering the burn, can act as a temporary dressing. You can buy creams, sprays, etc. for burns from your chemist.

Be prepared. Have dressings and antiseptics ready so you can care for your injuries. You can learn more about looking after wounds, cuts, burns, etc. from a first aid book, someone you trust who knows about first aid or perhaps the nurse in your doctor's practice.

Call an ambulance if blood is spurting from a wound. Wrap the injury in a clean towel or tea towel and try to stay calm. Clean any cuts with gauze swabs, not cotton wool. Cover with a dry, non-adhesive dressing. It can be useful to keep antiseptic creams, sprays, etc. handy. Paper stitches can be used to close superficial wounds.

Seeking medical advice

Severe injuries - If any of your cuts are gaping and deep you will need medical attention. Try to keep the injured part raised and apply pressure until you get to hospital, to reduce the bleeding. You should also seek medical attention for burns larger than a fifty pence piece, or that have penetrated deep into the skin.

Infection - If cuts or burns become infected it is important to get medical treatment or you may become seriously ill.

Shock - can occur if you lose a lot of blood (i.e. spurting or blood running continuously) or if you have severe or large burns. Call an ambulance if this happens.

Poisoning - If you drink bleach or any other corrosive liquid you are in danger of poisoning. In these circumstances you must get medical advice or attention immediately.

Overdoses - If you think you may have taken too many drugs (prescribed or illegal) it is important to get medical help quickly, particularly with drugs such as paracetamol.

Get support

Our Centre trains workers on self injury. You can contact them via the helpline (number and opening times below)

Remember you are not alone - there are many survivors who use self-harm as a way of coping.

HELPLINE SUPPORT

You can telephone our helpline for support or information on 01738 630965 We also have a 24 hour answering machine, so that at any other time messages can be left and will be returned discreetly, as soon as possible.

Write to: WRASAC P & K, P.O. Box 7570, Perth, PH2 1BY

Email info@perthshirerapecrisis.org

USEFUL CONTACTS

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| Samaritans | (01738) 626 666 |
| Genito-Urinary Clinic | (01738) 473 220 |
| Police Family Protection Unit | (01738) 892 911 |
| Perthshire Women's Aid | (01738) 639 043 |
| Victim Support | (01738) 567 171 |
| Criminal Injuries Compensation Board | (0141) 331 2726 |
| Citizens Advice Bureau | (01738) 624 301 |
| Bristol Crisis Service for Women | (0117) 925 1119 |

Childline (0800 1111)

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