

Understanding Self-Harm: Support, Advice, and Where to Get Help

This article is for adult learners and colleagues. It aims to explain what self-harm is, why it can happen, how to look after yourself or someone else, and where to find support. You're not alone—and help is available.

What is self-harm?

Self-harm is when someone intentionally hurts themselves as a way of coping with overwhelming feelings or situations. It's often about managing emotional pain rather than wanting to end one's life.

People self-harm for many different reasons, including: - Feeling overwhelmed, stressed, or out of control - Difficult life events (work pressure, finances, relationships, loss) - Struggling to express or process emotions - Feeling numb and wanting to feel *something*

Self-harm can affect people of any age, background, or profession—including adults in work and training.

Common myths

- **“Self-harm is attention-seeking.”**
This is a myth. It's usually a private coping strategy linked to distress.
 - **“Strong people don't self-harm.”**
Anyone can struggle—strength and self-harm are not opposites.
 - **“Talking about it makes it worse.”**
Talking openly and safely can reduce isolation and help people access support.
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If you're struggling with self-harm

If self-harm is something you're dealing with, you deserve understanding and support.

Helpful first steps can include: - **Talk to someone you trust** – a friend, family member, tutor, manager, or mentor - **Seek professional support** – your GP is a good starting point - **Notice triggers** – understanding what leads to urges can help you plan coping strategies - **Be kind to yourself** – recovery is not linear; setbacks don't mean failure

If urges feel strong, try grounding techniques such as slow breathing, distraction (e.g. a walk, music, a task), or writing down what you're feeling.

If you're worried about someone else

You might notice changes such as withdrawal, mood changes, or signs of distress.

You can help by: - Listening calmly and without judgement - Letting them know you care and take them seriously - Encouraging them to seek professional help - Looking after your own wellbeing too—you don't have to manage this alone

You're not expected to be an expert. Simply being supportive and helping them find the right help can make a real difference.

Where to get help (UK)

Urgent support

- **NHS 111** – for urgent mental health help
- **999 or A&E** – if someone is in immediate danger

Ongoing and confidential support

- **GP (General Practitioner)** – can refer to local mental health services
- **Samaritans** – 116 123 (free, 24/7) or samaritans.org
- **Mind** – information and local services: mind.org.uk
- **NHS Talking Therapies** – self-refer in many areas

Workplace and training support

- Speak to your **coach, tutor, HR, or line manager**
- Use any available **Employee Assistance Programme (EAP)** for confidential counselling

If you're outside the UK, local health services or international helplines can provide similar support.

A final word

Asking for help is not a weakness—it's a practical and courageous step. Whether you're struggling yourself or supporting someone else, help is available and recovery is possible.

If this article brings up difficult feelings for you, please consider reaching out to one of the support options above.