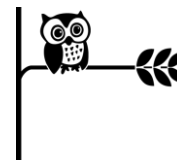


Safeguarding Briefing – Self Harm

Spring 1 Week 6



Self-harm can take lots of physical forms, including cutting, burning, bruising, scratching, hair-pulling, poisoning and overdosing. There are many reasons why children and young people try to hurt themselves. And once they start, it can become a compulsion. That's why it's so important to spot it as soon as possible and do everything you can to help. Self-harm isn't usually a suicide attempt or a cry for attention. Instead, it's often a way for young people to release overwhelming emotions. It's a way of coping. So whatever the reason, it should be taken seriously. Self-harm is the fourth most common concern that children and young people contact Childline about. There were over 19,000 Childline counselling sessions about self-harm in 2014/15.

Why Children harm themselves:

The exact reasons why children and young people decide to hurt themselves aren't always easy to work out. In fact, they might not even know exactly why they do it. There are links between depression and self-harm. Quite often a child or young person who is self-harming is being **bullied, under too much pressure to do well at school, being emotionally abused, grieving or having relationship problems with family or friends.**

The feelings that these issues bring up can include: **low self-esteem and low confidence, loneliness, sadness, anger, numbness and lack of control over their lives.**

Often, the physical pain of self-harm might feel easier to deal with than the emotional pain that's behind it. It can also make a young person feel they're in control of at least one part of their lives. Sometimes it can also be a way for them to punish themselves for something they've done or have been accused of doing.

How to spot the warning signs:

Young people will go to great lengths to cover self-harm scars and injuries. If you do spot them they might be explained away as accidents. The signs to look for divide into the physical and emotional.

Physical signs of self-harm

These are commonly on the head, wrists, arms, thighs and chest and include:

- cuts
- bruises
- burns
- bald patches from pulling out hair

Young people who self-harm are also very likely to keep themselves covered up in long-sleeved clothes even when it's really hot.

Emotional signs of self-harm

The emotional signs are harder to spot and don't necessarily mean that a young person is self-harming. But if you see any of these as well as any of the physical signs then there may be cause for concern.

- depression, tearfulness and low motivation
- becoming withdrawn and isolated, for example wanting to be alone in their bedroom for long periods
 - unusual eating habits; sudden weight loss or gain
 - low self-esteem and self-blame
 - drinking or taking drugs

The self-harm cycle:

Self-harm is often used as a coping mechanism. The physical pain of self-harm might feel easier to deal with than the emotional pain that's behind it. Sometimes it can be a way for someone to punish themselves for something they've done. It can also make them feel they're in control of something in their life. When a person self-harms, chemicals are released into the brain which can become addictive very quickly. The person may feel an instant relief of pressure and 'bad feelings'. This relief is short lived and is often replaced by feelings of guilt and immediate pressure. And this is how the cycle continues.

What to do if you think a child is self-harming:

Contact a member of the Safeguarding Team **immediately**

What the professionals working with the child/family will do to support the child:

- Show they understand
- Talk it over
- Identify the triggers
- Build their confidence
- Show they trust them
- Share Information carefully
- Help them to find new ways to cope

For more information please see Donna Wealleans or Lisa Cameron. There are also a wide range of resources and research studies around self-harm on the NSPCC Website and Young Minds Website.

PLEASE DO NOT LEAVE THIS LEAFLET ON VIEW IN SCHOOL TO THE CHILDREN