



headspace
National Youth Mental Health Foundation

what you need to know about
self harm

What is self harm?

Self harm is when people deliberately hurt their bodies. Common forms of self harm include:

- cutting (e.g. cutting the skin on arms, wrists or thighs)
- hitting yourself
- burning the skin
- deliberately overdosing on medication, drugs or other harmful substances.
- picking at wounds or scars

About one in ten young people say they've harmed themselves at some point in their lives. For some young people, self harm is a one-off event. For others, it can happen several times or become a repeated behaviour that can be hard to change.

Why do young people self harm?

Young people often report that they self harm to try to manage intense emotional pain. Many feel overwhelmed by difficult feelings, thoughts or memories. For some young people, it can seem like there's no other way to deal with what's happening or express what they're feeling.

Self harm might give relief for a moment, but it doesn't help fix the problem. With the right help, people can learn more effective ways to cope.

Some people are more likely to self harm than others. This includes people who've experienced emotional, physical or sexual abuse and people who are going through a mental health challenge like depression.

Usually, self harm in young people is triggered by a build-up of negative, stressful life events – not just one incident.

What's the connection between self harm and suicide?

There's an overlap between self harm and thinking about suicide – but not everyone who self harms wants to take their life. Sometimes self harm involves very risky things and which can lead to accidental death or serious injury.

What can I do if I self harm?

If you've been self harming or thinking about self harming, it's important that you know there are people who can support you and want to support you.

It's useful to look for help when problems are starting out. Telling a trusted family member, friend or teacher what you're going through is a good first step.

What if I don't feel ready to talk to someone I know?

You can:

- talk anonymously to an eheadspace clinician online or on the phone
- talk to a general practitioner (GP)
- call a confidential helpline for support (like Lifeline on 13 11 14 or Kids Helpline on 1800 55 1800).

If you're feeling the urge to self harm, it can be useful to try other strategies so you can avoid hurting yourself. Maybe distraction works. Activities you enjoy such as reading, listening to music or talking to supportive friends, can help get your mind off urges to self harm. You also might think of other ways to cope with tough feelings. Maybe journalling, art, mindfulness or reaching out to your support network can help you process what's going on for you.

There are also mental health professionals at headspace centres who can help you grow your coping skills. You'll get better at dealing with challenges and won't have to rely on self harming.

If you need medical help right now call 000.

How can I help a young person who self harms?

The best way to help someone is to:

- listen to them
- give them support
- encourage them to connect with professional help.

Be as open as you can with the person and try to make them feel safe to discuss their feelings. Remain calm – they might be feeling ashamed of what they've done and worry about your judgements.

Don't try to make ultimatums or force the person to stop – this could make things worse.

Ask the person directly if they're considering suicide. If you think they are, call your local hospital or mental health service.

Call 000 or take the person to the emergency department of the local hospital if they need urgent medical attention.

Supporting someone who self harms can be a stressful experience. Think about if it would be useful to get some advice or support for yourself. This can be done through eheadspace.



If you or someone you know is going through a tough time you can get help and support from headspace, your school or university wellbeing service or your local health provider. For more information, to find your nearest headspace centre, or for online and telephone support, visit [headspace.org.au](https://www.headspace.org.au)



If you need immediate assistance call 000 or to speak to someone urgently, please call Lifeline on 13 11 14 or Suicide Call Back Service on 1300 659 467.

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