

SELF - HARM

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&

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Definition of Self-Harm

- Self-injury/harm is any act which involves deliberately inflicting pain and/or injury to one's own body, but usually without suicidal intent.

WHAT IS SELF - INJURY?

Self - injury is often a way of dealing with stress/anxiety or other emotional issues. People deal with these issues in various ways eg

- Cutting or burning themselves
- Bruising themselves
- Taking an overdose of tablets etc
- Pulling hair or picking skin
- Abuse of alcohol/recreational drugs
- Indulging in high risk activities eg joy riding
- Eating disorders.

PREVALENCE

- 1 in 10 young people in years 10 and 11 at school are likely to be self-harming.
- It is difficult to obtain accurate figures as many young people who self-harm do not seek support.
- National statistics are rare as there is no standard definition used in research

Prevalence

- Some young people self-harm on a regular basis and in some cases for many years.
- Others self-harm just once or only on a few occasions.
- Some young people use self harm as coping strategy for a particular issue and they stop once the issue is resolved. It may resume if the issue resurfaces.
- Young people may begin to self-harm from pre-teens to teenagehood with most losing the urge to self-harm by their early thirties.
- It is more prevalent in young women but not exclusively so.

Support Systems

- Often young people do not want to be involved with CAMHS.
- Depending on the severity, a referral to CAMHS may not be necessary
- Support can be offered by third sector agencies and also TYS.
- CAMHS do provide support to some third sector agencies via our PMHW service.
- We also have a PMHW within the TYS-emotional well-being service

Harm Minimisation

- Young people have told us that it is not helpful to be told 'Don't self harm'
- Young people use self harm to deal with stress. It is a maladaptive coping strategy but if they stop self harming without being introduced to another way of coping they may find another, more destructive, mechanism eg drugs/alcohol
- Equally if they agree to stop but find they cannot, this will leave them feeling that they have let you down and this could initiate a downward spiral.

Harm Minimisation

- The accepted way of working with someone who self harms is harm minimisation.
- This involves NOT telling them to stop but giving advise on how to keep themselves safe when they do self harm eg advice on keeping wounds clean, how to access medical advice, information on help lines etc.
- Meanwhile work would be continued with the young person around better coping strategies and/or dealing with the issues that have resulted in them self harming with the aim that they would gradually be weaned off the self harming activity.

Harm Minimisation

- This can be a controversial way of working especially for parents/carers, teachers and other support staff but it is the most affective method.
- Ideally those supporting the young person would be given information about the way of working and would be signed up to it but this can be hard if , for example, you are a parent whose young person is cutting themselves.
- It is important to remember that young people do not usually continue to self harm into their twenties and thirties.