

# Helping Children who Self Harm



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## Why do children and young people self-harm?

Children and young people often self-harm as a way of coping and managing their feelings and emotions after experiencing trauma. Self-harm gives them a sense of control when they feel they have no other options available to them.

*The following are examples of self harm that children and young people may carry out:*

- Cutting themselves
- Over-eating or under-eating
- Picking or scratching their skin
- Pulling their hair out
- Biting their nails

Children and young people may not realise that the behaviours they are engaging in are forms of self-harm.

As a parent/carer it can be difficult not to panic when you hear your child may be harming themselves in any way.

Try to stay calm. If your child is self-harming it does not mean you aren't doing your best as their parent/carer.

Your child will need a calm and supportive response from you and to know that you are able to help them find other, healthier ways to manage how they are feeling.

By staying calm and having an open, supportive conversation you will demonstrate how it is healthier to talk and share together.

Getting angry or frustrated with them may imply that you don't understand and are unable to talk about difficult things, leading them to continue these behaviours alone without the support they may need to explore more positive ways of coping.

## Useful contacts

### YoungMinds

The YoungMinds Parent's Helpline offers information and advice to any adult worried about the emotional problems, behaviour or mental health of a young person up to the age of 25.

The YoungMinds parent helpline can be contacted on: 0808 802 5544



### Samaritans

Samaritans offer a safe place for you or your child to talk at any time. It is a 24hour service that is available 365 days a year. They can be contacted (free of charge) on: 116 123

### Mind

Mind is a mental health charity for England and Wales, they are available online or over the phone. They give advice, support and can signpost you or your child to other services available.

This service can be contacted on: 0300 123 3393



**Valued Lives** (Redruth) This is an out of hours crisis support service and can be contacted on: 01209 901438



### Kooth

Offer support to young people in Cornwall through online or one-to-one counselling and mentoring support.

Visit: Kooth.com



## Alternative coping strategies for children and young people to use instead of self-harm

### For children who feel anger and frustration

- Get involved in exercise
- Tear a piece of paper up into lots of little pieces

### For children who feel sadness and fear

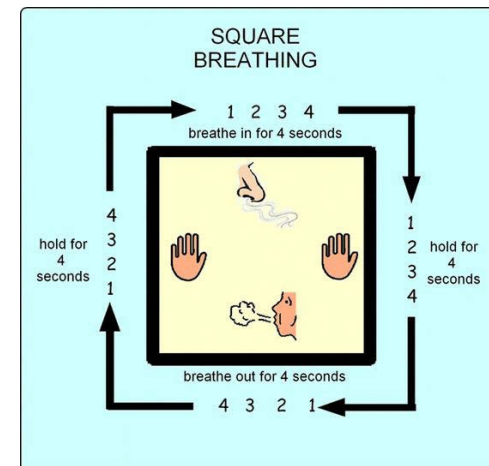
- Wrap a blanket around them
- Go for a walk outside
- Encourage them to listen to their favourite music
- Try the square breathing technique with them as this will help them to feel a sense of control over their bodily response to stress.

### For children with a need to control

- Write lists
- Encourage them to tidy their bedroom
- Get them to write a letter about they are feeling, then tear it up or put it in a safe place

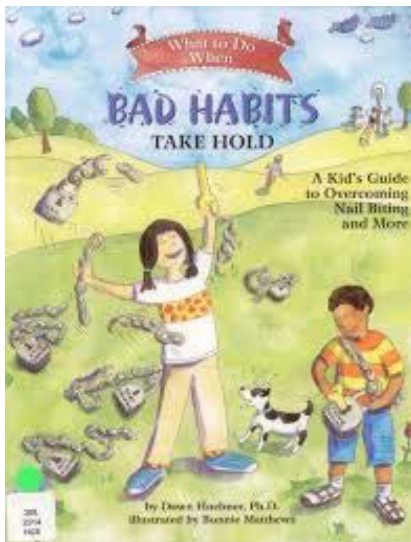
### For children who feel numb and disconnected

- Give them ice cubes or a hot water bottle to hold and refocus their mind
- Encourage them to take a cold shower or warm bath



## Resources that may be helpful

- *What to Do When Bad Habits Take Hold: A Kid's Guide to Overcoming Nail Biting and More* (book available on Amazon).
- *Mind For Better Mental Health: Understanding Self-harm* booklet
- Try using fidget toys to help children form new habits to replace the ones that harm them.



## How can I help my child?

Reassure your child that you are there for them, that they are loved and that they can talk to you if they would like to. Validate and acknowledge their feelings; try to not make them feel judged or as though they are in trouble.

Discuss your concerns with a teacher or Pastoral care worker at your child's school—they may be able to offer additional advice or let you know where to find further support if needed. The school nurse may be able to offer support.

You can talk to their GP; your child doesn't have to go with you if they do not want to. However if your child is over 18 they will need to ask for the help themselves. If they are not willing to do this, you may wish to seek support for yourself as this may help you to further support your child.

If your child is under 18, your GP may decide your family would benefit being referred to the Early Help Hub to consider additional support.

You can make contact with the Early Help Hub directly if you prefer on 01872 322277— they will have a better idea of what current support is available in the county, this may include specialist Child and Adolescent Mental Health Services (CAMHS).

Youth counselling services can also help, young people can refer themselves to these. Most services will support young people between the ages of 13-25.

You and other family members may also be offered support to help better understand and support them. It is important that you are able to get some support for yourself as supporting someone who self harms can be very overwhelming.