

Self harm and Suicide

Safeguarding Champions – Sept 2026

Definitions

Self-harm

Self-harming is the deliberate act of injuring or damaging one's own body as a way to cope with emotional or psychological distress, without wanting to end their own life. People may self-harm to relieve tension, punish themselves, feel something when numb or to communicate stress to others.

Suicide

Suicide is a death resulting from intentional self-harm or events of undetermined intent, typically for those over 10 years old.

It occurs when someone makes the decision to end their own life. This can be a response to overwhelming emotional pain, difficult circumstances or mental illness. Suicidal thoughts and behaviours are complex and can be influenced by, social, psychological, cultural and biological factors.

Statistics

Over the course of someone's lifetime:

- 1 in 10 people self-harm
- 1 in 4 people have suicidal thoughts
- 1 in 13 people try to end their life through suicide

Latest stats - 2024

- Women are more likely to have suicidal thoughts and make attempts, however more men successfully take their own life.
- More than 4 times as many people reported having self-harmed in 2023/24 compared to 2000.
- The highest suicide rate was males aged 50-54 with 26.8 per 100,000. Females aged 45-49 were 7.9 per 100,000.
- The number of people reporting suicidal thoughts in the past year, increased by 76% between 2000 and 2023/24.
- 5717 suicides were registered in 2024 which is 61 more than the previous year.

This may mean people are finding it harder to cope with mental health problems.

Forms of self-harming

Cutting - *to break or injure the skin*

Burning – *with hot objects, chemicals or cigarettes*

Hitting / Punching – *self or objects*

Scratching / Rubbing – *the skin to cause damage*

These forms of self-harming can bring temporary relief or a feeling of control, but they also carry a risk of infection, scarring or severe injury.

Why self-harm?

Some of the reasons people may self-harm include:

- Expressing or coping with *emotional distress*
- Trying to feel in control
- To punish themselves
- Relieving unbearable *emotional distress*
- A cry for help
- A response to intrusive thoughts

It could be a response to something happening now, something in the past or for an unknown reason. It can also change over time.

Causes of emotional distress

There are many possible causes and sometimes, the small things build up and lead to someone self-harming. These can include:

- Being bullied
- Pressure at work
- Family / relationship problems
- Money worries
- Low self-esteem
- Struggling with anxiety, depression or stress
- Confusion about sexuality
- Grief after bereavement / loss
- Abuse – physical / sexual / psychological / coercive control
- Contact with criminal justice system
- Complex mental health difficulties leading to impulsive behaviour / difficulty controlling emotions – possibly caused by previous trauma
- Living with conditions such as Autism / ADHD

How to help – Self Harm

Do

- ✓ encourage them to speak to a GP or free listening service
- ✓ ask how they would like to be supported
- ✓ let them know you're there for them
- ✓ tell them about their positive qualities
- ✓ try to understand their emotions and experiences, without judging them, rather than focusing on their self-harm
- ✓ consider that any amount of self-harm might be a sign that they're feeling extremely distressed
- ✓ let them be in control of their decisions, but get them medical attention if needed

Don't

- ✓ try to force them to change what they're doing
- ✓ threaten to take away their control
- ✓ insult them, for example by saying they're attention-seeking

It's important to approach the matter with care. Sometimes just letting them know they are not alone helps!

If you are supporting someone, it is also important to look after yourself!

What are suicidal thoughts?

- Abstract thoughts about ending their own life
- Feeling that people would be better off without them
- Thinking about methods to end their life
- Making a clear plan to end their own life

Thoughts can start suddenly or build up over time and can change quickly. Sometimes they may be experienced for a short time, and at other times they may be constantly there.

What does it feel like to be suicidal?

Thinking and feeling

- Hopeless - like there's no point in living
- Tearful / overwhelmed by negative thoughts
- Unbearable pain that you can't imagine will end
- Not wanting to exist
- Useless - not wanted / needed by others
- Not wanting to die, but living is too difficult
- Desperate - with no other choice
- Like you can't think of anything else and suicide is always on your mind
- Powerless - like you can't do anything to stop it
- Self-hatred - feeling worthless and low self-esteem
- Like everyone would be better off without you
- Cut off from your body / physically numb

What's experienced?

- Poor sleep - including sleeping too much or not enough
- A change in appetite / sudden changes to your weight
- No desire to take care of yourself – e.g not showering / eating like you normally would
- Wanting to avoid others
- Not being able to focus on or enjoy things you normally like
- Reckless / risky behaviour because you don't care what happens to you
- Making a will / giving away possessions
- Struggling to communicate
- Talking or writing about death and wanting to die
- Urges to self-harm or use recreational drugs and alcohol

Causes of suicidal thoughts

Suicidal thoughts can be triggered by an event, a build-up of experiences or there may be no apparent reason.

Mental health problems

Physical health problems, including chronic pain

Problems with work, including work stress, redundancy or not being able to find a job

Problems in relationships, including break-ups and issues with family or friends

Experiences of prison or the criminal justice system

Abuse

Experiences of discrimination, stigma or hate

Housing problems, including homelessness

Substance and alcohol addiction

Trauma, including trauma from experiences in childhood

Loneliness

Social pressure, such as people making you feel like you need to do certain things or act in a certain way

Shame, such as feeling like you haven't achieved what was expected of you

Bereavement, including losing a loved one to suicide

Money problems

Not being able to get mental health support or other support you might need

How to help - Suicide

Do

- Listen without judgement
- Offer support and encourage them to get professional help
- Encourage communication
- Stay calm
- Seek professional help

Don't

- Dismiss or minimise their feelings
- Panic or overreact
- Judge, blame or criticise
- Try and fix all their problems
- Make promises that cant be kept

Support

- [Stop Domestic Abuse](#) (0330 0533 630)
 - [Respect](#) - men's DA advise line (0808 8010327)
 - [Stay Alive App](#)
 - [CALM](#) (0800 585 858)
 - Hampshire [CAMHS](#)
 - [MIND](#)
 - [SHOUT](#) (Text 'HANTS' to 85258 – 24/7 service)
 - [KOOTH](#)
 - [Samaritans](#) (call 116 123)
 - NHS -
 - [NHS Choices](#)
 - [Self harm Support](#)
 - 111
 - [Young Minds](#)
 - [Tommys](#) - pre, during and post pregnancy for both parents
 - [Andy's Man Club](#) – suicide prevention for men
 - [SANE](#)
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- [Papyrus](#) (0300 102 2470) / Tet 'HOPE' to 88247 www.papyrus-uk.org/Rethink
 - [Stay Alive App](#)
 - [Cruse](#) - bereavement support
 - [National Suicide Prevention Alliance](#)
 - [First hand](#) - bereavement support
 - [Support after suicide](#)
 - [HARMLESS](#)
 - [National Self Harm Network](#)
 - Police (999 - emergency / 101 non-emergency)
 - Community Safety Team – communitysafety@hart.gov.uk

Further information

Hampshire
County
Council

Grassroots
Suicide
Prevention

NHS England –
Staying Safe
from Suicide

Window of
Tolerance

Warning signs
of suicide for
autistic people

Masculinity
and Suicide

DA and Suicide
Podcast

Staying Safe

Samaritans
data

ONS Suicide
data

Trevor Project



You are
enough
exactly as
you are