



Understanding... Self-Harm

For many people self-harm is a way of coping with intense emotional pain by inflicting physical pain on their own bodies. However, the actual act of self-harm can be upsetting in itself, causing feelings of guilt. Although self-harm is distressing, research shows that, with support, it can usually be overcome successfully.

What is Self-Harm?

Self-harm, self-injury and self-mutilation are all terms to describe deliberate damage someone does to their own body. This can involve, amongst other things, skin picking, cutting, burning of hair or skin, or head banging. Though the terms are usually used to describe acts that are not socially sanctioned, it is important to realise that alcohol or drugs are also sometimes used in a self-harming way. Self-harm is not directly linked to suicide - for some people it is a way to avoid suicide. Someone who is self-harming maybe doing it to allow themselves to 'feel' something, whereas the aim of suicide is usually to stop 'feeling'.

However, anyone who is in extreme emotional distress may consider suicide, including someone who self-harms. Self-harm is not an attention seeking exercise, though if conspicuous it may be a cry for help. In addition, it is important to be aware that some individuals may self-harm as a result of having certain types of learning difficulty, such as autism. Self-harm is estimated to be one of the top five causes of acute medical admissions in the UK.

Someone may self-harm sporadically or repetitively. The way that they damage the body is usually intended to be superficial although sometimes they may accidentally cause more damage than they intended. Everybody who self-injures has his or her own reason for doing so. It may be because they are angry, scared or repulsed at themselves for some reason that is difficult to define. Contributory factors can be, amongst other things, low self-esteem or self-hatred, depression, fear of rejection or failure, guilt, mourning, past experience of emotional, physical or sexual abuse, or feelings of powerlessness.

Continued overleaf

Helping Yourself

If you are self-harming, it is likely that there are underlying issues that are causing you distress, and you might benefit from some support in looking at these.

Even if you don't feel ready to talk to anybody about underlying issues, there are still some practical ways in which you might think about helping yourself. Though feelings involved in self-harm are often strong, you do have choices and you can stop. If you do self-harm again, try not to feel guilty about it, or be put off from trying to quit again: it can be hard to stop suddenly if this has been your usual way of dealing with emotions.

Keep a diary of when you feel the need to self-harm and the emotions that have led you to that point. You may begin to recognise the build-up and look towards developing evasive action. Try to find other ways of expressing your feelings – you may want to consider drawing on yourself with make-up or a marker pen, hitting and punching cushions or placing an ice-cube on your skin. You might tell yourself that you can self-harm, but only after a delay of 10 minutes, and then keep extending that time.

Self-harm involves negative feelings. Try to think positively about yourself and remember, if you self-harm again, to try not to feel bad about it. On the other hand, it's important not to build your self-esteem on the ability to self-harm – hardening yourself to physical pain will not necessarily harden you to emotional pain.

If you do feel the need to self-harm again, do try to do it as safely as possible, using sterile equipment and seeking medical help when you need it. It can be helpful to have dressings and antiseptic creams ready.

Helping Others

If you know or care about someone who is self-harming it can be tempting not to acknowledge what is happening in the hope that the act will cease. It is important to realise that self-harm is an indication of emotional distress, and as such, needs to be taken seriously. Someone who is self-harming may well resist help, seeing self-harm as an essential coping mechanism in distressing circumstances. Simply listening can be of enormous benefit in itself, as can the promise of future meetings to discuss their worries. However, it is important that you remember your own personal and professional limitations, and encourage someone who is self-harming to seek support from someone experienced in dealing with self-harm as soon as possible. Someone who is self-harming is more likely to recover if they seek support.



GETTING SUPPORT

In the University:

You can talk confidentially to the Dean of Student Affairs or other members of the Student Support Team.

Email: student.support@ncl.edu.my

Webform: studentsupport.newcastle.edu.my

Or make an appointment at the Student Office.

Outside the University:

Your GP or family doctor can be a useful first point of contact. In some cases, your doctor will refer you for more specialised help and support. Sometimes it is easier to talk to someone over the phone.

The Befrienders Johor Bahru

The Befrienders offers confidential emotional support through a helpline and email service.

Helpline (1pm to 12am): 07 33 123 00

Email: sam@befriendersjb.org

Website: <http://www.befriendersjb.org/>

Hospital Permai

Trunk Line/Operator: 07 231 1000

Emergency (BDM): 07 231 1170

URGENT HELP OR SUPPORT

Emergency Services

If you are worried about your safety or feel at risk of harming yourself, or if you are worried about the safety of a fellow student, you need to access help immediately.

If you feel your life is in imminent danger, you should call 999 or go to Accident and Emergency at the nearest hospital.

For emergencies on campus, call NUMed Security.

NUMed Security (24/7): 07 555 3881/3984/3985

Out-of-Hours Help

Out-of-hours on weekdays and on week-ends, you may call the NUMed Senior Officer-of-the-Day emergency number.

NUMed Senior Officer-of-the-Day: 011 1231 1276

