



LifeSIGNS self-injury fact sheet for people who self-injure

What is self-injury?

Self-injury is any deliberate, non-suicidal behaviour that inflicts physical injury to your body. Self-injury is essentially a coping mechanism that may enable you to deal with intense emotional distress, creating a calming sensation. Or you may use self-injury to 'awaken' you when feeling numb or dissociated.

The injuries may validate your feelings, creating a 'real' pain that is easier to cope with than the hidden emotional pain.

Self-injury has an immediate effect, creating instant relief, but it is only temporary; the underlying emotional issues still remain. Over time, self-injury may have become your automatic response to the ordinary strains of everyday life, and both frequency and severity of self-injury may have increased.

At LifeSIGNS, we recognise that self-injury is a coping mechanism, and we will never judge you or tell you to stop. But we do encourage you to make positive changes in your life and in your behaviour, and seek healthier coping mechanisms so that you can choose to move away from self-injury.

Who self-injures

Self-injury affects people from all walks of life, irrespective of age, gender, sexual orientation, ethnicity or personal strength.

Types of self-injury

Some forms of self-injury get talked about more often than others, but you may have found your own unique ways to hurt yourself. It is still self-injury.

Severity

The severity of your self-injury is not an indication of the level of your emotional distress. You should never feel that your self-injury isn't 'bad' enough for you to need or deserve help. You deserve help.

Who to turn to

Talking about self-injury can be really hard. You might feel it's easier to talk about 'feeling rough' or your stress or the things that you feel are going wrong for you at the moment.

Turn to someone you really trust - a friend, family member, maybe a teacher. Make sure you both have the time to sit down and talk. You might find it helpful to print fact sheets or pages from our website to explain what self-injury is about. Try to focus on the underlying emotional causes.

It may upset them to hear what you do. Don't allow yourself to get disappointed with this reaction. Allow them time to digest everything - you don't have to explain everything in one go.

Look at our 'coming out' page for some more help: www.lifesigns.org.uk/out

Alternatives:

- Express your feelings - get it all out on paper or in an email. Express yourself, be honest with yourself, but don't let negative judgements about yourself creep in - just state your emotions;
- Create something - it doesn't have to be related to your SI or your issues. You might create something of beauty, or just something of interest. Don't judge it or yourself by how 'good' it is, focus on and enjoy the process of creation;
- Call someone - keep it short and friendly, just a chat might help;
- Chat online - on social network sites, or our support forum at www.lifesigns.org.uk/board
- 15 min rule - when the urge to self-injure comes, tell yourself that you are going to choose to *not* self-injure for 15 minutes; after this period of 15 minutes, if you still feel like self-injuring, then you can;
- Find more suggestions at www.lifesigns.org.uk/help



Scan the image on your smartphone to access our mobile website.

Points to remember:

- Self-injury is a symptom of underlying emotional distress, and a coping mechanism;
- Severity or type of self-injury is not an indication of the level of emotional distress being suffered;
- Self-injury has nothing to do with personal strength, and admitting that you need help is a sign of courage, not weakness;
- At LifeSIGNS, we encourage all people to make positive changes in their lives, empowering themselves to move away from self-injury and find healthier coping mechanisms;
- When moving away from self-injury, it's okay to have relapses - don't be hard on yourself if you find yourself turning to SI at times;
- You are not alone! Join our support forum and gain support alongside others. Follow LifeSIGNS on our social networks.

When to seek medical attention

The majority of scratches and cuts can be dealt with at home with sterile dressings, antiseptic wash and plasters. Burns must be checked by a medical professional.

If an injury is serious or an overdose has been taken, medical attention should be sought. If in any doubt call NHS Direct on 0845 46 47 (UK only); you will not be 'interrogated' - it's OK to call for advice.

It can be scary, or you may feel you don't deserve help, but it is essential to get proper medical attention if a wound is too serious for a simple first aid kit.

Be aware that although self-injury is non-suicidal behaviour, the emotional distress that leads to self-injury can also lead to thoughts of suicide. If you feel suicidal, please seek urgent medical assistance.