

Helping Someone Dealing with Self-Harm

Discovering that a friend, family member or loved one is self-harming can be a lot to process. It can be tough to understand why someone would intentionally hurt themselves, and you might find yourself feeling emotions like shock, sadness, anger, guilt, confusion and more.

1. **Ask.** If you have concerns that someone you know is self-harming, don't ignore your instincts. You might see scars on someone's arms, legs or torso. It is also important that self-harm can take a variety of forms like cutting, piercing, biting, burning, hair pulling, hitting, and more.
Do not skirt around what you are trying to say. Ask compassionately, gently, but directly.

- "I've noticed some scars on your legs. You've seemed sad lately. Are you self-injuring?"
- "You said that your anxiety has been intense. Did you buy that lighter to self-harm?"

2. **Listen, listen, listen.** Self-harm is a common coping method for people who feel guilt, rejection, sadness, self-hatred, worthlessness, confusion, loneliness, anxiety, anger, and/or more. It is a myth that those who self-harm are doing it for attention. Listening openly to their feelings can help to identify why they are self-harming. Do not place personal judgements on what they are saying. Remind them that you care and are there to support them.

3. **Assess and offer.** It is not urgent to get the person to stop self-harming immediately as it can help to relieve a lot of emotions. Instead, find out about how their method of self-harming, and check to see if they have been self-harming safely. For example, some people who have a lot of experience cutting know when to stop in order to avoid any serious threat to their life and how to avoid infections. If they are unsure about safety, you can explore [this useful guide](#) together.

This is a useful [basic first-aid guide](#) in case something escalates while self-harming:

If it feels appropriate and un-rushed, you can gently offer to explore some distractions or alternatives to self-harming. If the person is not open to this, do not push it. Instead, continue to encourage safety. You can explore options again in the future if it feels right. If they are open to exploring, here is [a great list of options](#).

4. **Take care of yourself.** If you are new to talking about self-harm, you might find yourself reacting strongly or having intense feelings. Do not feel obligated to keep everything to yourself, because supporting someone alone can be a lot to carry. It is important to take care of your own needs so that you can best support someone else. For tips on taking care of yourself while supporting someone, here is [a useful guide](#).



Your friends @ Youthspace