



LifeSIGNS

Self Injury Guidance & Network Support

Registered Charity No. 1114661

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Factsheet for People who
Self-Injure 2007 V1

A Definition of Self-Injury:

LifeSIGNS sees self-injury as any deliberate, non-suicidal behaviour that inflicts physical harm on someone's own body and is aimed at relieving emotional distress – essentially it is a coping mechanism. Physical pain is often easier to deal with than emotional pain, because it causes 'real' feelings and can be 'seen'. Injuries can prove to an individual that their emotional pain is real and valid.

Self-injury may calm or awaken a person. However, it only provides temporary relief and does not deal with the underlying issues. Self-injury can become a natural response to the stresses of day-to-day life and can escalate in frequency and severity.

LifeSIGNS recognises that self-injury is a way of coping with distressing experiences and difficult emotions; we also appreciate how bewildering self-injurious behaviour may seem you. We encourage you to explore alternatives to self-injury and to come to understand what drives you to hurt yourself, but we will never judge, or tell you what to do.

Types of Self-Injury:

There are various ways in which people injure themselves. Some of the more common methods are as follows:

- Cutting, or scratching
- Banging and bruising limbs
- Burning
- Overdosing on medication without suicidal intent
- Deliberate bone-breaking.

While people can injure any part of their body, arms and legs are frequently cited as the most common places. This is perhaps because they are easily accessible, and can also be hidden easily.

Self-injury can also be known as self-harm. Self-harm might include other behaviours such as eating disorders and alcohol abuse, whereas self-injury usually refers to specifically injurious behaviour such as self-cutting.

Whilst most self-injury is not life threatening, there are times when must you seek medical attention:

- If an injury is serious or an overdose has been taken
- If you believe you are at severe risk to yourself (i.e. Suicidal) or to others.

If you ever feel suicidal, please phone the Samaritans on 08457 909090, or seek help from your GP or A & E straight away.

Remember that self-injury can affect anyone, regardless of age, gender, race, sexuality and religion. Everyone who self-injures deserves help and support.

If you are someone who self-injures:

Self-injury can be a very lonely and isolating experience. It might feel like you are the only person who hurts themselves in this way, and it might feel like things will never get better. However, you don't have to be alone! There are people out there who want to help you.

You might want to consider telling a family member or friend about your self-injury. Young people in particular often find it difficult to tell their parents about their self-injury. However, not having to hide anymore can make life a lot easier.

Telling people can lead to feelings of relief and can develop into help and support. Sometimes, just having the option of being able to talk to someone can reduce feelings of needing to self-injure. If you are unsure about how to tell someone, download the **free** LifeSIGNS Self-Injury Awareness booklet from www.lifesigns.org.uk for information, or you could print out the LifeSIGNS factsheet for family/friends which you could give to the person you are telling to help them understand a bit more about self-injury.

There is lots of help available, from counsellors at schools, universities and in the workplace, GPs, psychiatrists and psychologists to alternative therapies, group therapy and peer support on the LifeSIGNS message board. There is no miracle cure for self-injury as it is normally a symptom of an underlying emotional problem. What will help you will not be the same as what has helped another person struggling with self-injury. It is important to keep an open mind, and remember that no matter how bad things seem everyone deserves health and happiness.

Although at LifeSIGNS we don't tell people to stop self-injuring, in time it is hoped that you will find other ways for you to cope that are more constructive and less harmful. You might want to find out more about self-injury and alternative coping mechanisms, and you may find it helpful to be in contact with other people who self-injure by joining the LifeSIGNS message board.

It is important that self-injury is not replaced with another negative and potentially damaging coping mechanism, for instance smoking or drinking. Each person who turns to self-injury should be aware that they have choices, and sometimes they choose to harm themselves, and other times they may choose other activities. A non-judgmental approach to choices can inspire a person to feel responsible for the choices they make.

Care should be taken every time you consider hurting yourself. When you need to self-injure please find a safe place where you will not be disturbed and that you feel calm in, and have your first aid kit ready to hand. LifeSIGNS does not encourage the use of self-injury, we simply accept that self-injury is a coping method for some people at certain times, and we will endeavour to support those who self-injure along their roads to recovery.

LifeSIGNS (Self-Injury Guidance & Network Support) is a UK registered charity (no. 1114661), run by the volunteer directors who have personal experiences with self-injury.

LifeSIGNS aims to support all people who are affected in any way by self-injury in the UK and beyond - including those who self-injure, their family and friends, healthcare professionals, schools and teachers, and anyone with an interest in self-injury.