

# Supporting Students who Self-Harm

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# Welcome & Housekeeping

- Online format/etiquette
- Confidentiality and sensitivity
- Emotional opt out

# Aims

- Have a working understanding of what self-harm is and some of the underlying reasons
- Improve confidence in speaking to a young person about self-harm
- Understand the risk factors
- Consider ways to support them going forward, including referrals into specialist services.
- An understanding of support and resources available

# Why is this training relevant to us?

- Reducing rates of self-harm is a priority in the County Durham Health & Wellbeing Strategy
- Schools are well-placed to help promote protective factors and healthier coping strategies for young people
- It's our duty of care (Supporting Pupils at School with Medical Conditions, 2014)

# Self-harming actions

Self-harm refers to “any act of self-poisoning or self-injury carried out by an individual irrespective of motivation” (*NICE 2013*) “It is an expression of personal distress”

- Cutting or scratching with knives, razor blades or sharp implements
- Burning/scalding
- Hair-pulling
- Hitting or banging arms, legs or head on walls, objects
- Taking overdoses/swallowing substances
- Taking risks with the intention of hurting oneself
- Self-strangulation

**This list is not exhaustive!**

# Self-harm – Mythbusting

Only girls do it

Attention seeking?

People self-harm  
because they are  
suicidal

Self-harm is a  
teenage phase

They enjoy it

# Why do it? – *Self-harm is a coping strategy*

The pain is easier to deal with than the emotions

I felt like I deserved it

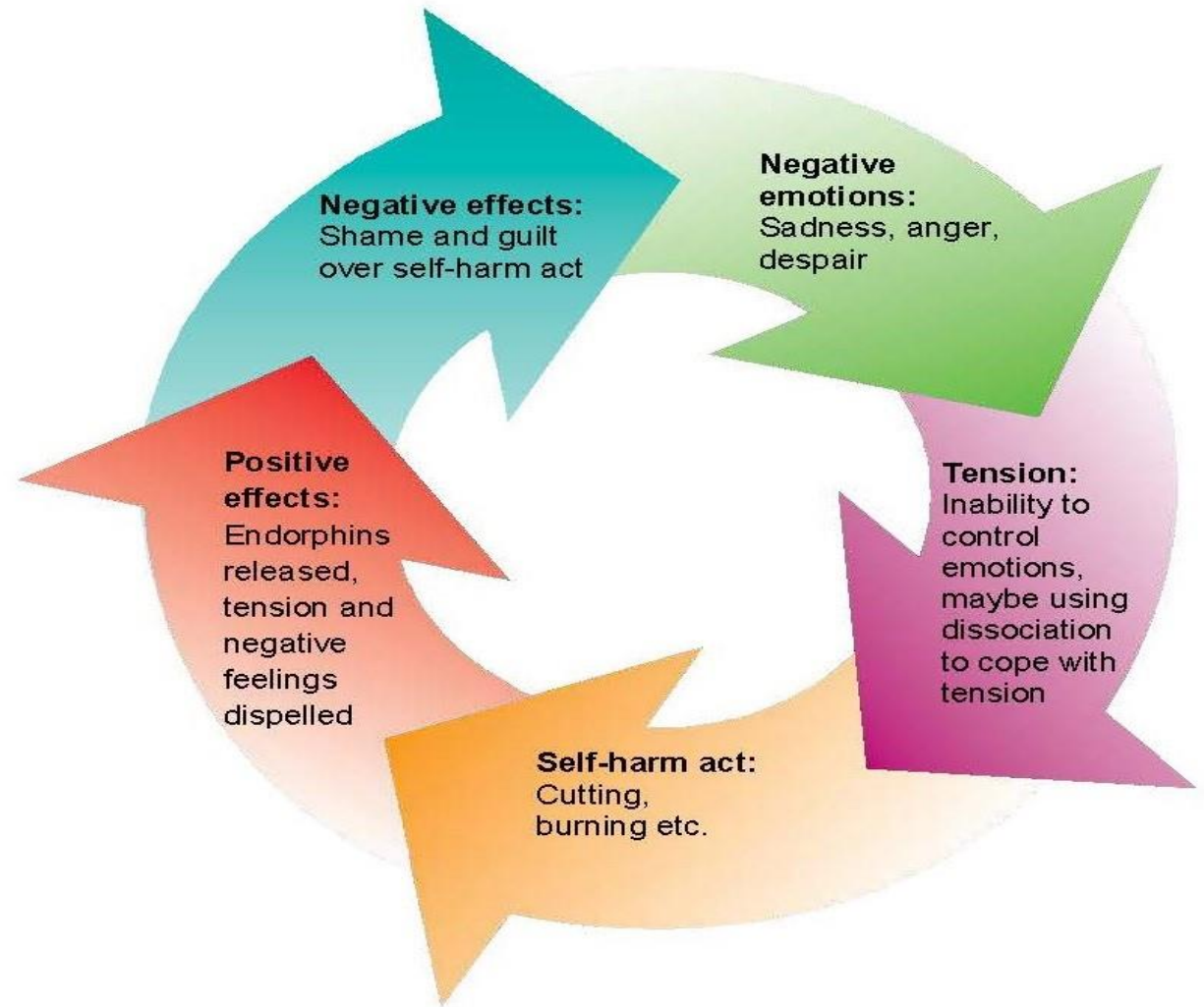
I just wanted to feel something, to feel alive

It makes me feel calmer, it's like a release

It's addictive

I wanted to feel in control

# The Self-harm cycle





# Adverse Childhood Experiences

## Including:

- Experiences of separation/loss/abandonment
- All forms of abuse and neglect
- Domestic violence
- Parents with a mental health condition
- Living in a chaotic environment with inconsistent boundaries

# Common Triggers

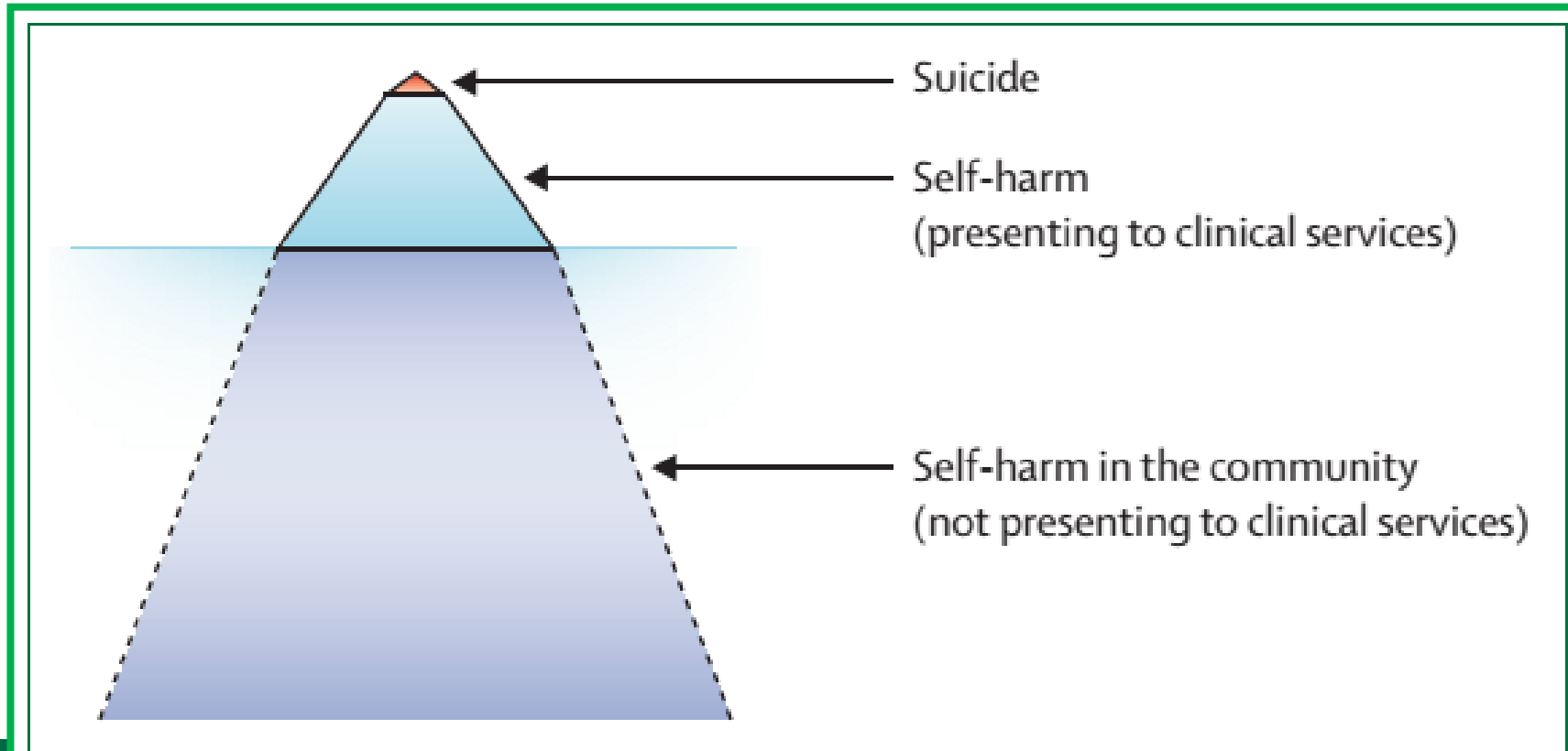
- Bullying
- Exam pressure
- Stress
- Bereavement
- Conflict in relationships that re-evokes feelings of loss/abandonment
- Identity issues/belonging

# What are the barriers to disclosure?

- A private matter hence under reporting
- Imagining that sharing their actions/feelings will be upsetting to others or be a burden
- Previous experience of “bad” responses, or that others will think they are doing it for “attention”
- Loss of control

# Prevalence

- 1 in 6 young people self-harmed in the last year (The Children's Society, 2018)



**Figure 1: Representation of the relative prevalence self-harm and suicide in young people**

# Responding to the young person

## - *What's helpful*

- Kind, calm and non-judgemental approach
- Establish if they need medical attention, stay with them if they're at immediate risk
- Use active listening: open questions, reflections and clarify if you're not sure
- Avoid asking "why" but reflect and open up conversations about how they're feeling
- Be clear about your duty of care – follow procedures and involve them in any action you take
- Making sure you take time afterwards to reflect on your own feelings and any support you might need

# Responding to the young person

## - *What's not helpful*

- Telling them to “stop”
- Appearing overwhelmed or panicking
- Using sanctions
- Asking them to talk to someone else, or assume someone else is dealing with this
- Making assumptions about the methods or the reasons
- Making agreements you can't keep

# Questions it's OK to ask

*When does this happen? - Where? - How often? - Who else knows about this? - Who do you trust that can help?*

*How do you feel after? - Are there other strategies that have helped? - What do you think the risks are in what you're doing? – What do you need to keep yourself safe?*

*Are you feeling suicidal?*

It's important to ask and find out if the self-harm is a coping strategy or if there is intent to end their life. Sometimes even extreme forms of self-harm may not carry intent but there is still risk of misadventure so you must take appropriate action according to the potential risk. If they are at immediate risk do not leave them on their own.

# Risk and Vulnerability

Increased risk also associated with:

- Feelings of depression/low mood
- Increased frequency or escalation of self-harm
- Suicidal thoughts
- Intent and planning
- Losing a friend or relative to suicide
- Internet sites
- Technical knowledge or access
- Use of alcohol/drugs
- Inability to keep themselves safe/poor impulse control



# Risk, Vulnerability & Procedures

- Please see multi-agency self-harm pathway (also available at <https://durham-scp.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2016/10/Guidance-for-staff-working-with-CYPs-at-risk-of-Self-Harm-Sept-16.pdf>)
- Schools flow chart available in the Self-harm Guidance for Schools.

**\*IMPORTANT\***

Remember that a risk assessment cannot always accurately predict risk, and simply carrying out a risk assessment doesn't reduce risk in itself. An Assessment of Need is required to establish the individual's circumstances and what support needs to be accessed.

# Social Contagion

- ‘Contagion’ refers to the way in which a person’s self-harming behaviour influences another person to engage in self-harm
- Likely to be affected are those who are already struggling with mental health problems, have a history of self-harm, have few protective factors and have a history of adverse childhood experiences (ACEs).
- The ‘Circle of Vulnerability Model’ can also help to identify students at risk.
- **Geographical Proximity**  
**Social Proximity**  
**Psychological Proximity**

# Contagion

- Where a young person may be influencing others, once their needs are understood and addressed, a conversation can be had about reducing the impact on others.
- **Discourage:**
  - Sharing of too many details/specific self-harm
  - Speculation around self-harm events
  - Glorifying/promoting self-harm
- **Encourage:**
  - Sharing of helplines/support organisations
  - Sensitivity to the feelings of young people, families and friends
  - Sharing of positive coping strategies

# Final Reflections

- What are the challenges for you in thinking about or working with a young person who is self-harming?
- How do you manage your own self-care and what positive coping strategies do you use?
- How well do you know your own organisation's self-harm policy and what information do you need going forwards?

# Support and guidance for schools

- School's self-harm guidance - <https://durham-scp.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2020/09/Schools-Self-Harm-Guidance-2020-Final-Version.pdf>
- Advice and support from Educational Psychology Service/EWEL
- Joint Education-CAMHS training offer
- MHSTs available for advice and support in clusters of education settings across County Durham

# Resources and contacts for professionals

- CAMHS Single Point of Access - **0300 123 9296**
- CAMHS Crisis – **0300 0200317**
- Support and training from EPS and EWEL, **03000 263 333**
- [www.minded.org](http://www.minded.org) – free elearning for professionals
- Useful video on ‘active listening’ :  
[https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=oWe\\_ogA5YCU](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=oWe_ogA5YCU)



Come along to the group, meet other parents/carers in similar situations and get support. There will be guest speakers, discussion topics, practical tips for coping and tea/coffee & biscuits

**1st Wednesday of every month**

10am-12pm

Durham County Cricket Ground,  
Riverside, Chester-le-Street DH3 3QR.

**3rd Wednesday of every month**

5.30-7.30

South Durham CAMHS, Acley Centre,  
Newton Aycliffe DL5 4PE.

**For further information, please contact:**

**Wendy: 07415 380 040 or Nicky: 07500 783 634**

**Everyone welcome-hope to see you there!**

"I am so glad I came and returned home feeling a little stronger knowing I wasn't alone"

"Parent"

"Was able to find out about local services and teams that I can get involved. Met some people who are going through the same issues we are having or similar. Access to support and info for parent's fab. To be able to speak about your child and not feel like an alien."

"Parent"

**Durham**  
County Council



# Resources for young people

- <https://www.recoverycollegeonline.co.uk/young-people/>
- [www.youngminds.org.uk](http://www.youngminds.org.uk)
- [www.papyrus-uk.org](http://www.papyrus-uk.org)
- <http://nshn.co.uk/downloads/Distractions.pdf>
- [www.Samaritans.org](http://www.Samaritans.org)
- <https://www.annafreud.org/on-my-mind/>