

Understanding and responding to self-harm

By CAMHS Rapid Response

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About CAMHS Rapid Response

CAMHS Rapid Response is a Berkshire wide service that provides urgent assessments, follow up appointments, and short-term intensive interventions to young people presenting in a **mental health crisis**.

What we provide

- Urgent comprehensive mental health assessments (identify mental health needs and identify Clinical formulation – not a risk assessment)
 - Provide follow up appointment after the first assessment – to review risk and gather more information/formulation (to make sense of what has gone on and therefore identify ongoing care planning).
 - Multi-agency liaison/consultation (where required)
 - Medication (where required)
 - Short term skills-based work for young people at the edge of Tier 4 (where required) to help them learn skills to manage their emotions and behaviour.
 - Aim to reduce presentation to A&Es, tier 4 admissions and delayed discharges.
 - Teaching/training partner agencies.
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Self-Harm Poem



Definition of self-harm

*“The term ‘self-harm’ is used to describe all intentional acts of selfpoisoning (e.g., overdoses) or self-injury (e.g., self-cutting), **irrespective of degree of suicidal intent or other types of motivation.** Thus it includes acts intended to result in death (‘attempted suicide’), those without suicidal intent (e.g., to communicate distress, to temporarily reduce unpleasant feelings), and those with mixed motivation“*

Some reasons why young people may self-harm or engage in other risk taking behaviours



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- To express themselves/communicate
- To punish themselves
- To regulate themselves (or release internal tension/stress)
- Self-harm is often a coping mechanism
- Difficulties at home
- Arguments or problems with friends
- Acting on hallucinations
- Influenced by others/peers (competitiveness, copying or fitting in)
- School pressures
- Low self-esteem
- Transitions and changes, such as changing schools
- Alcohol and drug use
- Peer influence
- Bullying
- Adverse Childhood Experiences (ACEs)
- Depression
- Anxiety
- Other mental illness

Adding these problems to the fact that teenagers brains are not developed in terms of logical thinking, impulse control will make them vulnerable/prone to risk taking behaviours. Self-harm can also feel addictive as it releases endorphins.

Supporting some-one who self-harms



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What can you do to help?

Finding out that someone self-harms, whether someone tells you directly, or you suspect that someone is hurting themselves, it can be difficult to know what to say and how best to approach the situation. You might feel shocked, angry, helpless, responsible or any number of other difficult emotions.

- Try not to panic or overreact. The way you respond will have an impact on how much they open up to you and other people about their self-harm in the future.
- Remember that self-harm is usually someone's way of managing very hard feelings or experiences, and that in the majority of cases it is different to suicidal feelings.

What helps?

There are lots of things you can do to make a difference to someone you know who self-harms. Your attitude and how you relate to them is one of the key things that can help them feel supported. Here are some things to keep in mind:

- Try to be non-judgemental.
 - Let the person know that you are there for them.
 - Relate to them as a whole person, not just their self-harm.
 - Try to have empathy and understanding about what they are doing.
 - Let them be in control of their decisions.
 - Offer to help them find support.
 - Remind them of their positive qualities and things they do well.
 - Try to have honest communication, where you take responsibility for any fears you have
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Supporting someone who self-harms using validation



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1. Actively listen. Make eye contact and stay focused.
2. Be mindful of your verbal and nonverbal reactions in order to avoid invalidation (e.g., rolling eyes, sucking teeth, heavy sighing, walking away, making light of serious things, or saying, for example, “That’s stupid, don’t be sad,” “I don’t care what you say,” “Whatever!”).
3. Observe what the other person is feeling in the moment. Look for a word that describes the feeling.
4. Reflect the feeling back without judgment. The goal is to communicate that you understand how the other person feels (e.g., “It makes sense that you’re angry”; “I understand that you are having a tough time right now”). For self-validation: “I have a right to feel sad.” Avoid “Yes, but . . .” thinking. Instead, think about what your best friend in Wise Mind would say to you.
5. Show tolerance! Look for how the feelings, thoughts, or actions make sense given the other’s (or your own) history and current situation, even if you don’t approve of the behaviour, emotion, or action itself.
6. Respond in a way that shows that you are taking the person seriously (with or without words); for example, “That sounds awful.” If someone is crying, give a tissue or a hug. You may ask, “What do you need right now? For me to just listen or to help you problem-solve?”

WHAT TO VALIDATE?

Feelings, thoughts, and behaviours in ourselves or others

Validate the valid, not the invalid. You can still validate the feeling without validating the behaviour. For example: Validate someone feeling upset about a low test grade even though you know he or she didn’t study, but don’t validate the lack of studying that led to the low grade.

Supporting some-one who self-harms



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What doesn't help?

Sometimes, even with the best will in the world, attempts to support someone can backfire.

Here are some potential pitfalls to watch out for:

- Trying to force change.
- Acting or communicating in a way that threatens to take control away from them.
- Either ignoring their injuries or overly focusing on them.
- Labelling self-harm as 'attention seeking'. Although it often isn't, self-harm can sometimes be a person's way of asking for help. If so, it is important to remember that there is nothing wrong with wanting help, and that deep distress can get in the way of someone's ability to be direct about what they need.

Self Care

It is important to also look after yourself and colleagues following dealing with an incident of self-harm.

What are 'unmet' needs?

Anything that perpetuates stress in a child (e.g. what's keeping the problems going)

Unmet Needs are usually reversible and the 1st intervention is to work on reversal

- Any neurodevelopmental difficulty (language, learning, sensory, ADHD, ASD, DCD) that is unaddressed
 - Absence of appropriate education provision
 - Disruptive care-giving (any abuse/trauma)
 - Threats to attachment security in a CiC, or due to current economic climate
 - Bullying
 - Substance misuse
 - School refusal/poor school attendance
 - Limited physical/social activity
 - Untreated major mental illness
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How do we (CAMHS) think about crisis/self-harm?

**We aim to identify what's going on (in life)
through curiosity and exploration**

**We share our understanding (with patient,
parents and network)**

We create a care-plan around unmet needs.

Not offer therapy or medications

**A young person taking 10 vitamin tablets,
has no intent to die**

Answer – False

The amount has no relation to the intent. A young person may not know that this will not cause harm or the level required to cause harm

**Self-harming is attention seeking
behaviour**

Answer – False

**It is a way of expressing deep
distress**

If you have a young person that self-harms, then you should lock away all potentially harmful substances and the potential cutting instruments

Answer – True

In an environment where a young person is not supervised all medicines and potentially harmful substances should be locked away. Knives; razors and other potential cutting instruments, should be removed and kept in a place where adults can monitor their use

Young People who self-harm have mental health problems

Answer – False

Self-harm in itself is not a diagnosis. It is not a mental disorder, it is an emotional difficulty. So they may be distressed but may not reach the criteria for a mental health diagnosis. Some people who have a diagnosed mental health condition may have associated self-harming behaviours as part of the diagnosis. Studies have shown that a high prevalence of self-harm was found among children/young people suffering from depression; conduct disorder and anxiety disorder. However for the vast majority of young people who self-harm, it is an expression of difficult or unbearable emotions

Positive risk taking



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We can't completely eliminate risk and we need patients to take some responsibility (in a managed/planned way).

When we take positive risks we need to justify the rationale of doing so, by being clear about the particular outcomes we are trying to achieve when taking positive risks (the benefits of taking positive risks), and also the consequences of being too risk averse.

We always try and avoid mental health inpatient admissions due to the following:

- This will not resolve family issues (if family issues is the main cause).
- Interrupted education.
- Impact on friendships
- They learn unhelpful behaviours from other patients.
- Often they escalate when being discharged as inpatient environment gives them a false sense of safety.

Hospitalisation (Adolescent mental health inpatient unit)



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No evidence this prevents further SH attempts or dying by suicide (Gould 2003, Kings 2006)

No rigorous RCTs show psychiatric inpatient admissions reduce self-harm

In fact, some adolescents may increase their self-harm behaviour once placed in an inpatient unit (Huey 2004)

Care Planning - What can carers do to enhance safety?



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- Making it harder to get hold of items that can be used to hurt ourselves can reduce the chances of self-harm occurring. If a young person has previously used a ligature or taken a medication overdose, then restricting access is important.
 - If your child's whereabouts are unknown and concerns exist, you should contact police to report them as vulnerable and missing. If your child has threatened "jumping" or has previously gone to train stations or high rise buildings such as a multi-storey car park, be sure to inform the police of this possibility so the police can narrow their search and little time is wasted in finding your child.
 - If concerns are existing; a bedroom search is advised to ensure all potential harmful objects are to be removed.
 - Limit access to social media /internet if unlimited access is having a negative impact on your child's mental and emotional wellbeing. It is best for parents and the young person to work together on this to agree some rules and a compassionate approach is recommended.
 - Restrict contact with friends/peers if contact is unhelpful during crisis period.
 - If the nature of risks are high, you may want to enhance supervision within and outside the home. This must be a short term measure until things are more manageable and there is clarity around more appropriate and sustainable forms of support. This will be advised/guided by the CAMHS clinician at the point of assessment.
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Inappropriate attendance to A&E

- We should all be trying to prevent young people from attending A&E unless they require medical intervention that is life threatening such as:
 - They have recently taken an overdose
 - Ingested harmful liquids
 - Cut themselves significantly (deep cut/s and/or bleed profusely)
 - Burns that are blistering/red.
 - Young person has lost consciousness.

If no medical intervention is required, however there are urgent/significant concerns about the young persons risk/safety in regard to their mental health then the CAMHS Rapid Response Team can be contacted on **0300 365 1234** during these hours:

8am to 10pm (Mon-Fri excluding Bank Holidays)

9am to 5pm (Weekends and Bank Holidays)

Attending hospital can reinforce/reward behaviour.

Outside of the hours of 8am to 10pm, please contact: **0800 129 9999**. This number will be for the 24 hours Berkshire Adult mental health crisis team. This team is designed to support adults in mental health crisis but are able to take calls from young people and parents; and offer advice and direction.

NHS 24 hour emergency service **999**. Call 999 in a life-threatening medical emergency. This is when someone is seriously ill or injured and their life is at risk.

Resources for support



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Samaritans - National 24 hour Listener Telephone No: **116 123 or 0845 790 9090**

ChildLine – a free, private and confidential service where you can talk about anything. Whatever your worry, whenever you need help, we're here for you online, on the phone, anytime. **Tel: 116123** www.childline.org.uk

YoungMinds - a leading charity for young people's Mental Health. Parent Helpline: **0808 8025544**

The Mix - If you're under 25 you can talk to The Mix for free on the phone, by email or on their webchat. You can also use their phone counselling service, or get more information on support services you might need. Freephone: 0808 808 4994 (13:00-23:00 daily) www.themix.org.uk

NHS 111 (or go to 111.nhs.uk) you should use the NHS 111 service if you urgently need medical help or advice but it's not a life-threatening situation. Available 24 hours a day, 7 days a week.

PAPYRUS – a National Charity dedicated to the prevention of young suicide. Provides confidential help and advice to prevent suicide in young people: www.papyrus-uk.org Tel: 0800 0684141.

Family Lives – a charity supporting parents to avert crisis. Confidential Family Support Service: **0808 800 2222**.
<https://www.familylives.org.uk/>

Youthline – A registered Charity providing a free, confidential counselling service for young people attending secondary school, and young adults up to the age of 25. Tel: 0800 0961425 <https://www.youthlineuk.com/>

Childline – a free, private and confidential service where you can talk about anything. Whatever your worry, whenever you need help, we're here for you online, on the phone, anytime. **Tel: 116123** www.childline.org.uk

Kooth - Free, safe and anonymous online support & counselling for young people <https://www.kooth.com/>

Bullying UK 0808 800 2222 Free from Landlines, open 7am-Midnight Website: www.bullying.co.uk

Shout <https://giveusashout.org/> Shout 85258 is a 24/7 UK text messaging service for times when people feel they need immediate support

Thank you

questions...