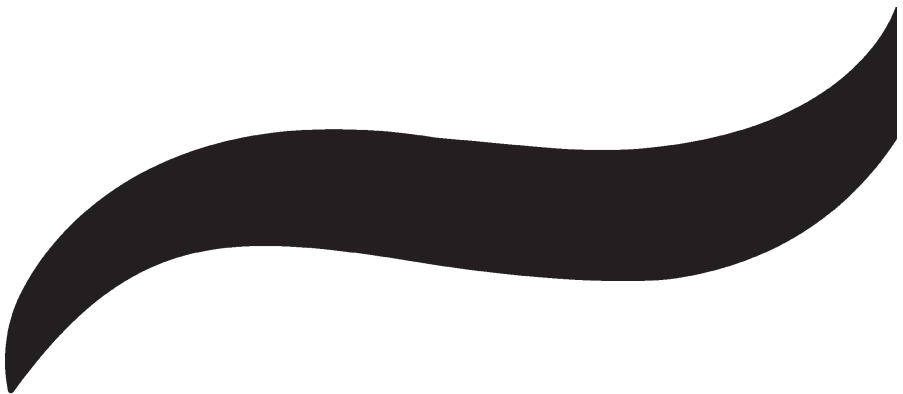




# Self-Harm

Information for clients



## **SELF-HARM**

Self-harm is when a person causes physical damage to him or herself. It usually involves activities such as cutting or scratching with sharp objects. This leaflet looks at how to learn to cope with and stop self-harming.

### **WHY DO PEOPLE SELF-HARM?**

People sometimes harm themselves in order to try and cope with their problems. For some people, the pain of self-harm can help stop strong feelings such as upsetting thoughts or anger. Some people who harm themselves do so because they hate themselves or their bodies. This might be the result of being abused or remembering abuse.

### **HOW COMMON IS SELF-HARM?**

Self-harm is surprisingly common. Each year, more than 24,000 teenagers are admitted to UK hospitals after deliberately harming themselves. A recent survey of teenage girls in Edinburgh showed that nearly one in three have self-harmed.

### **WHY IS SELF-HARM A PROBLEM?**

When people harm themselves there is a risk of serious physical damage and infection. In the longer term there is a risk of permanent damage and ugly scarring. People who harm themselves usually feel ashamed and disgusted, and become depressed about what they are doing.

Once people start self-harming they can become 'addicted' to it. Just like any other bad habit, it can be very difficult to stop. The original need for self-harm might not be there any more. What's left is a vicious circle of feeling bad/harming/feeling bad/harming.

## HOW DO YOU KNOW IF YOU'RE READY TO STOP?

Most people who self-harm want to stop, but may feel they are not ready or could not manage without self-harming. Stopping never has to be an 'all or none' process. If you decide to try to stop, celebrate your successes and learn from your failures, you will get there in the end.

The first task when you've decided to try to stop is to break the cycle, and try new ways of coping. You do have to force yourself to do this; it doesn't just come. If you choose to harm yourself in the next crisis, you will know that it is a choice. This implies that there are other choices that could be made.

## DEALING WITH SELF-HARM

There are a number of different 'in the moment' strategies you can try. These strategies can work because they help you with the strong emotions that make you want to self-harm. They can teach you that you can get through a crisis without harming yourself.

### 1. Buy some time

If you get the urge to harm yourself, tell yourself that if you still want to do it in 10 minutes, you can. When the time is up, see if you can go another 10. Gradually increase the time you wait. This really works!

### 2. Learn how you feel

The best way to increase the chances of calming the urge to harm is to match how you are feeling to what you do. First, take a few moments to look behind the urge.

#### What are you feeling?

- ❖ Angry, frustrated, restless?
- ❖ Sad, soft, melancholy, depressed, unhappy?
- ❖ Craving sensation, feeling unreal?    ❖ Wanting focus?
- ❖ Wanting to see blood?    ❖ Wanting to see scars or pick

## **How do you feel?**

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.....

### **3. Dealing with feeling**

Match the feeling to an activity. Some examples:

#### **Angry, frustrated, restless:**

Use a pillow to hit a wall. Rip up an old newspaper or phone book. On a sketch or photo of yourself, mark in red ink what you want to do. Clean your room (or your whole house). Go for a walk/jog/run.

#### **Sad, soft, melancholy, depressed, unhappy:**

Do something slow and soothing, like taking a hot bath with bath oil or bubbles. Do something that makes you feel taken care of and comforted. Listen to soothing music or call a friend and just talk about things that you like.

#### **Craving sensation, feeling unreal:**

Do something that creates a sharp physical sensation. Squeeze ice hard (this really hurts). Put a finger into a frozen food (like ice cream) for a minute. Bite into a hot pepper or chew a piece of ginger root. Snap an elastic band on your wrist.

#### **Wanting focus:**

Focus on how it feels to breathe. Notice the way your chest and stomach move with each breath. Do something that you really need to focus on, like playing a computer game. Choose an object in the room. Examine it carefully and then write as detailed a description of it as you can. Include as much as you can: size, weight, texture, shape, colour, possible uses, and feel. Choose a random object, like a wastepaper bin, and try to list 30 different uses for it.

### **Wanting to see blood:**

Draw on yourself with a red felt-tip pen. Make a tray of red ice by dropping six or seven drops of red food colour into each of the wells. Use these to draw on the parts of you that you'd like to cut.

### **Wanting to see scars or pick scabs:**

Get a henna tattoo kit. Put the henna on as a paste and leave it overnight; the next day you can pick it off as you would a scab and it leaves an orange-red mark behind.

### **“I tried but I still want to harm myself.”**

Can you wait another 10 minutes and repeat the three previous steps?

Sometimes you will make a huge effort to keep from harming yourself but nothing seems to work. You feel that if you don't harm yourself, you'll explode. What now?

### **Ask yourself the following questions:**

- ❖ Why do I want to harm myself?
- ❖ Have I felt like this before?
- ❖ Have I dealt with this a different way in the past?
- ❖ What else can I do that won't hurt?
- ❖ How will I feel tomorrow morning?
- ❖ Do I need to harm myself?

If you don't feel ready to stop yet, you can still take more control over your self-harming. If you feel you need to harm yourself, allow yourself to do so, but decide beforehand what you are going to do and stick to your limits. If you choose to do this, you should take care to remain as safe as possible when harming yourself.

## STAYING SAFE

If you must cut then you can try to do so in the least harmful way.

- ❖ Don't share things you use to self-harm with anyone else. If you do, you risk infection (hepatitis, AIDS, etc.).
- ❖ Try to keep cuts shallow. Keep first aid supplies on hand and know what to do in the case of emergencies.
- ❖ Do as little as you can, just to ease your distress. Set limits. Decide how much you are going to allow yourself to do and keep to it. You can clean up and bandage yourself later.
- ❖ There are herbal remedies that can help reduce scarring. See website list page.

## WHAT IF SOMEONE I KNOW IS SELF-HARMING?

No one **wants** to self-harm. Someone who is self-harming is likely to be very upset. He or she will need support from someone who is calm and understanding. Telling someone not to do something is more likely to make him or her do it. Remember being told to tidy your room? A person who is self-harming wants to stop, but doesn't know how to do so. He or she has no better way of dealing with the upsetting things that are happening.

Try to talk and let the person tell you about what is really wrong or upsetting him or her. Read this leaflet to learn some helpful tips you can pass on to help the person stop self-harming. Be prepared to help him or her clean up and dress wounds using sterile dressings. You should try your best not to show negative feelings whilst you are doing this. Caring support is needed; it doesn't mean you are giving in to the behaviour. When the person is calmer you can see if he or she is willing to have a talk about what they have done. You might then be able to help them identify the thing that has led to the self-harm.

## FURTHER INFORMATION AND SUPPORT:

### Useful Contacts

For information on mental services, supports, opportunities or self-help information call:

- ❖ North Lanarkshire: Well Informed 0800 073 0918
- ❖ South Lanarkshire: Lanarkshire Association for Mental Health Information Line: 0330 3000 133

For further information on mental health and well-being, visit Lanarkshire's Element website: [www.element.org.uk](http://www.element.org.uk)

[www.lanarkshiremindmatters.scot.nhs.uk](http://www.lanarkshiremindmatters.scot.nhs.uk)

Remember, should your problems persist or you feel you need help urgently please contact your GP. The following organisations can also prove useful in and out of hours.

- ❖ **Breathing Space** - 0800 83 85 87  
(Mon - Thu, 6pm - 2am; Fri 6pm - Mon 6am)  
[www.breathingspacescotland.co.uk](http://www.breathingspacescotland.co.uk)
- ❖ **Samaritans** - 116 123 (24hrs) [www.samaritans.org](http://www.samaritans.org)
- ❖ **NHS24** - 111 (Out of hours) [www.nhs24.com](http://www.nhs24.com)
- ❖ **Healthy Working Lives** - 08452 300 323 (Local),  
0800 019 2211 (National),  
[www.healthyworkinglives.com](http://www.healthyworkinglives.com)
- ❖ **Childline** - 0800 11 11 (24hrs) [www.childline.org.uk](http://www.childline.org.uk)
- ❖ **NHS Inform** - 0800 22 44 88 [www.nhsinform.co.uk](http://www.nhsinform.co.uk)
- ❖ **Parentline Scotland** - 0808 800 22 22  
[www.children1st.org.uk/parentline](http://www.children1st.org.uk/parentline)
- ❖ **National Debt Line Scotland** - 0808 808 4000  
[www.nationaldebtline.co.uk/scotland](http://www.nationaldebtline.co.uk/scotland)
- ❖ **National Domestic Abuse Helpline** - 0800 027 1234

## WHAT IS WELL CONNECTED?

Well Connected is a programme in Lanarkshire, sometimes referred to as social prescribing or community referral. It makes it easier for us and people we know to take part in and benefit from activities and services that we know improve our well-being which means how we feel about ourselves and our lives. There are a number of Well Connected areas available to us and we can benefit from more than one:

- ❖ Physical activity and leisure opportunities
- ❖ Volunteering
- ❖ Employment
- ❖ Arts and culture
- ❖ Benefits, welfare and debt advice
- ❖ Learning opportunities
- ❖ Calm Distress online course
- ❖ Health Walks
- ❖ Mindfulness Classes.

For information on any of the above call:

- ❖ North Lanarkshire: Well Informed 0800 073 0918
- ❖ South Lanarkshire: Lanarkshire Association for Mental Health Information Line: 0330 3000 133
- ❖ Visit: [www.elament.org.uk/self-help-resources/well-connected-programme.aspx](http://www.elament.org.uk/self-help-resources/well-connected-programme.aspx)

## HEALTHY READING

All public libraries have a healthy reading section making it easier to access mental health and well-being leaflets, books, CDs, DVDs and web-based support. All libraries across Lanarkshire have resources to help us get the most from life such as living life to the full, sleeping better and becoming more confident or overcoming and coping with mental health problems such as anxiety, depression, stress, dementia and panic. There are also resources for all ages including supporting young people, adults and older people as well as items on positive parenting. Simply pop into your local library.

## GUIDED SUPPORT:

### Calm Distress

Calm Distress is an online course from NHS Lanarkshire Psychological Services, designed for you to use in your own time and at your own pace. It is all about understanding emotions and wellbeing, during Covid-19 and beyond. It is open - and free - to all adults who have a Lanarkshire GP.

Over five friendly sessions, Calm Distress will help you learn new ways to cope with difficult thoughts and feelings. Each session lasts about 20 minutes, giving you lots of useful information in the time it takes to drink a cup of tea.

You can access Calm Distress through the NHS Lanarkshire Mind Matters website:

**[www.lanarkshiremindmatters.scot.nhs.uk](http://www.lanarkshiremindmatters.scot.nhs.uk)**

## Stress Control Classes

A six-week class all about staying on top of stress, anxiety, low mood and more.

NHS Lanarkshire Psychological Services are delighted once again to be able to offer the popular drop-in Stress Control classes. This six-week course will help you develop skills and techniques to manage stress, anxiety, low mood, low confidence and many more of the challenges of day-to-day living. The class is free, and there is no need to register.

If you would like more information about Stress Control:

Call **01698 754532**

Email **[stresscontrol@lanarkshire.scot.nhs.uk](mailto:stresscontrol@lanarkshire.scot.nhs.uk)**

### Living Life to the Full - Online Course

Living Life to The Full is a free web-based life skills course that aims to help us tackle and respond to issues/demands which we all meet in our everyday lives. It will explore issues such as understanding why we feel the way we do, problem solving, noticing and challenging unhelpful thoughts and behaviours and anxiety control. You can register for the course at [www.lltff.com](http://www.lltff.com) and complete as many or as few modules as you wish.

If you feel you need additional help, the Living Life to The Full course is also available with support from self help coaches (via Action on Depression Scotland). To find out more visit [www.aod.lltffionline.co.uk](http://www.aod.lltffionline.co.uk)

### Living Life: Guided Self Help and Cognitive Behavioral Therapy - Telephone Support

Living Life is a free telephone support service for people suffering from low mood, mild to moderate depression, symptoms of anxiety or a combination of both. Trained Self-help coaches and therapists will guide us through a range of workbooks over a series of telephone sessions. For more information or to make a telephone appointment, call **0800 328 9655** (Mon–Fri 1–9pm).

# CONFIDENTIALITY AND THE USE OF PATIENT INFORMATION

NHS Lanarkshire take care to ensure your personal information is only accessible to authorised people. Our staff have a legal and contractual duty to keep personal health information secure, and confidential. In order to find out more about current data protection legislation and how we process your information, please visit the Data Protection Notice on our website at [www.nhslanarkshire.scot.nhs.uk](http://www.nhslanarkshire.scot.nhs.uk) or ask a member of staff for a copy of our Data Protection Notice.

**NHS Lanarkshire** - for local services and the latest health news visit [www.nhslanarkshire.scot.nhs.uk](http://www.nhslanarkshire.scot.nhs.uk)  
NHS Lanarkshire General  
Enquiry Line: 0300 30 30 243

**NHS inform** - The national health information service for Scotland.  
[www.nhsinform.co.uk](http://www.nhsinform.co.uk)  
Tel No: 0800 22 44 88

If you need this information in another language or format, please e-mail: Translation.  
[Services@lanarkshire.scot.nhs.uk](mailto:Services@lanarkshire.scot.nhs.uk)



[www.careopinion.org.uk](http://www.careopinion.org.uk)

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