

1 March 2024

Self-harm and Self-injury Awareness Day takes place every year on 1st March.

The purpose of the day is to reduce the stigma around self-harm, to make it ok to talk about and to raise awareness about the support available for those who self-harm.

Raising awareness leads to understanding and empathy. It banishes judgement and fear and reduced the number of people who suffer in silence. The day is about educating people who do not self-injure and reaching out to people who do.

Teenagers are the most likely group to self-harm. According to the Mental Health Foundation 10% of young people self harm and most young people reported that they started to hurt themselves around the age of 12. Anyone may self-harm regardless of their age, gender, race, or lifestyle choices.



Getting support for yourself

If you've been self-harming and you want to stop, there is help available for you. It's important that you go at a pace that you're comfortable with. To start your recovery:

Talk to a friend or family - try telling someone that you trust about your self-injuring. The support of others is vital when you're recovering. They could even attend appointments with you whilst you're getting help from healthcare professionals.

See your GP - if you don't feel comfortable talking to someone you know, you may prefer to talk to a professional, like your GP. They can arrange for you to see a mental health professional for talking therapy, like Cognitive Behavioural Therapy (CBT) or prescribe medication.

If you are struggling and feel that you have no one to turn to, remember there are many organisations available to help you. These can be found in the support section at the end of this guide.

People who self-harm say that it helps them alleviate emotional numbness and releases tension.

Self-harm is a coping strategy that helps people to manage their emotional hurt or stress. There are many reasons why someone may self-harm. It may be to help them regain a sense of control or a sense of feeling, to express their internal pain, as an act of self-punishment or as a form of expression.

Self-harm can take many different forms and behaviours that are not in our best interests, including:

- cutting
- burning skin
- punching or hitting
- scratching or pinching
- poisoning
- over-eating and under-eating
- biting
- Inserting objects into your body
- overdosing
- exercising excessively
- pulling your hair
- getting into fights where you know you will get hurt

It's important to talk about self-harm so we can understand what it is, why people might do it, how they can do it safely and how they can access support.

It's important to remember that self-harm is not about getting attention, people who hurt themselves frequently consider it a private thing and try to hide their behaviours. It's also not necessarily about suicide, even though some people who self-harm feel suicidal, many use self-harm to feel alive.



How to support someone

Use Self-harm and Self-injury Awareness Day to check up on a friend who might be struggling. Remind them that you are there for them. Sometimes, people can feel alone even when they are surrounded by friends.

It can be hard to know how to react if someone you know is self-harming, here is some advice on what to do:

Don't Panic – learning that someone you care about is self-harming can be difficult, and may make you feel upset, confused or even angry. Don't panic if you're not sure how to react, often simply just being there is enough.

Listen – you may be worried about what to say, but you don't need to say anything. Just be there to listen. Try not to jump to conclusions or make any immediate decisions. Allow the other person to speak without interrupting and without judgement. Self-harm may feel like the only way to express very strong and

deep-rooted emotions for them. If someone opens-up to you this can be a huge breakthrough.

Help them find support – when they are ready, help them find out about support services available to them. You may also support your loved one to make an appointment and offer to accompany them. There are organisations available to help, details of which can be found in the support section below.

Offer long term support – some people self-harm for years as a way of dealing with difficult emotions or situations. So don't expect a quick recovery. Most people don't want to be defined by their self-harm, so don't change how you behave towards them.

Supporting someone can be extremely difficult emotionally, you may feel overwhelmed or out of your depth. To try and reduce these feelings, it's important to set boundaries and have support for yourself. Be honest about how you're feeling. If you're feeling upset or struggling to cope, talk to someone.

Ways of coping

Taking steps towards recovery may feel difficult, but with the right support recovery is possible. There are many different things that you can do to cope. Here are some strategies:

Distraction strategies:

- **Distraction box** - prepare a 'distraction box' containing things that help you cope with difficult urges. This could include old photos of happy times, crosswords or colouring books, scents, or herbal teas.
- **Time** - try the 10 mins rule, if you feel like you want to self-harm, try to postpone this for 10 mins. For many self-harm happens when emotions are intense, so after 10 mins the intensity may have reduced.
- **Alternatives** - try other options to self-harm, things like:
 - Write down your feelings on some paper and rip it up.
 - Draw on yourself in pen. Visually this may help relieve your urge without cutting.
 - Put elastic bands on your wrists or ankles and flick them instead of self-harming.
 - Hit something soft, like a pillow or cushion.
 - Play loud music or sing/shout.
 - Take a bath.
 - Squeeze a piece of ice in your hand.
 - Keep busy, try cleaning, tidying, or gardening.
 - Use breathing techniques, like box breathing.



Self-help coping strategies:

- **Diary** - keep a diary to express how you are feeling. This will also be helpful to monitor patterns, thoughts, and feelings.
- **Pets** - our pets give us unconditionally love and are great companions in difficult times. Being around animals is also proven to release endorphins, which can improve your mood.
- **Exercise** - physical exercise can help channel urges away from self-harming, this could involve a run, walk, or cycle ride.
- **Mindfulness** - try mindfulness techniques, concentrating on your surroundings. Mind have a lot of useful mindfulness techniques and tips [here](#).
- **Self-care** - choose self-care over self-harm. It is important that you are kind to yourself. This may involve applying your favourite body lotion to the area of your body you might usually harm. You could also try using essential oils. Ensuring we have the correct nutrition, get enough sleep, and regularly exercise, will look after both your physical and mental health, which is why self-care is critical.

Self-care isn't selfish - it's essential.



Coping techniques and strategies will be different for everyone, if one doesn't work, then try a different one.

Support and help available:

[NHS](#)

[Samaritans](#)

[Young minds](#)

[Papyrus](#)

[Harmless](#)

[Mind](#)

[Alumina](#)

[Mental Health](#)

[Foundation](#)

[Heads above the](#)

[Waves](#)

[Self Injury](#)

[Support Org](#)

[Calm Harm](#)

[Time to change](#)

[Hub of Hope](#)

Worrying about money can be extremely stressful and may lead to mental health conditions. Police Mutual are here to help. We want to break down the stigma surrounding debt and get people talking about money.

We've teamed up with **PayPlan***, one of the UK's leading free debt advice providers, who offer free and confidential advice to anyone in serious financial difficulties.

They're able to advise you on a range of debt solutions suited to your individual circumstances, helping to protect you and your family with a sustainable way to manage your debt.

Get free and confidential help to combat your debt, call **PayPlan*** on **0800 197 8433**.

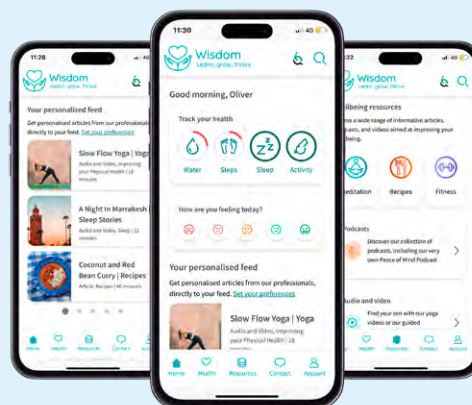
Police Mutual Services

Our Care Line Service provided by Health Assured can offer advice and information, helping with a range of concerns including emotional support. Take a look at the e-portal or download the APP.

Health & Wellbeing e-portal

<https://healthassuredap.co.uk>

Username: policemutual Password: careline



Download the **Wisdom App** provided by **Health Assured** and register today - your code is **MHA107477**

Police Mutual

To read more of our wellbeing guides take a look at our Wellbeing Hub [here](#).

Call us 01543 441630 Visit policemutual.co.uk
We're open from 9am - 5pm Mon - Fri

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