Lancashire Care NHS
NHS Foundation Trust

Self-help for self-injury

Children and Families | Community Services | Mental Health | Secure Services | Specialist Services

Supporting Health and Wellbeing

By Jenny Winnard, Community Psychiatric Nurse (CPN) and Sarah Devlin, Service User

About the authors

Jenny and Sarah decided to do something about the lack of support and treatment locally for people who self-injure after working together as CPN and Service User. There seemed to be self-help guides which the trust used for things like depression and anxiety, but nothing for self-injury. This idea progressed and Jenny and Sarah have now produced this booklet along with some training for staff about dealing with people who self-injure.

About Jenny by Sarah:

Jenny qualified as a Registered Mental Nurse (RMN) in 1999 and worked at Ormskirk Hospital's Scarisbrick Inpatient Unit and Lathom Suite Psychiatric Intensive Care Unit until 2005. Jenny then got promoted into a community mental health team in Skelmersdale. She has been my CPN since October 2005. Jenny is ace! She has helped me a lot and is very understanding, caring and open minded. She's also very girly and pink.

About Sarah by Jenny:

Sarah qualified as a primary school teacher in 2000. Owing to Sarah's mental health problems, she now works as a mental health development worker, helping people to give their views about mental health services. Sarah has been self-injuring since she was 12 years old. Sarah is a very motivated and dynamic person. She has tremendous courage to talk about her experiences and has developed this leaflet to try and help other people who self-injure. This does however, help her too.

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Self-help for self-injury

How is this booklet going to help me?

This booklet will tell you more about self-injury and will hopefully help you find useful alternatives to self-injury.

This booklet has been designed for health care professionals to use with their clients to help raise awareness and understanding for both the client and the health care professional.
This booklet aims to:

Raise awareness

Help you to better understand the reasons behind your self-injury

Help you with telling people about your self-injury

Help find alternatives to self-injury

Give practical advice on how to care for wounds

Tell you where else to get help and support

What is self-injury?

"Self-injury is a coping mechanism. An individual injures their physical self to deal with emotional pain, or to break feelings of numbness by arousing sensations."

LIFESIGNS

"Deliberate self-injury is a term used when someone harms or injures themselves on purpose. Self-injury is a way of dealing with very difficult feelings that build up inside. Self-injury is always a sign of something being seriously wrong."

Royal College of Psychiatry (2004)

Self-injury, as defined in the NICE guideline, is an expression of personal distress, usually made in private, by an individual who hurts him or herself. The nature and meaning of self-injury however, varies greatly from person to person. In addition, the reason a person injures him or herself may be different on each occasion, and should not be presumed to be the same.

Understanding NICE guidance Clinical Guideline

What self-injury is not

Self-injury is not attention seeking, manipulation, or 'cool'. It is not a failed suicide attempt. Self-injury is private and personal and usually hidden.

"Most of my scars are on my stomach and are hidden from view. When things get really bad I injure my arms or hands, but I always have a cover story if that happens"

Anon

Why do people start to self-injure?

Self-injuring behaviour can usually be split into three categories. Although there are three categories it may be that they cross over, and the reasons may not always be the same for each episode of self-injury.

People who are unable to talk about how they are feeling or have been coached not to tell people (e.g. by an abuser) may feel so many emotions which they cannot otherwise release.

Self-injuring validates their feelings, and reduces the amount of turmoil they feel.

Self-injury may be a way to communicate to people that something is wrong. This category can be viewed as attention seeking, but for someone to physically injure themselves, regardless of whether it is viewed as attention seeking still shows that something is wrong

Sometimes self-injury can be as a punishment or a control. They may feel that they are bad and deserve to be punished more than they can punish themselves mentally, or they may feel that the rest of their life is out of control and self-injuring is the only genuine control that they, and no-one else has control of.

Facts about self-injury

FACT Self-injury isn't necessarily about suicide.

Sometimes people injure themselves because they want to die but often it's more about staying alive. People may hurt themselves to help them through a bad time. It's a way to cope.

FACT It doesn't mean you're off your head.

All sorts of people self-injure. Even people in high powered jobs. It's a sign that something is bothering and upsetting you, not that you are mad.

FACT It's not just attention seeking.

People self-injure because they are in pain and trying to cope. They could also be trying to show that something is wrong. They need to be taken seriously.

FACT It can happen once, or many times.

Some people attempt suicide or hurt themselves just once or twice. Other people use self-injury to cope over a long time. They might hurt themselves quite often during a bad patch.

FACT People do stop self-injuring.

Many people stop self-injuring when they're ready. They sort their problems out and find other ways of dealing with their feelings. It might take a long time and they might need help. But things can get better.

Taken from "**What's the harm?**" by Lois Arnold and Anne Magill
The Basement Project, Abergavenny.

How common is self-injury?

Sometimes it can feel like you are the only person in the world who self-injures, but the following statistics show just how prevalent self-injury is and has been.

In a recent survey, all respondents were asked if they had ever deliberately injured themselves without suicidal intent, and 2% said that they had (2% of men and 3% of women).

There was no statistically significant variation in the percentage of respondents in different ethnic groups who had ever deliberately injured themselves.

Single respondents (particularly single women) were the most likely to have deliberately injured themselves, followed by separated and divorced women

Unemployed women were more likely to have deliberately injured themselves at some time (9% compared with 2% of those in full time employment).

Taken from 'Non-fatal suicidal behaviour among adults aged 16 to 74 in Great Britain' by the Office of national statistics

There are 48,500,000 people in the UK over the age of 16 in the UK, the office of national statistics report says that 2% of respondents said they had self-injured. This equates to 969,316 people in the UK who have deliberately self-injured at some point and that excludes people under 16.

In the UK, 170,000 people per year attend hospital for self-poisoning alone.

Kapur, N, House, A, Creed, F, et al (1998) "Management of deliberate self-poisoning in adults in four teaching hospitals: descriptive study"

Talking to family and friends

It is up to you whether you want to tell someone, how you want to tell, when you want to tell them and how much you want to tell them.

Sometimes it's useful to try to gauge someone's opinion about self-injury before you tell them. Many TV shows have self-injury storylines, so you could start up a conversation about that, or maybe ask advice from the person you are thinking of telling about a friend you are concerned about.

Once you have decided to tell someone, you need to make sure you prepare yourself for their reaction. It is important to remember that you may have done this for years before telling someone, and that you may have got your head around it, but the person you are telling will be receiving new, possibly distressing information. It may be worth thinking of any questions they may have beforehand so that you are prepared with an answer. It may also be useful to find some information for them or show them this booklet if you feel that you won't be able to answer all of their questions.

It is advisable to make sure that you have some support in the build up and the period after you tell someone. You are laying your emotions on the line and you need to be prepared before and have that support afterwards just in case it doesn't go according to plan.

Self-help for self-injury

What is the difference between self-harm and self-injury?

Self-harm can include any kind of action or behaviour which can be harmful to the body or mind e.g. drugs, alcohol or smoking. These things have long term effects. Self-injury causes a more instant harm and has long been seen as less socially acceptable, however, projects like this are aiming to change this view. Some people still use the term self-harm rather than self-injury and both are generally accepted terms.

What leads to self injury?

Trigger
"A thought or incident, which causes someone to need to self-injure."

Dictionary definition:
Verb: to begin, stir up, or set in motion as if by pulling a trigger

Urge
"A strong desire to self-injure."

Dictionary definition:
to force or drive to some course or activity

Emotions before self-injury

Anger, frustration, restlessness - Feeling very wound up and annoyed

Low self esteem - feelings of guilt and low mood, hating yourself and feeling the need to punish yourself.

Depressed - sad and unhappy.

Control - feeling that self-injury is the only control in your life.

Feeling empty, unable to feel, numb, not real - these feelings can mean that you need to injure to feel pain or see blood to know you are alive.

Craving the feeling to self injure - this relates to the feelings of euphoria felt when self-injury occurs.

Each time you feel an emotion which will usually lead you to self-injure, try to identify it from the list above and try to pick an alternative from the lists on the following pages.

Alternatives to try for each emotion

Anger, frustration, restlessness

Play darts

Exercise

Draw on yourself with washable red felt pen

Scribble on paper

Write - Stories, diaries, poems, letters

Play an instrument

Sing

Dance

Flick rubber bands on your skin

Blow bubbles

Pillow fight

Paint, draw, create something

Rip paper

Pop bubble wrap

Play with plasticine or play doh

Pop balloons

Throw socks at the wall

Deface the good looking people in magazines

Play with a slinky

Play with kids toys or computer games

Scream

Cry

Colour a picture

Housework

Low self esteem

Write - Stories, diaries, poems, letters

Be with other people

Think about not wanting more scars

Paint your nails

Hot shower/bath (pamper yourself)

Paint, draw, create something

Put your books, CD's, Videos, DVD's in alphabetical order

Memorise song lyrics or passages from books

Make a tape or CD of your favourite songs and play it

Phone a friend

Curl up under a blanket

Sleep

Cry

List positive things about yourself

Do something to help someone else

Make your favourite food or drink

Feeling empty, unable to feel, numb, not real

Flick rubber bands on your skin

Hot shower/bath

Cold shower/bath

Bite into a lemon

Scream

Cry

Curl up under a blanket

Focus on breathing

Craving the feeling to self-injure

Exercise

Fake tattoos

Draw on yourself with washable red felt pen

Scribble on paper

Think about not wanting more scars

Paint your nails

Flick rubber bands on your skin

Put plasters or dressing pads on

Hot shower/bath

Cold shower/bath

Knitting (or if you feel too young for that try Skoobi strings)

Paint, draw, create something

Rip paper

Pop bubble wrap

Play with plasticine or play doh

Pop balloons

Blow bubbles

Throw socks at the wall

Deface the good looking people in magazines

Colour a picture

First Aid Advice

The first key thing for people who self-injure is to keep a well stocked first aid kit. The contents of your kit may vary depending on how you injure. Below you will find a list of essential basic items and lists of items for specific injuries.

Essentials

Antiseptic wipes/spray/wound wash
Dressing pads (adhesive and non-adhesive)
Micropore tape
Scissors
Clean gauze
Plasters

Extras for cuts

Bandages
Antiseptic Cream
Kitchen Roll
Steristrips (If you can't get hold of these you can make them by cutting strips of micropore tape)

Extras for burns/scalds

Bandages
Cling film

Extras to help with scars

Aloe vera spray/cream/moisturiser
Vitamin E Oil/spray/cream/moisturiser
Bio oil
Scar reduction patches (use as directed).

Self-help for self-injury

Scars are the permanent reminder of self-injury. Whether you need to see your scars or you hate them, they will always be there.

The following first aid advice will not only help to prevent infection, but will also help to prevent scars being larger or more visible than necessary.

For cuts and grazes

Before you injure:

Clean the area you intend to injure with antiseptic BEFORE you do anything.

Make sure that whatever implement you're using to injure yourself with is clean, not rusty and if possible clean it with antiseptic.

Make sure you have all the first aid equipment you are likely to need within reach, including something you can press on to a wound to prevent excess blood loss.

Have a phone within reach in case things go wrong.

After injuring:

Using a dressing pad, clean cloth, clean gauze or several sheets of kitchen roll, apply direct pressure to the wound for at least ten minutes.

If the wound continues to bleed profusely, call an ambulance or get someone to take you to hospital immediately.

Before using steristrips or putting a dressing pad on, you should ensure that you clean the wound and the area around it with antiseptic.

If the edges of the wound are more than a few millimetres apart you may need to use steristrips in order to make sure the edges can knit together whilst healing.

To do this, stick one end of the steristrip underneath the wound, hold the edges of the wound together, pull the steristrip towards the area above the wound and stick down so that at the point where the steristrip is, the edges of the wound are held together. Repeat this all the way along the wound, leaving a space about the same width of the steristrip between each steristrip so that the edges of the wound are completely together and form a straight line.

If you cannot manage to get the edges of the wound to stay together using steristrips you probably need stitches and should seek medical attention.

Once you have either used steristrips or are sure that the wound will be able to knit together, cover the wound with a clean, dry dressing. You should change the dressing every 2 to 3 days and check that there are no signs of infection e.g. swelling, redness, more pain than you expect, discomfort, discharge, a foul smell or a change in colour of the surrounding skin.

If you have used steristrips you should leave them on for at least a week. They should fall off in time when the wound has healed.

Self-help for self-injury

For burns and scalds

If you have burnt or scalded yourself you should hold the affected area under cold running water for at least 10 minutes. If after this time the area has blistered or is bigger than two fifty pence pieces, you will need to seek medical attention. Advice on what to do next tends to vary, but based on personal experience, the best thing to do is to take a piece of cling film large enough to completely cover the area plus around an inch all around it, place it on the area and make sure the cling film is sealed to your skin all the way round with micropore tape. To protect the cling film from letting any air in, put a dressing or bandage over the cling film. This should be checked regularly to prevent infection.

Once you have taken the cling film off, check for infection (e.g. swelling, redness, more pain than you expect, discomfort, discharge, a foul smell or a change in colour of the surrounding skin) then cover the area with a dry dressing and check on it every 2-3 days.

For overdoses and poisoning

As this very much depends on what medication or substance you have taken, the only advice we can give for overdoses or poisoning is to seek medical attention immediately.

After any form of self injury

After you have injured, look after yourself. You and your body have been through an ordeal.

Do something good for yourself, but above all, put your feet up and relax, not just because you deserve to relax, but also your body may go into shock, so raising your feet will help to combat this.

Scar reduction

As we said earlier scars are the permanent reminder of self-injury. You can reduce the severity of scarring right from the start. If you have a cut or a burn and you follow first aid advice you can take the first step towards minimising a scar.

After this it is important to watch out for infection and to resist the urge to pick at any injury.

We have suggested some items for a first aid kit which can help to reduce scarring. It is possible to use Aloe vera on a wound before it has completely healed, however this can be painful. Moisturisers, creams and sprays containing Aloe vera or Vitamin E can be used on scars and can reduce the redness of a scar if used over a period of time. There are also other items on the market such as bio oil and scar reduction patches which should be used as directed. All of the above items can be found at most chemists, and many of the items can be found at the major supermarkets.

Ask for advice

If you have followed all of the first aid advice but are still unsure about something, seek advice. You can always go to your GP, practice nurse, A&E, a Minor Injuries unit, an NHS walk in Centre, call NHS Direct, or even ask your CPN (if you have one).

Using the written exercises

Recording the urge to self-injure

Recording the urge will help you to look back and see how you've coped, particularly if you manage to resist the urge. It will also help you and your care co-ordinator to identify issues you may need to deal with.

Recording self-injury

Recording these things will help you to look back and decide whether it was worth it. It will also help you to manage to resist the urge under similar circumstances in the future, by allowing you to look back and see some progress in your ability to resist the urge.

At the back of this pack you will find a few copies of the written exercises along with a form to take to A&E, to save you having to say everything in an open reception area.

Please feel free to photocopy the written exercises and the A&E form.

Other sources of support

Self injury organisations and resources

All of the following websites offer support and information to people who self-injure and other people interested in knowing more about self-injury.

Firstsigns www.firstsigns.org.uk

National Self Harm Network www.nshn.co.uk

Equilibrium www.selfharmony.co.uk

Secret Shame www.selfharm.net

Sirius Project www.siriusproject.org

Young People & self harm www.thesite.org/selfharm

Bristol Crisis Service for Women www.selfinjurysupport.org.uk

The Basement Project PO Box 5, Abergavenny, NP7 5XW
Tel:01873 856524

National Institute for Health & Clincial Excellence Guidelines for the treatment of Self Harm, including guidance for patients and carers www.nice.org.uk/CG16

Help-lines

Lancashire Care Mental Health Helpline 0500 639000
FREEPHONE Mon to Fri 7pm-11pm and weekends from 12 midday until midnight

Saneline MH 0845 7678000 open 1pm-11pm every day (local rate call cost)

Samaritans 08457 90 90 90 open 24hours a day (local rate call cost)

Bristol Crisis Service for Women helpline 0117 9251119 open Fri & Sat 9pm-12.30am, Sun 6pm-9pm

NHS Direct 0845 46 47 open 24 hours www.nhsdirect.nhs.uk

Recording the urge to self-injure

Why do you want to self-injure? Has something triggered the urge to injure yourself?	
Which emotions are you feeling from the list on page 11?	
Is there another way of dealing with the way you feel?	
What alternatives have you tried?	
How will you feel after you injure yourself?	
Did you still feel the urge to self-injure?	

If you answered **YES** to the last question, please make sure that you have read the first aid advice

If you answered **NO** to the last question, make sure you give yourself some credit for resisting the urge

Recording self-injury

Why did you want to injure yourself?	
How did you injure yourself?	
Did you follow the first aid advice?	
How did you feel whilst injuring?	
How do you feel now?	
Did injuring yourself help?	

SH information sheet

Basic Information

Name: _____

Address: _____

_____

_____

_____

Phone Number: _____

Date of Birth: _____

Next of kin: _____

Name: _____

Phone Number: _____

GP: _____

Name: _____

Address: _____

_____

Have you attended here before? _____

Medication/s: _____

Allergies: _____

Are your vaccinations up to date? _____

Have you had any alcohol or drugs? _____

Injury Information

I have (tick appropriate):

☐ Cut myself with _____

☐ Burnt myself with _____

☐ Taken an overdose of _____

I took _____ tablets

Approximately _____ minutes ago

☐ Swallowed _____

Amount _____

Approximately _____ minutes ago

☐ Tried to break my _____

Mental Health Contact Information

Delete the following as appropriate:

I am / am not in contact with mental health services

I have / have not brought my care plan with me

My Care co-ordinator is: _____

Phone number: _____

Information about how you feel and how you want to be treated

(Please answer yes or no to the following statements)

I want to be treated by someone the same sex as myself

I am very distresed

I need to be seen as soon as possible to stop me panicking

I need to sit in a quiet waiting area

I want to discuss what I have done and why

I am suicidal

Other sources of information:

The Mental Health Helpline

This provides an information and listening service for people in Lancashire. It is available between 7:00pm and 11:00pm Mondays to Fridays and from 12:00 noon until 12:00 midnight on Saturdays and Sundays. **Freephone 0500 639000.**

Customer Care

If you wish to pay a compliment about the Trust's services, make a comment, raise a concern or complaint, please contact the Customer Care Department on **01772 695315, freephone 0808 144 1010** or email **customer.care@lancashirecare.nhs.uk**

If you have problems reading the print we can provide this leaflet in large print, audio book or Braille.

এই ডকুমেন্ট অনুরোধে বাংলায় পাওয়া যায়।

本文件可以應要求，製作成中文 (繁體字) 版本。

આ દસ્તાવેજ વિનંતી કરવાથી ગુજરાતીમાં મળી રહેશે.

ਇਹ ਦਸਤਾਵੇਜ਼ ਮੰਗ ਕੇ ਪੰਜਾਬੀ ਵਿਚ ਵੀ ਲਿਆ ਜਾ ਸਕਦਾ ਹੈ।

درخواست پر یہ دستاویز اردو میں بھی مل سکتی ہے۔

W przypadku jakichkolwiek problemow z odczytaniem tekstu z przyjamnoscia dstarczymy Panstwu ulotke z duzym drukiem, tasme do odluchu lub tekst w jezyku Braille.

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Copies of this leaflet are available from:

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Sceptre Point, Sceptre Way,
Walton Summit, Preston PR5 6AW

Tel: **01772 695300**

Email: **communications@lancashirecare.nhs.uk**

Website: **www.lancashirecare.nhs.uk**

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