

**LOURDES MAC PARENT SUPPORT
GROUP**

Self-Harm

WHAT IS SELF-HARM?

- Self-harm is a behaviour and not a illness. People self-harm to cope with emotional distress or to communicate that they are distressed
- Self-harm can take lots of physical forms, including cutting, burning, picking at skin or re-open wounds, hair pulling (trichotillomania), hitting , head-banging, provoking fights, drinking harmful chemicals, taking personal risks.
- There are many reasons why children and young people try to hurt themselves. And once they start, it can become a compulsion.
- Self-harm isn't usually a suicide attempt or a cry for attention. Instead, it's often a way for young people to release overwhelming emotions. It's a way of coping. So whatever the reason, it should be taken seriously.

WHY DO CHILDREN/ADULTS SELF-HARM?

- To relieve unbearable emotional distress and tension
 - To provide distraction from emotional pain
 - Form of self-punishment
 - Feeling 'in-control'
 - Communicating distress
 - Low self-esteem, poor self-image, self-blame
 - Bullying, rejection
 - Bereavement, parent divorce
 - pressures to do well at school
 - Anxiety, depression

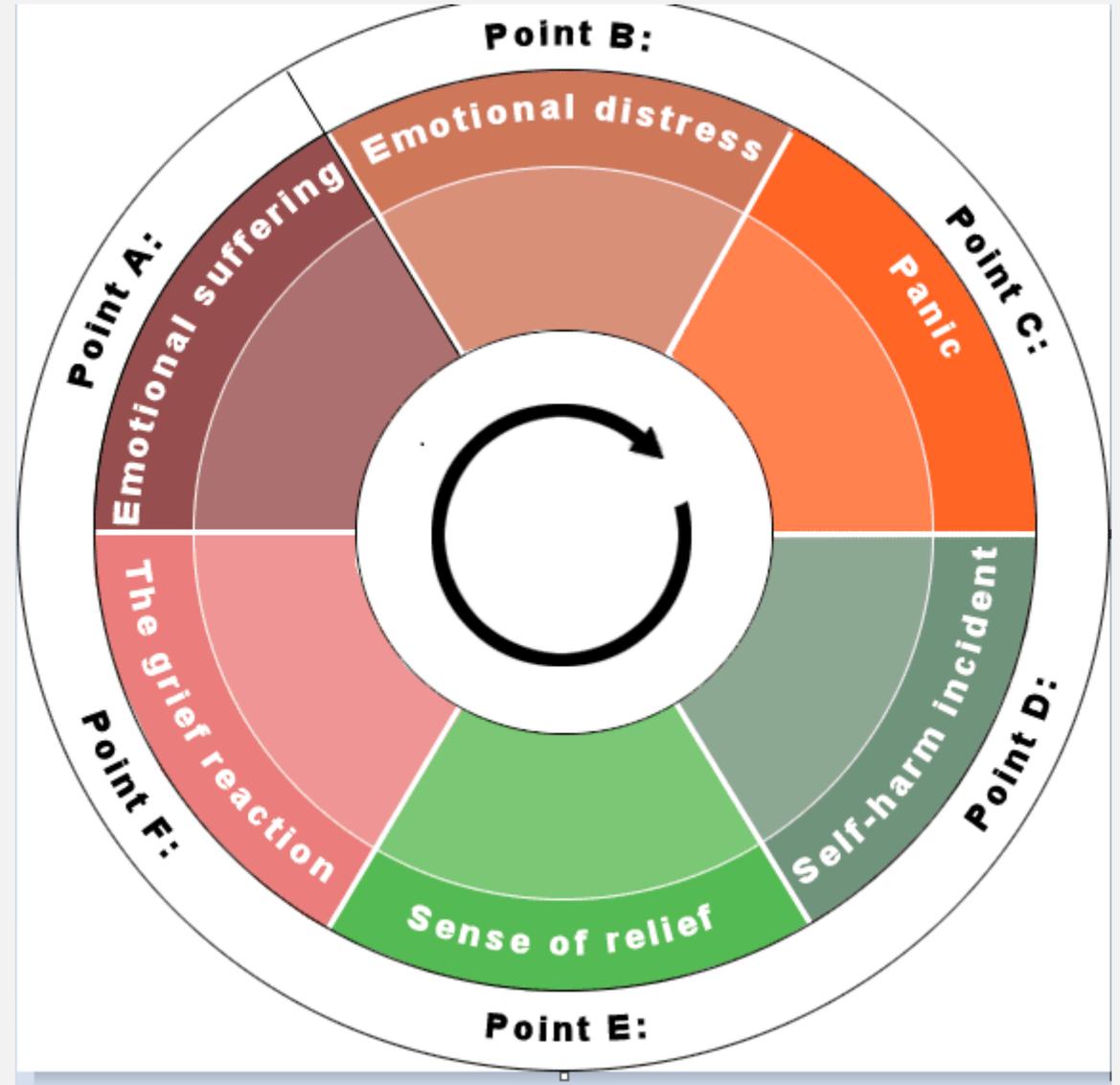
[Why I started to cut myself –BBC Newsbeat](#)

ENDORPHINS

When people feel emotional pain, the same area of the brain gets activated as when people feel physical pain.

Endorphins are neurotransmitters that act similar to morphine and reduce the amount of pain we experience when we are hurt.

When people self-harm, the same process takes place.



- Self – harm cycle.

POSSIBLE WARNING SIGNS

- Unexplained accidents or injuries of cuts, bruises, or cigarette burn, on wrist arms, thighs and chest.
 - Keeping fully covered, even in warmer weather
 - Avoidance of situations where revealing clothing is expected
 - Sharp objects or cutting instruments amongst a persons belongings
- Relationship issues – change in socialising, sleeping, eating patterns. A breakdown in typical communication
 - Low self-esteem, isolation, irritability and mood changes
 - Poor performance or results in school or work
 - Loss of interest in hobbies or sports

COPING STRATEGIES

Use a red felt tip pen to mark where you might usually cut

Hit pillows or cushions, or have a good scream into a pillow or cushion to vent anger and frustration

Rub ice across your skin where you might usually cut, or hold an ice-cube in the crook of your arm or leg

Put elastic bands on wrists, arms or legs and flick them instead of cutting or hitting

Have a cold bath or shower

Alternative therapies: massage, reiki, meditation, acupuncture, aromatherapy

Bake or cook something tasty

Clean (and won't your folks/housemates be pleased!)

Craftwork: make things, draw or paint

Dance your socks off

Eat sweets or chocolate for an instant sugar rush (but be careful of the dip in your mood once it's over)

Exercise for a release of endorphins and that feel-good factor

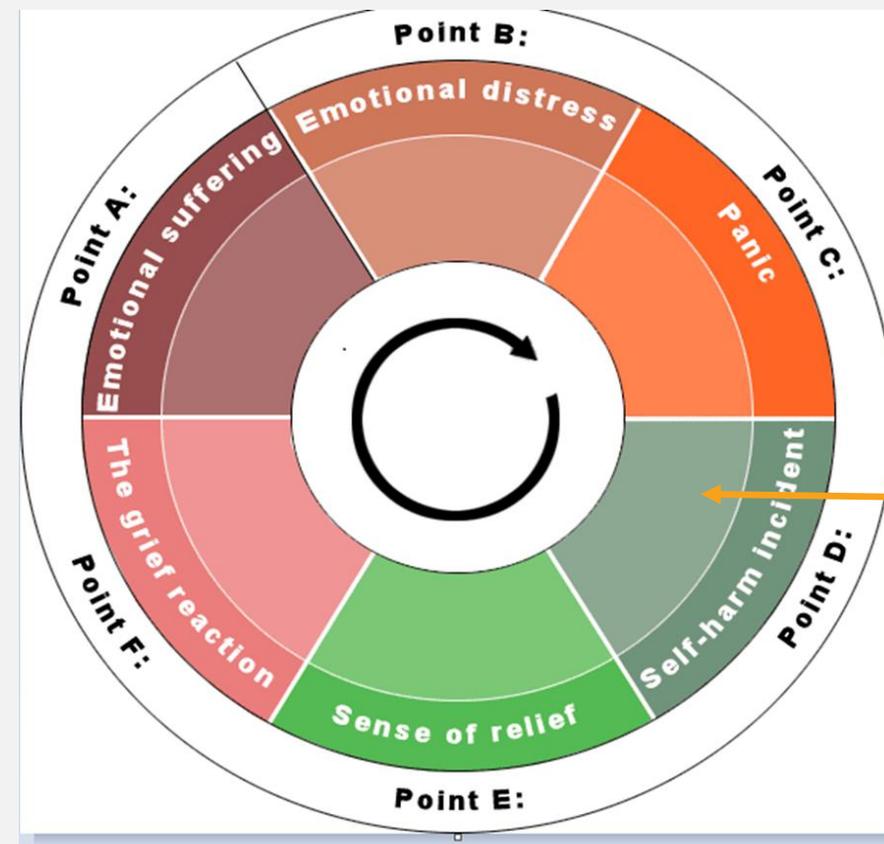
Forward planning – concentrate on something in the future, like a holiday

Go for a walk (preferably further than the local pub)

Go online and look at websites that offer you advice and information

Hang out with friends and family

<https://www.themix.org.uk/mental-health/self-harm/self-harm-coping-tips-and-distractions-5696.html>



What other coping strategies can be put into place?

[Coping with Self-Harm ft. Luke Cutforth | Voice Box | Childline](#)

Activity – Stress Bucket

I think my child might be self-harming. How do I bring up the subject?

“First work on improving your relationship,” says Wedge. “Take time out once a week to sit down together and generally chat about what’s good and bad in their life. You can start with: ‘What did you learn at school today? Who did you spend time with?’ If your child gives one-word answers, try a different environment. Go out somewhere together for a chat. You don’t have to raise self-injury in the first conversation but you could raise it in the 14th. The child might say something to which you can gently ask ‘...is that why you’ve been hurting yourself?’ You can ask rather than accuse.”

'I've begged them to stop and hidden anything sharp. But they're still hurting themselves.'

“Your child cannot stop self-harming just because you want them to,” says Wedge. “Self injury isn’t something you can stop because of will power or because you have made a decision. Nor is it a cry for help or attention-seeking. “Your child is having trouble dealing with emotions and, for now, this is the only way they can deal with them.” In fact, trying to physically restrain your child or prevent them from harming is the worst thing you can do, says Caroline Roe: “If a young person feels they are being prevented from doing what they need to do, it can drive the behaviour underground so they are less likely to seek help - or they are likely to feel more out of control. And when they feel out of control they are more likely to harm themselves in a worse way. “But that doesn’t mean you have to put up with anything and you certainly don’t have to accept or approve their self-harming. But what you can say is this: ‘OK, we accept that this is where you are now. Let’s see how we can help you move forward’. There can be clear boundaries put in place – where the child agrees to keep talking to the parent and seek help.”

What can I do to help a child who is self harming?

“Parents can make a massive difference very quickly,” says Caroline Roe. “I can work with a parent for just one hour and change their perspective radically. We try and say: ‘Let’s take the focus off self-harm.’ The problem isn’t the self-harm. The problem is that someone is distressed enough to do that in the first place. “We encourage parents to not take the self-harming personally, not respond with anger and frustration but to enquire how the young person is feeling.” Wedge says: “Keep talking. Instead of asking: ‘Have you hurt yourself today?’ ask: ‘How are you feeling?’ Take the self-harm out of the equation.” Parents have to accept that their child might not want to talk to them about it and may never give an explanation. “All you can do is assure them your love is unconditional,” says Wedge. “If they can’t talk to you, help them find someone they can talk to.” However, if your child does confide, don’t dismiss or trivialise their worries. “It’s important that however bad parents think things are, they are hopeful of change,” says Caroline. “Believe and keep believing in your child’s capacity to overcome it. Then they’ll feel that too. That sounds clichéd but it makes a big difference. The biggest thing that people who self harm say they want to hear is ‘it’ll be ok.’”

Is my child suicidal?

This is another huge worry for parents. But experts stress there is a distinct difference between self harming and suicide. “People who self-harm hurt themselves as a way of coping with life - not ending it,” says Caroline Roe. Self-harm is the symptom, not the cause. There is always something else wrong.

'I'm terrified that my child will really hurt - or even kill themselves - by self harming.'

This is the most common fear expressed by parents who contact Family Lives. But experts and parents who have been through it say most self-harmers know exactly what they are doing and how far they need to go to find release/relief from their problems. However, the very nature of self-harming means that there is a risk that the child may go too far – and accidentally cause more harm than intended. While the majority of scratches and bruises can be dealt with in a first-aid type manner any serious injuries or anything to do with heat or medicines should get prompt medical attention and a discussion with the young person about the physical nature of the self injury.

‘I JUST NEED YOU TO LISTEN’

- [It's not about the nail](#)