

## Self-harm session plan

**Aim:** To enable the group to understand self-harm

**Learning Outcomes:**

By the end of the session the participants will:

- ➔ Understand what self-harm is and why people do it
- ➔ What they can do to help
- ➔ What information and support is available

**Group size:** 6 - 10

**Time:** 1 hour

**Venue:** Small room or quiet space

**Materials:**

- True and false cards
- Myth Busting sheet
- Flipchart paper and marker pens

TIME	WHAT	WITH
5 mins	<p>Introduce the aims and outcomes of the session. Stress that:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• you will not be asking anyone to share their own experiences, or experiences of anyone they know</li> <li>• you may know someone who has self-harmed before, or is currently self-harming. We are talking about this subject today because we want to help you understand what self-harm is and how you can get support and help.</li> <li>• some of you may find this talk upsetting. If you are at all worried about anything we talk about today then please talk to a youth worker or someone you trust after the session.</li> </ul>	
5 mins	<p>Set the scene:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• We all have a good idea of what our physical health is like. This doesn't change too much unless of course you get ill or suffer an accident resulting in injury.</li> <li>• Emotional health is different. Emotions and feelings can change often and it is hard to see when someone around you is struggling. This is due to the fact that we cannot see from the outside how someone is feeling on the inside.</li> <li>• People with good emotional health are able to keep their problems in perspective; they are in control of their thoughts, feelings and behaviour.</li> </ul> <p>Ask the group what can affect their emotional health. Answers can include: stress; family and relationship problems; money; school; bullying; peer pressure; the death of someone close; body image.</p>	



TIME	WHAT	WITH
5 mins	Ask the group what they think self-harm is. They'll probably come up with ways to self-harm (cutting, anorexia etc) but try to get them to think about the purpose of it. A good definition is ' <i>Self-harm is where someone hurts themselves as a way of dealing with overpowering feelings, memories, situations or experiences</i> '.	
15 mins	Myths busting: Put the 'false' card at one end of the room and the 'true' card at the other. Read out each statement from the Myth Busting sheet and then ask the young people to move to the card that gives their answer. After they've moved, discuss their views before giving the answer.	Myth Busting sheet. True and false cards.
5 mins	Bring the group back together and ask them 'why do people self-harm?' Answers include: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• To express negative feelings that they can't put into words</li> <li>• To gain a sense of control</li> <li>• To turn emotional pain into physical pain as its easier to cope with</li> <li>• As a response to emotional pain</li> <li>• To take their mind off past memories</li> <li>• To stop feeling numb and disconnected</li> <li>• To punish themselves, or because they feel shame or self-hate</li> </ul> <p>Introduce these answers if the group don't get them all.</p> <p>Stress that <b>people who self-harm are trying to find a way to cope</b>. But, maybe we can help them find other ways to cope.</p>	
10 mins	Ask the group what other positive ways they can think of to cope. Note on a flip chart. <p>Answers include:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Having a box of special items (for example, photos that comfort you, letters and notes that you have received from friends and family, inspirational poems, cherished toys from your childhood)</li> <li>• Exercise (running and dancing - gives you an adrenaline rush which is a great way to lift your mood, blow off steam and take your mind off things)</li> <li>• Telling yourself positive things (use your thoughts and feelings to develop helpful questions and statements e.g. 'I have the ability to take control' and 'why am I getting upset?').</li> <li>• Playing or making music</li> <li>• Doing something creative (drawing, painting etc)</li> <li>• Thinking of things that make you feel happy (imagining a positive outcome can help you to see past your problems and can often allow you to develop ideas and ways in which you can resolve them)</li> </ul>	Flipchart paper and marker pens

TIME	WHAT	WITH
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Knowing what triggers the urge to self-harm and avoiding them (learn what brings on feelings of emotional distress, e.g. are there certain times, places or people that bring on these difficult feelings? Learn ways to reduce these times or find things to do that reduce these feelings, such as being around someone who makes you feel calm).</li> <li>• Talking (talking about negative feelings or about self-harming can be very difficult. A person who self-harms may be concerned that they will be pressured to make changes faster than they would like, or that their worries may not be taken seriously or that they will be judged by others. But if you don't talk, no-one knows and no-one can help.)</li> </ul> <p>Introduce these answers if the group don't get them all.</p>	
10 mins	<p>Benefits of talking</p> <p>Tell the group that if someone talks to someone they trust, they could get a listening ear, support in other ways, advice or ideas for other support.</p> <p>Ask the group 'If someone who self-harms chooses to talk to you – how can you help?' Note down the answers, hopefully they will include:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Don't judge them – particularly if they decide they don't want to talk, they may not be ready. It's most important that they know you're there for them.</li> <li>• Respect their wishes, and their confidentiality – don't gossip about what they tell you.</li> <li>• Talk openly, but remember you're there for support.</li> <li>• Listen properly.</li> <li>• Try to see things from their perspective.</li> <li>• Don't give advice unless you're asked for it – they may just want to get things off their chest. Telling someone to stop can be counterproductive.</li> <li>• Remain calm and don't look shocked.</li> <li>• Remember they are in pain.</li> <li>• Offer to support however you can.</li> <li>• Encourage them to seek further help, especially if their self-harming sounds life-threatening – doctors, parents, GPs and A&amp;E can all help. If this is the case, and you're going to tell someone because you're so worried, let them know first.</li> </ul>	
5 mins	<p>Finally, tell the group there are organisations that can help. They can offer support, advice and information for people who self-harm, their families and friends, and empower people who self-harm to ask for help. They include:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• samaritans.org</li> <li>• selfharm.co.uk</li> <li>• harmless.org.uk</li> <li>• nhsn.co.uk</li> <li>• childline.org.uk</li> </ul>	



**False**



**True**



# Somerset Youth and Community Service

## Myth Busting

### Statements and answers:

#### **People who self-harm are trying to kill themselves**

Mostly Myth - many incidences of self-harm are not associated with suicidal thoughts, but are a sign that the person is struggling to cope with events, thoughts or feelings.

A person who takes their own life usually cannot imagine any other response to the problems they are facing. A person who self-harms is trying to cope. Their behaviour occurs in response to the problems and predicaments that they are experiencing.

*But* self-harming is still dangerous and people can accidentally cause themselves serious harm. It is very important that the person seeks support, so that they can learn what is causing the difficult feelings and find other ways of coping.

#### **People who self-harm are attention seeking**

Mostly Myth – many people who self-harm do it in private and keep it hidden because they find it hard to talk about. If it is brought to attention it is because they are likely to be seeking help.

#### **People who self-harm are in emotional pain**

Mostly Fact - many people who self-harm use it as a way of dealing with emotional pain. Self-harm is an expression of emotional problems and difficult feelings.

#### **Only people with mental health problems self-harm**

Myth – Self-harm is not restricted to any race, age or gender. However, many people suffering from some form of mental ill-health are at a higher risk of self-harm.

#### **Trying to help people who self-harm will just make it worse**

Mostly Myth – help can be offered in many ways. It is important that the help that is offered is done so in a sensitive way.

#### **If you ignore people who self-harm, they'll stop doing it**

Mostly Myth – ignoring someone who self-harms may convince them that they have no other options and that there is no support available.