

What is self-harm?



Self-harm is when someone intentionally hurts themselves as a way to cope with overwhelming emotions or difficult situations.

For some, it can feel like a way to release tension, manage big feelings, or find a sense of control when everything else feels out of reach.

It's important to remember that self-harm isn't a sign of weakness; it's a sign of emotional pain.

There are safer ways to cope, and with the right support, things can get better.

Signs & effects

Self-harm can look different for everyone, but some common signs include:



Unexplained injuries

Frequent cuts, burns, or bruises, often in places that can be easily hidden.



Covering up

Wearing long sleeves, even in warm weather, or avoiding situations where marks might be seen.



Struggling with self-esteem

Feeling ashamed, unworthy, or believing you deserve to feel pain.



Feeling stuck in a cycle

A sense of temporary relief after self-harming, followed by feelings like guilt, shame, or sadness.



Growing emotional distress

Over time, self-harm can make overwhelming feelings harder to cope with, not easier.



Pulling away from others

Avoiding conversations about how you're feeling or starting to feel more isolated.

Causes

The reasons behind self-harm are often linked to trying to cope with big or overwhelming feelings. Common experiences include:

Feeling overwhelmed by emotions

Using self-harm as a way to release tension, anger, sadness, or other feelings that feel too big to hold.

Feeling numb or disconnected

Hurting yourself to feel something when everything else feels empty or flat.

Wanting to punish yourself

Responding to feelings of guilt, shame, or self-blame by turning that pain inward.

Trying to feel in control

When everything feels out of control, self-harm might feel like the only thing you can manage.

Coping with trauma

Trying to manage memories or the ongoing impacts of a traumatic experience.

Feeling lonely or unsupported

Struggling with difficult relationships, rejection, or feeling like no one understands.

Experiencing self-harm is never your fault. Whatever the cause, there are ways to navigate what you're feeling. And remember, support is available every step of the way.

Recognising triggers and urges

Having a plan like below can help you prepare for situations that might lead to the urge to self-harm. This can make it easier to spot what's happening and respond in ways that support your wellbeing.

Self-harm management plan

Anticipate **What might lead to the urge to self-harm?**
e.g., stressful situations, overwhelming emotions, or feeling numb

Identify **How will I know I'm experiencing the urge to self-harm?**
e.g., racing thoughts, physical tension, dissociation, or seeking isolation

Manage **What can I do instead?**
e.g., use grounding techniques, hold ice cubes, talk to someone I trust



Practical management strategies



Notice your triggers

Pay attention to the feelings, situations, or thoughts that make you want to self-harm. Knowing what sets you off can help you plan ahead.



Pause and distract

When urges come up, try delaying for a few minutes and doing something else like listening to music, holding ice cubes, or going for a short walk.



Reach out to someone you trust

Talking to a friend, family member, or support service can help you feel less alone and ease the intensity of the moment.



Create a safety plan

Having a list of things that comfort you, people to contact, and steps to follow when urges feel strong can make a big difference. Tools like the Beyond Now can help you build one.



Look after your body

Eating regular meals, getting quality sleep, and moving your body in ways that feel good can help you feel stronger and more balanced.



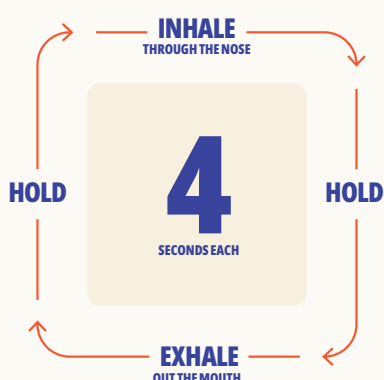
Get support

A therapist or support group can provide tools and understanding to help manage anxiety.

Want to try something now?

If you're feeling distressed or unsure where to start, a grounding technique like **box breathing**, **reciting something in order**, or **using your five senses** can help ease physical sensations and take your focus off your urge to self-harm.

BOX BREATHING



RECITING TECHNIQUE

You can try reciting:

- the alphabet
- the months, backwards
- what you did yesterday



5 SENSES TECHNIQUE

Look for...

-  5 things you can **see**
-  4 things you can **feel**
-  3 things you can **hear**
-  2 things you can **smell**
-  1 things you can **taste**



Everyone is different, so what works for someone else might not work for you, and that's okay.

The key is to keep experimenting until you find what helps you most.

Wherever you are, help is at your fingertips with the **Support Toolkit**

 lifeline.org.au/toolkit

When to seek help

You may want to speak with a health professional if:

- ✓ You feel like you can't manage the urges to self-harm on your own.
- ✓ Self-harm is becoming more frequent, severe, or harder to stop.
- ✓ You're finding it hard to cope with difficult feelings like guilt, shame, or numbness.
- ✓ You're feeling isolated, overwhelmed, or hopeless.
- ✓ You're having thoughts of suicide or feel like you're at risk of serious harm.
- ✓ Thoughts of self-harm are getting in the way of daily life, relationships, or responsibilities.

Reaching out can feel difficult, but it's a sign of strength.

Support is always available to help you feel more in control and hopeful for the future.

Support is available

Understanding and managing self-harm isn't something you have to do on your own.

Head to our **Support Toolkit** to find more practical strategies and discover national and local support services that can help.

The Support Toolkit also offers information on a wide range of mental health and wellbeing topics you can explore at your own pace, whenever you need.

Visit lifeline.org.au/self-harm/services or scan the QR code to get started.



If you're feeling overwhelmed right now, Lifeline is here to support you.

You can reach us 24 hours a day, 7 days a week.

☎ Call 13 11 14

✉ Text 0477 131 114

💬 Chat online at lifeline.org.au/crisis-chat

If your life is in danger, please call 000.

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➔ lifeline.org.au/toolkit