

What are the benefits of Counselling?

Nearly everyone faces challenges and difficulties in their life at some time. But sometimes they are overwhelming and we feel like we are helpless. The experience of exploring your thoughts and feelings with another individual can relieve your sense that you are entirely alone with your problems. Greater self-knowledge and understanding can enhance your relationship with yourself and others and improve your sense of choice and self-esteem. This in turn can cultivate the feeling that life can be enjoyed rather than endured.

Counselling can be of great support in times of crisis or change. It involves the provision of professional assistance to people who are experiencing personal issues, in order to help alleviate those difficulties. At the core of therapy is a confidential and collaborative relationship where the therapist guides the person on a journey of increased understanding. Therapy offers a relationship with the intent of alleviating distress and rekindling hope.

Support Groups

In a support group, people with similar experiences meet to discuss their feelings and experiences, and share tips for coping.

Online Support

If you do not feel ready to talk face-to-face with someone, you might find online support useful. Several self-harm services offer confidential email or text support, and there are also forums where people who self-harm share their experiences and offer support to each other. **It is important to use caution when using online support.**

Help and Support can be accessed from:

Mind	0300 123 3393
Mind.org.,uk	0844 448 4448
YoungMinds	
Harmless	web:harmless.org.uk
Elefriends	web:elefriends.org.uk
Youthline (Coopers Hill, Bracknell)	01344 311200
BACP (British Association for Counselling and Psychotherapy)	01455 883 300

Attributed to: 'Mind: Understanding self-harm'; insightful.me.uk:IACP

Youthline (CCG 2016-2017)

M. Cooper (BACP) 2016

*see Mind's booklets Understanding Dissociative Disorders: How to cope with suicidal feelings

UNDERSTANDING SELF-HARM

INFORMATION SHEET



Youthline

Young People's Counselling Service

UNDERSTANDING SELF-HARM—INFORMATION SHEETS

What is self-harm?

Self-harm is when you hurt yourself as a way of dealing with very difficult feelings, old memories, or overwhelming situations and experiences. The ways you hurt yourself can be physical, such as cutting yourself. They can also be less obvious, such as putting yourself in risky situations, or not looking after your own physical or emotional needs.

Why do people harm themselves?

There are no fixed rules about why people self-harm. For some people, it can be linked to specific experiences, and be a way of dealing with something that is happening now, or that happened in the past. For others, it is less clear. If you don't understand the reasons for self-harming, it's important to remind yourself that this is ok, and you don't need to know this in order to ask for help.

Any difficult experience can cause someone to self-harm. Common causes include:

- Pressures at school or work
- Bullying
- Money worries
- Sexual, physical or emotional abuse
- Bereavement
- Confusion about your sexuality
- Breakdown of relationships
- An illness or a health problem
- Difficult feelings, such as depression, anxiety, anger or numbness, experienced as part of a mental health problem

Some people have also described self-harm as a way to:

- Express something that is hard to put into words
- Make experiences, thoughts or feelings that feel invisible into something visible
- Change emotional pain into physical pain
- Reduce overwhelming emotional feelings or thoughts
- Have a sense of being in control
- Escape traumatic memories
- Stop feeling numb, disconnected or dissociated*
- Create a reason to physically care for yourself
- Express suicidal feelings and thoughts without taking your own life*
- Communicate to other people that you are experiencing severe distress

How can I help myself?

If you are thinking about stopping or reducing your self-harm, finding ways of helping yourself can feel very empowering.

If you do not feel able to stop self-harming completely, it is important to be honest with yourself and consider what else you can do that would feel helpful. For example, you may be able to work towards reducing or stopping your self-harm in the future, even if you find it too difficult to stop self-harming immediately

What treatment and support is available?

You might believe that it is impossible to stop self-harming if you have been doing it for a while. This isn't true. It can take time, effort and determination to stop, but lots of people have managed to do it. Sometimes you may need to get outside support to help you make positive changes. You may find that you need to try a few different things to find what works for you, and combine self-help techniques with professional support. It takes courage to ask for support. It is understandable that you may have concerns that you won't be understood or that you will be pressured to make changes faster than you want to. However, it is important to remember that you have the right to receive support that is both empowering and respectful. Any health professional, such as your G.P. should discuss all your options with you, and your views and preferences should be taken into account when making decisions about your treatment.

Your GP

If you want to seek professional help, the first step would usually be to visit your GP. Your GP can discuss your self-harm with you in confidence. They may assess you and let you know about available treatment options, or they may refer you to a specialist.

Talking Treatments:

Talking treatments can be short or long-term and involve talking with someone who is trained to listen with empathy and acceptance – usually a counsellor or therapist. They do not aim to give advice, but offer you the chance to explore your feelings and find your own solutions to any difficulties you are having. Talking things through with another person can help you understand your feelings and behaviour, and start to make positive changes. It can also help you feel supported to have someone else accept and understand your experiences.

Talking Treatments that might be useful include:

Psychodynamic Therapy: this focuses on how past experiences contribute to current experiences and feelings

Cognitive Behaviour Therapy (CBT) CBT aims to identify connections between thoughts, feelings and behaviour, and to help develop practical skills to manage them

Dialectic Behaviour Therapy (DBT): This therapy combines techniques from CBT that help to change thoughts and feelings, along with techniques that strengthen self-acceptance