



**Sport  
In Mind**

**British  
Equestrian**

# SELF-HARM

## What is self-harm?

Self-harm is when someone hurts themselves as a way of dealing with very difficult feelings, painful memories or overwhelming situations and experiences. There are no fixed rules about why people self-harm. It really can be very different for everyone. People of all ages and backgrounds self-harm. There is no one 'typical' person who hurts themselves.

### Self-harm can be a way to:

- have a sense of being in control
- express something that is hard to put into words
- have something in life to rely on
- stop feeling numb, disconnected or dissociated
- turn invisible thoughts or feelings into something visible
- change emotional pain to physical pain
- reduce overwhelming emotional feelings or thoughts
- create a reason to physically care for themselves
- escape traumatic memories
- punish themselves for their feelings and experiences
- express suicidal feelings and thoughts without taking their own life.

### Common reasons for self-harm

Any difficult experience can cause someone to self-harm, including:

- low self-esteem
- an increase in stress
- pressures at school or work
- loss of a job
- bereavement
- bullying
- breakdown of a relationship
- money worries
- sexual, physical or emotional abuse
- homophobia, biphobia and transphobia
- an illness or health problem
- difficult feelings, such as depression, anxiety, anger or numbness.

After self-harming, someone may feel a short-term sense of release, but the cause of the distress is unlikely to have gone away. Self-harm can also bring up very challenging emotions and could make someone feel worse.

For some people, self-harm is linked to specific experiences and is a way of dealing with something that is happening either at the moment or that happened in the past. For others, the reasons are less clear and can be more difficult to decipher.

Some people self-harm particular areas of their body that are linked to an earlier trauma. Some people find that certain actions, such as drinking alcohol or taking drugs, increase the likelihood of self-harm, or that self-harm is more likely to happen at certain times (for instance, at night).

Sometimes, people talk about self-harm as attention-seeking. If people make comments like this, it can leave people feeling judged and alone. In reality, a lot of people keep their self-harm private, and it can be painful to have their behaviour misunderstood in this way.