

Coping With Self-Harm

In order to survive trauma such as sexual abuse or rape, it's understandable to want to escape its full emotional impact and separate yourself from the difficult feelings you are experiencing. Self-harm is one way in which you might be seeking to escape the extremely painful feelings.

What is self-harm?

Self-harm is the act of physically or emotionally hurting yourself on purpose, often by inflicting pain on your own body. You might cut, or burn your skin or hair, or feel the need to excessively clean yourself. You might also find that you are drinking too much, smoking or taking drugs. You could also be eating too little or too much, leading to a difficult relationship with food, and possibly overeating, anorexia or bulimia. You might also be working extremely hard, resulting in exhaustion.

Why do I self-harm?

You might self-harm to cope with difficult and painful feelings that you are too scared to express in other ways. You could be attempting to numb or ignore those feelings, in an attempt to regain control over these distressing and often confusing emotions. Experiences of trauma and extreme stress are commonly linked with self-harm which can provide an alternative way to cope, replacing or masking difficult feelings. Self-harm can commonly provide comfort, a sense of control, or a way to reduce overwhelming feelings.

You are not to blame

Many people who self-harm feel they are to blame for the trauma they have experienced and so punish themselves by self-harming. You are not to blame. Guilt and shame are common feelings after sexual abuse and violence, but the guilt and shame does not lie with you. The blame always rests with the abuser.

How to support yourself

Understanding why you self-harm could help you to deal with, process and gain more control over painful memories.

RSVP services: 0121 643 0301 Helpline: 0121 643 4136 Email: info@rsvporg.co.uk



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Asking yourself the following questions could help:

When did the self-harm begin? What does it say about your feelings, your past experiences or your life at the moment? These questions could give you clues about some of the problems, issues or trauma that you might wish to talk through, either with a partner, friend, relation, or with a counsellor.

What drives you to want to stop self-harming? Are others encouraging you to stop? Do you no longer want to feel shame and guilt about self-harm? Is self-harm not working for you anymore, meaning you want new ways to cope? Answering these questions might help you understand what is driving you to change and what support could help to encourage you and keep your motivation high.

How do you feel before and after you've self-harmed? Is there a pattern to when you self-harm or triggers that increase the chance of you self-harming? Answering these questions might help you understand the feelings you are trying to cope with and what you achieve through self-harm.

When are you ready to stop? Are there people around you who know you want to stop self-harming and can support you? To know these answers could help you to feel more prepared, ensuring you surround yourself with encouraging people who can provide you with a lot of support.

Talk to someone. When you feel ready, talk to someone. It could be a family member or a friend, or you might find it easier to talk to someone outside of your family and social circle, somebody who doesn't already know you. RSVP has a helpline where you can talk to someone in confidence. The choice to talk to someone is always yours.

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Useful links:

Mindfulness and meditation: Headspace provides short guided meditations, including specific topics e.g. stress, sleep and anxiety. For more information visit: www.headspace.com

Practicing Mindfulness has ideas to “Quiet the Mind” and other mindfulness and stress reducing exercises: www.practicingmindfulness.com

Living Life to the Full has free online cognitive behavioural courses. Visit for info: www.lltff.com

You don't need to deal with the effects of sexual violence, sexual assault or sexual abuse alone. RSVP are here to offer support to survivors, to enable you to live a life with hope and confidence which is free from abuse. We offer:

- Specialist counselling for survivors and their supporters
- Independent sexual violence advocates (ISVAs) to assist you through criminal or civil proceedings or in crisis, whether you have reported or not
- Social groups and coffee mornings focusing on self-help
- Emotional support on our helpline 0121 643 4136

These are some of our services. For more ways we can support you contact:-

☎ 0121 643 0301

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f facebook.com/RSVPWM

@ isva@rsvporg.co.uk

📷 instagram.com/RSVPWM

@ www.rsvporg.co.uk/services

"I'm becoming a survivor, not a victim. I'm starting to less guilty too ... the rapes were not my fault."

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a world free from sexual violence and abuse

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