

## Supporting Someone Who Self-Harms

In order to survive trauma, it's common for people to want to escape the overwhelming impact, separating themselves from the difficult and traumatic feelings they are experiencing. Self-harm is one way of coping in the aftermath of any form of sexual violence, sexual abuse, rape or sexual assault.

### 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. The person might cut or burn their skin or hair, or feel the need to excessively clean themselves. They might also find that they are drinking too much, smoking or taking drugs. They could also be eating too little or too much, leading to a difficult relationship with food, and possibly overeating, anorexia or bulimia. They might also be working extremely hard resulting in exhaustion.

For each individual person self-harm will be expressed differently and have different meanings. It's not usually a random, meaningless act; self-harm often has some kind of purpose to it. Many people who self-harm have experienced trauma and extreme stress; self-harm can provide alternative ways of coping; replacing or masking difficult feelings. Some people could self-harm to cope with difficult and painful feelings that are otherwise too terrifying to face. Self-harm is often an attempt to cope better with life, it could produce physical pain and sensations which numb or ignore emotions.

**Understand your own feelings.** Self-harm might be a difficult concept for you to understand; you could feel upset, shocked, hurt and even disgusted at the thought that someone you know and care for self-harms. It might be difficult but being aware of, but not expressing your feelings of shock etc. will enable you to remain non-judgemental and compassionate.

**Be there.** Offer your support and accept self-harm is a way your friend or loved one copes with their feelings. Encourage them to talk about self-harming; if they know you're not ashamed or shocked by their behaviour it might enable them to accept themselves, and reduce any feelings of shame or embarrassment they may have.

RSVP services: 0121 643 0301 Helpline: 0121 643 4136 Email: [info@rsvporg.co.uk](mailto:info@rsvporg.co.uk)



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**Support them.** Help your friend or loved one identify different ways in which their feelings can be expressed differently and more safely. They will find this more helpful than just asking them to stop self-harm straightaway.

**Support yourself.** Supporting someone who self-harms can be very difficult and traumatic: you might think you've not helped at all, that they will never change, you could even feel angry and frustrated at them. Look after yourself too; talk to a trusted friend or call our helpline, we have trained volunteers who can offer you confidential space and support.

**You're not responsible.** Recognise you're not responsible for your loved one's or friend's behaviour. You can't stop them self-harming, it is up to them. However, it can be achieved with the help of your patience, understanding and support.

**No one needs to deal with the effects of sexual violence, sexual assault or sexual abuse alone. RSVP are here to offer support to survivors and their supporters. 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 the telephone helpline 0121 643 4136

☎ 0121 643 0301

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@ isva@rsvporg.co.uk

@ www.rsvporg.co.uk/services

🐦 @RSVP\_West\_Mids

📘 facebook.com/RSVPWM

📷 instagram.com/RSVPWM

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

"I am so grateful for the help I received,  
it will help me deal with ongoing problems."

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