



No Harm Done

A Parent's Journey

Next steps for parents or carers whose child is self-harming



I HOPE I CAN HELP MAKE A DIFFERENCE

“Having found out my child was self-harming I was so devastated and confused as to why. My emotions were all over the place, not knowing how to help her, where to go for professional help – it was so stressful. As a father I just wanted to wrap her up in cotton wool.

Back then I didn't know there were groups and services that could or would help her. But I did know it was hugely important to let my daughter know she was not alone. We, her family, were all here for her, to help her get better, support her through the darkest of times and help her feel safe.

I hope sharing our family's experience through this project, will go some way to helping other parents dealing with self-harm.”

Trevor, a parent

I FEEL GUILTY

If you've recently discovered that your child is harming themselves then you're probably experiencing a whole range of emotions. Parents commonly talk of guilt, shame, anger, frustration, sadness and disgust.

"I felt I had failed as a parent. Every cut felt like confirmation of what a bad job I must be doing."


Self-harm is a common coping mechanism for young people who turn to it as quickly as other generations might have used drugs or alcohol to manage difficult feelings. It can be a reflection of a broad range of issues, most of which are unrelated to our parenting.

However, as a parent you're in a great position to support your child's recovery. Acknowledge your feelings, perhaps by talking to a partner, friend or counsellor. Try not to focus on the past, instead think about how you can help make things change. Many parents grow closer to their children as they support their recovery.

"I couldn't have got through it without my Dad. He was so accepting and practical."

"Looking back, that time feels like a gift; we went from strangers to friends – we built a bridge of trust."





“She often said the wrong things and she didn’t understand at first, but she was there and she cared. That was the most important thing.”

I’M WORRIED I’LL SAY THE WRONG THING

Many parents find themselves paralysed with fear of saying the wrong thing to their child and so they say nothing at all. One time you should say nothing is if your emotions are running high – then it’s best to give yourself space and time to calm. The rest of the time, even if you don’t get it quite right, each conversation is a show of support for your child. Young people shared their tips with us on how parents can get it right:

Try not to judge: My parents didn’t like it but they didn’t think it made me a bad person.

Be honest: My parents told me they didn’t get it–nor did I. Their honesty and questions helped me to open up about it.

Accept recovery as a process: I can’t stop. Not right now. If you ask me to, I’ll feel like I’m letting you down. It’s going to take time.

Listen: My dad said very little. He just listened. It was exactly what I needed.

Talk about other things too: I’m more than my self-harm. It doesn’t have to be the focus of every conversation.

WHAT SHOULD I DO NEXT?

There are many practical ways in which you can support your child's recovery. The journey is different for everyone, but things that can commonly help include:

Supporting your child in accessing professional support

A visit to the GP or talking to someone at school is often the best first step.

Learning more about self-harm

There is a lot of misunderstanding around self-harm, the better you understand it, the better you can support your child. Further sources of support can be found [here](#).

Identifying stressors and triggers

Talk through a typical day or upcoming events with your child. Identify situations that are worrying them and discuss how to best address these.

Helping your child learn about alternatives

Work with your child to identify different ways of dealing with difficult emotions such as breathing exercises, music, physical activity, writing or art.

Keep supporting

As things get better and scars heal, we might begin to drift away. Try not to, this early recovery phase is sometimes the hardest part of all.



A photograph of two women in a park. The woman on the left has brown hair and is wearing a dark blue jacket, smiling broadly. The woman on the right has blonde hair, is wearing a white knit hat and a green jacket, and is holding a smartphone, looking at it. The background is a green lawn with trees.

“I found talking to a counsellor really helpful. I needed somewhere safe to say all the things I felt too scared to say elsewhere.”

SUPPORTING YOURSELF

It's important that you look after yourself and the rest of the family as well as the child who is self-harming. If we're not physically and emotionally well then we're not in a good position to support those we care about.

“Just basic stuff like eating well, sleeping enough and getting some exercise make a big difference. Those things slip really fast and as they slip so does your ability to cope.”

“We set aside time to let our hair down with our other son – he needs our attention and support too. This is stressful for him, he's very vulnerable. Besides, he deserves a little fun!”

“Sometimes you have to do something just for you. Have a bath, go for a walk, have a meal out. You'll come back refreshed and better able to manage.”

FURTHER SUPPORT

YoungMinds: [youngminds.org.uk](https://www.youngminds.org.uk)

[Parents Helpline](https://www.parentshelpline.org) 0808 802 5544

(Monday to Friday 9.30am – 4pm)

Coping with self-harm: [a guide for parents and carers](#)

(University of Oxford in conjunction with YoungMinds and The Royal College of Psychiatrists)

[Factsheet](#) from [The Royal College of Psychiatrists](#)

The Parent's Guide to Self-Harm: What parents need to know by Jane Smith. Available as a [paperback](#) or [Kindle](#)

A Short Introduction to Understanding and Supporting Children and Young People Who Self-Harm by Professor Carol Fitzpatrick. Available as a [paperback](#) or [Kindle](#)

[Self-Harm Alternatives](#): over 130 ideas for use in recovery suggested by young people, collated by Dr Pooky Knightsmith

No Harm Done - ▶ film & [📄](#) resource pack for young people

No Harm Done - ▶ film & [📄](#) resource pack for professionals

“If I could go back in time, I wouldn't change it. It was really hard but it brought my parents and I closer together and it helped me learn ways to talk and to cope that I will use for the rest of my life.”



#NoHarmDone

THANK YOU

Thank you to all the young people and parents that so generously gave their time and shared their experiences to make 'No Harm Done' a reality.

This pack was co-created with young people and parents and produced by:

YOUNG MINDS

The voice for young people's mental health and wellbeing



Raising awareness



fighting depression