

# Prisoners: Self-harm

This factsheet looks at what self-harm is and why you might self-harm in prison. It could help if you are using self-harm to cope with how you're feeling. Or if you are thinking about self-harming. It explains what support you can get and how to help yourself. This information is for adult prisoners in England. It's also for their loved ones, carers and anyone interested in this subject.

**Please note:** We have included links to websites and PDF documents in this factsheet. We know that prisoners don't usually have access to the internet. But they might be of use to your loved ones or staff who are supporting you. You could ask them if they could print out some useful information for you.

## Key Points.

- Self-harm is when you hurt yourself on purpose, by doing things like scratching, hitting, cutting, biting, or burning.
- Self-harm isn't a mental illness, but it is often linked to mental distress.
- Self-harm is common in prisons.
- You may self-harm because you find it difficult to cope with your feelings. Everyone has their own reasons for self-harming.
- You are more at risk of accidental suicide if you self-harm.
- There is professional help to stop you self-harming.
- Sharing your feelings with someone you trust can help you to self-harm less and make you feel less alone.
- There are other non-harmful ways to manage how you feel.
- If you can't stop self-harming, there are things you can do to lower the physical damage to yourself.

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## 1. What is self-harm?

Self-harm means that you harm yourself on purpose. Self-harm isn't a mental health condition, but it is often linked to mental distress.<sup>1</sup>

People self-harm in different ways such as the following:

- taking too many tablets, called an overdose<sup>2</sup>
- cutting yourself<sup>3</sup>
- burning yourself<sup>4</sup>
- banging or hitting your head or throwing yourself against something hard<sup>5</sup>
- punching yourself<sup>6</sup>
- sticking things in your body<sup>7</sup>
- swallowing things that shouldn't be swallowed<sup>8</sup>
- scalding with hot water<sup>9</sup>
- scratching your head or body<sup>10</sup>
- pinching yourself<sup>11</sup>
- pulling your hair out<sup>12</sup>

It is common for people to self-harm in secret. You may do this because you feel as though your thoughts and feelings aren't acceptable to other people.<sup>13</sup> You might feel anxious about what they think.

Self-harm can be both distressing for you and your loved ones. This is because they may not be able to understand why you self-harm.<sup>14</sup>

## 2. Who self-harms?

Many different type of people self-harm.

Self-harm is more common in young people who live with depression and anxiety. But it does also affect adults and those without a diagnosed mental health problem too.<sup>15</sup>

You are more likely to self-harm if you:<sup>16,17,18</sup>

- have a mental health issue such as:
  - depression,
  - anxiety, or
  - borderline personality disorder (BPD),
- take illegal drugs or drink too much alcohol,<sup>19</sup>
- are in prison,
- are a young person,
- are an asylum seeker,
- are a veteran of the armed forces,
- are gay, lesbian, bisexual, or transgender,
- have lost a loved one through suicide, or

- are a survivor of physical, emotional, or sexual abuse as a child, or as an adult.

You can find more information about:

- Depression,
- Anxiety disorders,
- Borderline personality disorder (BPD),
- Drugs, alcohol, and mental health, and
- Suicide – Coping with loss.

at [www.rethink.org](http://www.rethink.org). Or call our General Enquiries team on 0121 522 7007 and ask them to send you a copy of our factsheet.

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### 3. Why do people self-harm?

People self-harm for different reasons.<sup>20</sup> These reasons may change over time.

You might self-harm in prison because of:

- fear of coming into prison for the first time,
- anxiety about being on remand,
- feeling alone,
- loss of control over your life, or
- worrying about something outside, such as money, work, or family.

In prison you have a lot of spare time. You might spend this time thinking about the past or problems you have. Self-harming might make you feel better if you are finding it difficult to cope with how you are feeling. It can also show others how you are feeling.

You might self-harm to have some control. It can be frightening going into prison and you might feel you have no control over your life now. But usually, you only feel better for a short time.

You might also self-harm to:<sup>21</sup>

- deal with strong emotions like anger,
- punish yourself for things you think you've done wrong,
- make yourself feel normal,
- distract yourself from feelings, or
- get relief from feelings.

### Why might I self-harm to manage feelings?

Being overwhelmed by feelings is a common reason that people self-harm. Often these might be feelings such as sadness, guilt, and hopelessness.<sup>22</sup>

You may self-harm because you find it difficult to put your feelings into words. You may find your emotions physically uncomfortable. Or you may be aware of how you are feeling. But you may feel that your emotions are unmanageable or unacceptable.<sup>23</sup>

Physical pain might distract you when you are in emotional pain.<sup>24</sup> For some people self-harm releases tension, brings relief and helps to relieve pressure. Even if you don't understand why you are feeling that way.<sup>25</sup>

### Why might I self-harm to communicate?

You may self-harm to try and show others how you feel.<sup>26</sup>

Some people may think that you are attention-seeking. This is a common misunderstanding. Most people try to hide their self-harm behaviours from family and friends.<sup>27</sup>

Some people may self-harm to communicate to others how they are feeling. But this might not be the only reason behind the self-harm.

### Why might I self-harm to try to have control?

Self-harm can be a way of trying to feel in control of your body or your environment.<sup>28</sup>

You may self-harm if you dissociate. Dissociation means that you feel like you are detached from yourself, or from reality.<sup>29</sup>

You may self-harm so that you feel 'normal.' Self-harm may be a method that you use to stay in control of your day-to-day life.<sup>30</sup>

You can find more information about '**Dissociation and dissociative disorders**' at [www.rethink.org](http://www.rethink.org). Or call our General Enquiries team on 0121 522 7007 and ask them to send you a copy of our factsheet.

### Why might I self-harm to punish myself?<sup>31</sup>

You may self-harm to punish yourself for feelings or behaviours that you think are your fault. This may lead you to feel like you dislike yourself.

This is a common reason why people self-harm. You may not understand why you feel like this. You may not be able to link your feelings to something that has happened.

You may punish yourself through displaced anger. For example, you may be very angry towards a person or about a situation. But you are unable to tell the person how you are feeling or sort the situation out.

Whatever the reason for your self-harm, there is support available to help you. See [section 7](#) of this factsheet for more information.

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#### 4. How do people experience self-harm?

Many people self-harm to deal with distress. You may self-harm often or only every now and again. Everyone's experience is different.

Self-harm can become a normal way of dealing with life's difficulties because of the temporary relief it brings.

Think about being in a dentist's chair. Some people may dig their fingernail into their thumb to distract themselves from physical pain or fear. But this is a one-off event. They will stop when the dentist steps away from them. For people with an underlying emotional issue, it's not so straight forward.

Self-harm only provides temporary relief because the underlying issue is still there.

The earlier you get help, the easier it will be to learn other ways of coping. And work towards recovery.<sup>32</sup>

People who have self-harmed for many years can find it difficult to stop. But it's important to know that many people do learn to cope and recover.

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#### 5. Is there a link between self-harm and suicide?

Even if you self-harm but don't want to die, it can increase your risk of suicide.<sup>33</sup>

You may self-harm to deal with difficulties you face in life, rather than a way of trying to end it. Self-harm is risky, and you could end your life by mistake.

Also, self-harm is usually because of serious emotional distress. Most people who self-harm won't take their own life. But self-harm over a long time is linked with developing thoughts of suicide.<sup>34</sup>

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#### 6. What treatment should I get?

##### What are the NICE guidelines?

NICE guidelines are evidence-based recommendations for health and care in England.

They set out the care, treatment, and services suitable for most people with a specific condition or need. This includes guidelines on the assessment, management and preventing recurrence of self-harm.

The NHS usually follow the guidelines, but they don't have to. If they don't, they should have a good reason.

The treatment, care, and support that we refer to in this section is based on the NICE guidelines.

You can access the NICE guidelines on self-harm by clicking on the following link:

- **Self-harm: assessment, management and preventing recurrence:** [www.nice.org.uk/guidance/NG225](http://www.nice.org.uk/guidance/NG225)

The guidelines apply to healthcare staff in prisons. They say staff working in prisons may need to tailor the recommendations for certain prison settings.<sup>35</sup>

You might have self-harmed and need assessment or treatment. The guidelines say prison staff should make sure you have a safe location to wait in.<sup>36</sup>

### **Who deals with mental health care in prison?**

You should have the same access to healthcare as people in the community.<sup>37</sup>

There should be primary and specialist mental health care. And if you are at risk of self-harm the safer custody team (SCT) should work with you to keep you safe.<sup>38</sup> You can read more about the safer custody team in [section 7](#) of this factsheet.

You can find more information about '**Mental health care in prison**' at [www.rethink.org](http://www.rethink.org). Or call our General Enquiries team on 0121 522 7007 and ask them to send you a copy of our factsheet.

### **Should I be offered medication?**

Medication should not be offered to you to just treat self-harm.<sup>39</sup> But it may be offered to help with other mental health symptoms.

Before healthcare professionals offer you medication they should think about the following things.<sup>40</sup>

- How toxic the medication is and if you are at risk of overdose.
- How much alcohol or illegal drugs you take.
- Your access to other medication prescribed to yourself or others.
- Communicating with other professionals who are prescribing you medication.

You can find more information on '**Medication – Choice and managing problems**' at [www.rethink.org](http://www.rethink.org). Or call our General Enquiries team on 0121 522 7007 and ask them to send you a copy of our factsheet.

### **Will I be offered talking therapy?**

Healthcare professionals should consider offering you specialist talking therapy for adults who self-harm. Such as cognitive behavioural therapy (CBT) or problem-solving therapy.<sup>41</sup>

In therapy, your therapist will help you find ways to reduce distress that leads to self-harm.<sup>42</sup>

Therapy should:<sup>43</sup>

- start as soon as possible,
- be at least between 4 – 10 sessions, and
- be tailored to your needs and preferences.

You can find more information on ‘Talking therapies’ at [www.rethink.org](http://www.rethink.org). Or call our General Enquiries team on 0121 522 7007 and ask them to send you a copy of our factsheet.

### **Might I get referred to a specialist mental health team?**

You might be referred to a specialist mental health team. This is so you can get a psychosocial assessment if:<sup>44</sup>

- your healthcare professional is concerned about you,
- your levels of distress are getting worse, are high, or are there all the time,
- you are self-harming more often, or more severely, or
- your suicidal thoughts are getting worse.

### What is a psychosocial assessment?

A psychosocial assessment for self-harm, is when professionals assess you after you have self-harmed.<sup>45</sup>

They try to do this in a warm and empathic way to help you understand:<sup>46</sup>

- why you self-harmed,
- the problems that led up to it, and
- what would be helpful for you in both the short and long-term, to stay safe.

The assessment:<sup>47</sup>

- should be done with you as early as possible following an episode of self-harm, and
- will be carried out by a mental healthcare professional.

The assessment is there to:<sup>48</sup>

- help you to get the care that you need,
- develop a therapeutic relationship with you,
- begin a shared understanding of why you may have self-harmed,
- give you information about your symptoms or diagnosis, and
- give your family member or carers information about your symptoms or diagnosis. But only if you would like them to be involved.

The assessment should happen in a private area. This is so that you and health professionals can speak without being overheard.<sup>49</sup>

As part of the assessment the health professional will ask you about:<sup>50</sup>

- things that have happened in the past,
- what is happening for you now,
- if anything has changed for you, and
- if there is anything due to happen in the future which may be difficult. Such as an event or specific date.

As part of the assessment the health professional will think about:<sup>51</sup>

- your wishes, values, and what matters to you,
- any other mental health problems you may have,
- your treatment and support needs such as talking therapy, social care, or rehabilitation,
- your treatment preferences,
- if your family members or carers should be involved, and
- treating each episode of self-harm separately. This is because your reason for self-harm may vary from episode to episode.

### **Should I have a care plan?**

If you have a psychosocial assessment, health professionals should work with you to either:<sup>52</sup>

- review your existing care plan, or
- develop a new care plan.

Your care plan should be created based on your support needs and safety needs. These should be identified during the psychosocial assessment.

Your care plan usually outlines:<sup>53</sup>

- your support needs,
- your safety needs,
- what is needed to support your recovery, such as treatment or social care, and
- which professionals are involved in your care.

You should be given a copy of your care plan.

The plan should also be shared with healthcare and social care professionals involved with your care.<sup>54</sup>

### **What if I self-harm often or my treatment was not successful?<sup>55</sup>**

If you self-harm often or your treatment is not successful:

- you and those involved in your care should review your care plan, and
- you should be involved in writing a safety plan for you with professionals.



### What is a safety plan?

Healthcare professionals may develop a safety plan with you to help keep you safe. It will be tailored to your needs. It will form part of your care plan.

Your safety plan should include:<sup>56</sup>

- how you self-harm,
- your triggers and warning signs of increased distress, self-harm, or suicidal crisis,
- coping strategies that you find useful,
- people who can provide support to you in a crisis, and
- keeping your environment safe, helping remove or limit things you would use to self-harm.

You should be given a copy of your safety plan. It can be shared with your family and carers if you agree.

Healthcare and social care professionals will also keep a copy.

### **What is harm minimisation? <sup>57</sup>**

Harm minimisation is about working on different ways to help you avoid, delay, or reduce self-harm. You do this with healthcare professionals. Such as:

- distraction techniques or coping strategies,
- approaches to self-care,
- wound hygiene and aftercare.

Healthcare professionals might talk to you about harm minimisation strategies. They might do this if you can't stop self-harming in the short term but are taking part in longer term mental health support.

### **What should happen if I need to go to hospital?**

You might go to an accident and emergency department at hospital because of self-harm. Healthcare staff should:<sup>58</sup>

- assess how serious your injury is,
- arrange any urgent physical treatment,
- assess your level of distress,
- assess if there are any immediate concerns about your safety,
- assess if there are any safeguarding concerns,
- assess your willingness to accept medical treatment and mental healthcare, and
- find out if you have a care plan.

As soon as possible on arrival, you should be seen by a psychiatry professional or a suitably skilled mental health professional.<sup>59</sup>

## Can I just get treatment for my injuries?

Health professionals should offer you treatment for your injuries. Even if you don't want mental health support.

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## **7. Who can help?**

You might feel alone and isolated. You might feel like people close to you won't understand. But there are ways to reach out and ask for help.

Sharing your experiences can help your recovery. The following people can help you.

### **What is a prison officer?<sup>60</sup>**

Prison officers supervise you when you are in prison.

All prison officers are trained to create a safe environment. They should offer you support when it is needed.

You can raise any issues or concerns with prison officers.

### **Who is the safer custody team?**

Your prison will have a 'Safer custody team' (SCT). The SCT help to manage self-harm and suicide in prison.<sup>61</sup>

If any staff member thinks you are at risk of self-harm or suicide, you should get help under the 'ACCT' process. This stands for 'assessment, care in custody and teamwork'.<sup>62</sup>

The ACCT process is how prison staff plan support for you if you are at risk of self-harm or suicide. They will plan to put things in place to keep you safe.<sup>63</sup>

Someone called a case co-ordinator will bring together different staff to create a plan of actions to achieve this.<sup>64</sup>

Your plan should be drawn up to meet your needs. You should be involved in making decisions about your support.<sup>65</sup>

Speak to a prison officer if you want help for self-harm. They can pass this information on to the SCT.

You can find more information about '**Prisoners: Suicidal thoughts - How to cope**' at [www.rethink.org](http://www.rethink.org). Or call our General Enquiries team on 0121 522 7007 and ask them to send you a copy of our factsheet.

### **What is a prison chaplain?**

A prison chaplain is available to provide spiritual guidance and counselling. If you don't have a faith you can see a humanist pastoral support visitor.<sup>66</sup>

### What are listeners?<sup>67</sup>

The listener scheme is a peer support service which aims to reduce suicide and self-harm in prisons.

Listeners can provide confidential emotional support to you when you are finding it hard to cope.

Prisoners are trained and supported by the Samaritans to become listeners.

### What work do the Samaritans do in prisons?

The Samaritans work in prisons to reduce self-harm and suicide among prisoners. You can get help from them in different ways.<sup>68</sup>

Their details can be found in the [Useful contacts](#) section at the end of this factsheet.

There might be no Listener scheme available. Volunteers from the local Samaritans branch may visit the prison to give you face to face support.<sup>69</sup>

### What are Insiders?<sup>70</sup>

Insiders are other prisoners who have been trained to give you information and reassurance. They do this when you first go to prison.

They aim to make you feel less anxious during your first few days or weeks in prison. You could speak to an insider if you need help.

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## 8. How can I help myself?

There are different ways to help reduce or stop self-harm. We have included ideas for you below.

Everybody is different and what works for someone else may not work for you. You can try different things. Whatever you choose, give yourself time, as it may take a while for things to work.

### How can I delay self-harm?

- You may self-harm straight away when you are distressed.
- You can try to delay your self-harm.
- With this technique, you might not self-harm as badly, as often, or at all.
- You can give yourself an aim, like 'I'm going to wait 2 or 5 minutes, say, before I self-harm.'
- In this time, you can use distraction techniques, such as talking to someone.
- You can gradually increase the amount of time you wait.

### Is there anything else that might help?

Before harming, write down, or think about, the answers to these questions, or some of them.

- Why do I feel I need to hurt myself?
- What has happened to make me feel like this?
- How do I feel right now?
- Have I been here before?
- What did I do to deal with it?
- How did I feel then?
- What have I done to make myself feel better before?
- What else can I do that won't hurt me?
- Do I need to hurt myself?
- How will I feel when I am hurting myself?
- How will I feel after hurting myself?
- How will I feel tomorrow morning?
- Can I avoid what has made me feel like this? Or deal with it better now and in the future?

### **What non-harmful ways are there to manage how I feel?**

There are some non-harmful things you can try when you feel like harming yourself. Such as:

- speak to someone like a friend on your wing, a listener, insider or staff member,
- ring a family member or a friend or write them a letter,
- write your negative thoughts down, then rip up the paper,
- find other ways to show your feelings such as writing, drawing, and doing prison activities,
- try exercising in your cell,
- massaging or drawing on the place you want to hurt yourself, or
- distract yourself by choosing a random object and thinking of 10 different uses for it.
- Form an image of yourself feeling empowered. For example, try imagining yourself as superhero. Or try to remember a time you felt strong and positive about yourself.

### What is mindfulness?

Some people find mindfulness useful. Mindfulness is a type of meditation. It is when you focus on your mind and body. It is a way of paying attention to the present moment.

To practise mindfulness try focusing on your breathing. Think about how it feels when you breathe in and out. Mindfulness may teach you to be more aware of your thoughts and feelings. Once you are more aware of your thoughts and feelings, you can learn to deal with them better.

There is more information about getting started with mindfulness here:

[www.mindful.org/meditation/mindfulness-getting-started](http://www.mindful.org/meditation/mindfulness-getting-started)

### How can breathing exercises help?

Breathing exercises can help make you feel calmer and reduce stress. Below are some exercises you can try.

Breathing exercises usually benefit wellbeing. But if they aren't working for you, or are causing you difficulty, stop using them. You can try other relaxation technique or contact your GP for advice.

#### Slow breathing

- Sit or lie in a comfortable position.
- Keep your back straight and your shoulders back.
- Close your eyes and focus on your breathing.
- Think about how your breathing feels in your body.
- Can you feel it coming in through your nostrils?
- Can you feel it going down your throat, into your lungs?
- Slow down your breathing as much as you can.
- You may find it useful to count as you inhale and exhale.
- See if you can expand your exhale, to make it longer than your inhale. Can you feel your chest expanding? What about your belly?
- If you start to have upsetting thoughts, try bringing your focus back to your breathing.

#### Box breathing

- Sit or lie in a comfortable position.
- Put on some relaxing music if you want.
- Take one deep breath in and out.
- Breathe in for 4 seconds.
- Hold your breath for 4 seconds.
- Breathe out for 6 seconds.
- Hold your breath for 2 seconds.
- Repeat this cycle for 5-10 minutes.

#### 4-5-8 method

- Start by sitting up straight in a comfortable position or lying down.
- Slowly breathe in through your nose for 4 seconds. If you can't breathe in through your nose, use your mouth.
- Hold your breath for 5 seconds.
- Breathe out slowly for 8 seconds.
- Repeat this cycle 10 times, or as many times as you want. While you do it try to concentrate on your breathing. You can alter the second counts to suit you.

### What is yoga?

Yoga is an exercise. It has a focus on breathing techniques, strength, and flexibility to improve how you feel. Yoga can help to reduce depression and stress.<sup>71</sup> Some prisons have yoga classes that you can join.

There may be yoga classes on National Prison radio<sup>72</sup>. You may be able to find books on meditation or yoga in the prison library. Or you can ask the Prison Phoenix Trust to send you free CDs and books on yoga and meditation.<sup>73</sup> Their contact details are in the [Useful contacts](#) section below.

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## **9. I can't stop self-harming. How can I reduce risk?**

There is always risk with self-harm. But you can try to lower the physical damage you do when you self-harm. You can try the following.<sup>74</sup>

- Make sure anything you cut yourself with is clean. For example, use new blades. It's best not to share blades with other people as you could get diseases like hepatitis B, hepatitis C, and HIV.<sup>75</sup>
- Think carefully about where you cut. Avoid risky areas such as the insides of the wrists or the tops of the legs. as
- Make sure you are up to date with your tetanus jab. Tetanus is a serious infection. Contact prison healthcare staff if you're unsure if you need a tetanus jab.
- Think about not self-harming on areas you have lots of scars. Scar tissue may not be as strong as your skin.<sup>76</sup>
- Think about cutting down on illegal drugs or alcohol or avoiding them. They can affect your judgement.
- If possible, learn first aid and keep first aid supplies nearby. Such as antiseptic wipes and bandages.
- Have a written plan you can keep for what you can do in an emergency.
- Set yourself limits before you self-harm and stick to them. Such as decide how many cuts you will make and how big they will be. This is a good way of learning the skills you need to stop.
- Think of options that don't break your skin.
- If you self-harm by hitting yourself, put towels, or something else around your fists to soften the blow.
- There is no safe way to self-poison. Think of other options instead of swallowing medication or substances.

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## **10. Information for friends, carers, and relatives**

You may have concerns about your friend or relative when they are in prison. Especially if they had problems with self-harm before going inside and you think prison will make it worse.

You might be worried about your loved one while they are in prison if they are self-harming or you think they are.

If you're worried you can:

- tell a member of staff,
- contact the safer custody team, or
- contact the duty governor.

See [section 7](#) of this factsheet for more information on what the safer custody team do.

All prisons have safer custody hotlines that you can contact.<sup>77</sup> You can tell them why you're concerned about your loved one. You can find the contact details of the safer custody team at your loved one's prison by:

- clicking on this link:  
[www.prisonersfamilies.org/pages/category/need-urgent-help?Take=24](http://www.prisonersfamilies.org/pages/category/need-urgent-help?Take=24),
- scrolling down to where it says '**Filter**' 'Prisons',
- then click on the drop-down menu where it says 'All', and
- search for the prison that your loved one is in and click on it.

Or you can call the prison and ask to speak to the safer custody team.

### Who are the Prisoners' Families Helpline?

You can contact Prisoners' Families Helpline for advice and information.

#### **Prisoners' Families Helpline**

Provide advice and information to people who have a family member involved in the criminal justice system.

**Phone:** 0808 808 2003

**Email:** [info@prisonersfamilies.org](mailto:info@prisonersfamilies.org)

**Website:** [www.prisonersfamilies.org](http://www.prisonersfamilies.org)

They have a useful video and information to help you in you are worried about a loved one in prison:

[www.prisonersfamilies.org/pages/category/need-urgent-help?Take=24](http://www.prisonersfamilies.org/pages/category/need-urgent-help?Take=24)

### How should I react if I find out a loved one self-harms?

You may be feeling all sorts of different things if someone you know self-harms. Here are some tips on how to deal with the situation and support the person you care about.

Self-harm is a way a way your loved one deals with their distress. People don't usually harm themselves to be dramatic, annoy others or to make a point.

Be honest with yourself about how the self-harm makes you feel. It is okay to feel whatever you feel. You may feel frightened or uncomfortable. Try to take time to process your feelings. Try not to react straightaway with anger or blame.

If your relative wants to talk to you about their self-harm the main thing to do is listen to them.

You can offer to support them, but you don't have to give them advice or come up with solutions. You can ask them what help they want.

### **How can I learn about my loved one's distress?**

It might help you to have a better understanding of self-harm and your loved one's mental health issues. You can:

- read this factsheet, and
- if your loved one lives with a mental illness you can read more about it on our website here: [www.rethink.org/advice-and-information/about-mental-illness/learn-more-about-conditions](http://www.rethink.org/advice-and-information/about-mental-illness/learn-more-about-conditions)

You could contact mental health and self-harm charities for information. Or read books. See the [Further reading](#) and [Useful contacts](#) sections of this factsheet for more information.

### **What else can I do to help?**

It might help to try the following.

- Tell your loved one you care for them.
- Be as available as you can be to talk.
- Set aside your personal feelings about self-harm and focus on what's going on for them.
- Be honest and realistic about what you can and can't do.
- Offer them support if you think that you can help with something.
- Be patient and take time to build trust if you need to.
- Realise trying to make them feel guilty isn't helpful.
- Accept and try and understand their pain, as it might make it more bearable for them.
- Be hopeful about the possibilities of finding other ways of coping rather than self-harm.
- Discuss possibilities for treatment, without being pushy.

### **What support is available for me?**

Try to take care of yourself. You can be more supportive if you aren't tired and emotionally drained. Try to take a break if you need one.

If you are a carer, friend or relative of someone who self-harms in prison, you can get support.

You can do the following.

- Join a carers' service or support group.
- Speak to your GP if your mental health is affecting your day-to-day life.



### How can I join a carers' service or support group?

You can get peer support through carer support services or carers' groups. You can search for carer support groups on the following websites:

- **Rethink Mental Illness:** [www.rethink.org](http://www.rethink.org)
- **Carers UK:** [www.carersuk.org](http://www.carersuk.org), and
- **Carers Trust:** <https://carers.org/search/network-partners>.

### What support can my GP give me?

Caring for someone who self-harms can be challenging. If it is affecting your mental health to the extent that it is affecting your day-to-day life, you can see your GP.

They can offer you advice and treatment.

You can find more information about:

- GPs and your mental health, and
- Stress - How to cope

at [www.rethink.org](http://www.rethink.org). Or call our General Enquiries Team on 0121 522 7007 and ask them to send you a copy of our factsheet.

[Top](#)

## Further Reading

**Please note:** We have included website addresses as well as phone numbers. We know that prisoners don't usually have access to the internet. However, they might be of use to your loved ones or prison staff who are supporting you. You could ask them if they could print out some useful information for you.

### **Self-Harm: The 'Secret Self'**

This is a publication by Sane based on research they did. It explains what they found about why people self-harm and ways to support people. You can download it from their website.

**Website:** [www.sane.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2022/02/Selh-harm-secret-self-new.pdf](http://www.sane.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2022/02/Selh-harm-secret-self-new.pdf)

### **Self-Harm: A self help guide**

Northumberland, Tyne and Wear NHS Foundation Trust have produced a self-help booklet for people who self-harm. You can download it for free from their website.

**Website:** [web.ntw.nhs.uk/selfhelp](http://web.ntw.nhs.uk/selfhelp)

## **The Scarred Soul: Understanding and Ending Self-inflicted Violence**

– by Jan Sutton

This is a book that has new research, statistics, diagrams, some resources, case studies and practical self-help activities.

## **101 Distractions from Depression, Self-harm (and other Soul-destroyers)** – by Sophia Gill

This book is by someone with lived experience of depression and self-harm. She writes about what helped her distract herself and overcome her self-harming behaviour.



### **Useful Contacts**

#### **Samaritans**

There are different ways for prisoners to contact Samaritans. All prisons should have direct lines to either the local branch or the national number.

**Phone:** 116 123 (24/7 help is available)

**Address:** Freepost SAMARITANS LETTERS

**Website:** [www.samaritans.org](http://www.samaritans.org)

#### **Self-harm Network**

An online forum where you can chat with other people affected by self-harm.

**Website:** [www.nshn.co.uk](http://www.nshn.co.uk)

#### **LifeSIGNS**

This is a self-injury advice and support organisation. They have information, support forums. They have practical articles like what you can wear in the summer if you don't want anyone to see your scars.

**Website:** [www.lifesigns.org.uk](http://www.lifesigns.org.uk)

#### **ASSISTline**

National helpline offering supportive listening service to anyone throughout the UK with thoughts of suicide or thoughts of self-harm. They are open to those aged 18 or over.

**Phone:** 0800 689 5652

**Website:** [www.spbristol.org/assistline](http://www.spbristol.org/assistline)

**C.A.L.M. (Campaign Against Living Miserably)**

This organisation helps people dealing with suicidal thoughts or emotional distress.

**Phone:** 0800 58 58 58

**Address:** 5 Wootton Street, London, SE1 8TG

**Webchat:** [through the website](#)

**Website:** [www.thecalmzone.net](http://www.thecalmzone.net)

**Sane**

Sane run a national, out-of-hours helpline. They offer emotional support and information to anyone affected by mental illness. This includes family, friends and carers.

**Phone:** 0300 304 7000 or 0300 124 7900

**Address:** St. Mark's Studios, 14 Chillingworth Road, Islington, London N7 8QJ

**Website:** [www.sane.org.uk](http://www.sane.org.uk)

**SupportLine**

They offer confidential emotional support to everyone by telephone, email and post. They can talk to you about any issue.

**Phone:** 01708 765200

**Address:** PO Box 2860, Romford, Essex RM7 1JA

**E-mail:** [info@supportline.org.uk](mailto:info@supportline.org.uk)

**Website:** [www.supportline.org.uk](http://www.supportline.org.uk)

**PAPYRUS**

Charity that offers emotional support to people under 35 who are suicidal. They can also support people who are concerned about someone under 35 who might be suicidal.

**Phone:** 0800 068 41 41

**Text:** 07786 209697

**Email:** [pat@papyrus-uk.org](mailto:pat@papyrus-uk.org)

**Website:** [www.papyrus-uk.org](http://www.papyrus-uk.org)

**Switchboard – LGBT + Helpline**

Switchboard gives practical and emotional support for lesbian, gay, bisexual or transgender people.

**Phone:** 0800 0119 100

**E-mail:** [hello@switchboard.lgbt](mailto:hello@switchboard.lgbt)

**Webchat:** [through the website](#)

**Website:** [www.switchboard.lgbt](http://www.switchboard.lgbt)

### **Prison Phoenix Trust**

They help prisoners with yoga and meditation in prison. Run yoga classes on National Prison radio. You can ask them to send free books to help with relaxation in your cell.<sup>78</sup>

**Phone:** 01865 512 521

**Address:** PO Box 328, Oxford, OX2 7HF

**Email:** [all@theppt.org.uk](mailto:all@theppt.org.uk)

**Website:** [www.theppt.org.uk](http://www.theppt.org.uk)

### **Forward Trust**

Deliver drug and alcohol services to people in prison and the community.

**Phone:** 020 3981 5525

**Address:** Unit 106 - 7, Edinburgh House, 70 Kennington Lane, London SE11 5DP

**Webchat:** [through the website](#)

**Website:** [www.forwardtrust.org.uk](http://www.forwardtrust.org.uk)

### **Alcoholics Anonymous Great Britain**

Provide guidance, support and encouragement to prisoners. Provide meetings and visit. Can provide support upon release.

**Phone:** 0800 9177 650

**Address:** PO Box 1, 10 Toft Green, York YO1 7NJ

**Email:** [help@aamail.org](mailto:help@aamail.org)

**Website:** [www.alcoholics-anonymous.org.uk](http://www.alcoholics-anonymous.org.uk)

### **Prisoners' Advice Service (PAS)**

PAS offers free legal advice and information to prisoners in England and Wales on their rights, conditions of imprisonment and prison rules.

**Phone:** 020 7253 3323

**Address:** PO Box 46199, London, EC1M 4XA

**Website contact form:** [www.prisonersadvice.org.uk/about/contact](http://www.prisonersadvice.org.uk/about/contact)

**Website:** [www.prisonersadvice.org.uk](http://www.prisonersadvice.org.uk)

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## Rethink Mental Illness Advice Service

**Phone 0808 801 0525**

**Monday to Friday, 9:30am to 4pm  
(excluding bank holidays)**

**Email [advice@rethink.org](mailto:advice@rethink.org)**



### Did this help?

We'd love to know if this Information helped you

**Drop us a line at:** [feedback@rethink.org](mailto:feedback@rethink.org)

**or write to us at Rethink Mental Illness:**  
RAIS

PO Box 18252

Solihull

B91 9BA

**or call us on 0808 801 0525**

We're open 9:30am to 4pm

Monday to Friday (excluding bank holidays)



**Equality, rights, fair treatment, and the maximum quality of life for all those severely affected by mental illness.**

For further information on Rethink Mental Illness Phone 0121 522 7007  
Email [info@rethink.org](mailto:info@rethink.org)



**rethink.org**

### Need more help?

Go to [rethink.org](https://rethink.org) for information on symptoms, treatments, money and benefits and your rights.

### Don't have access to the web?

Call us on 0121 522 7007. We are open Monday to Friday, 9am to 5pm, and we will send you the information you need in the post.

### Need to talk to an adviser?

If you need practical advice, call us on: 0808 801 0525 between 9:30am to 4pm, Monday to Friday. Our specialist advisers can help you with queries like how to apply for benefits, get access to care or make a complaint.

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