

Self harm

What is it?



What can you do about it?

A booklet for people with learning disabilities

By Greenwich Community Learning Disabilities Team (CLDT)

All people shown in the photographs in this booklet are actors.

What is Self Harm?

Some people try to cope with difficult and painful feelings by hurting themselves.

Some people **cut themselves** - with a knife or other sharp things.



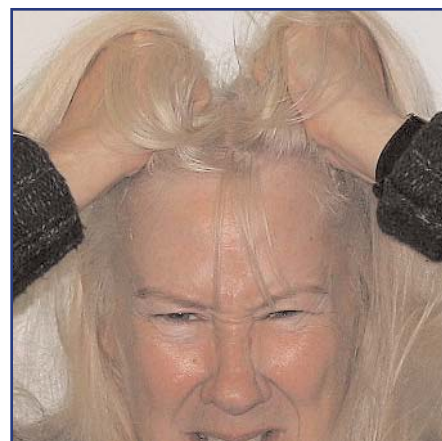
Some people **burn themselves**.



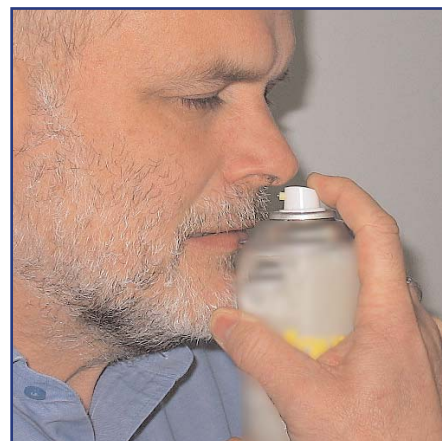
Some people **hit themselves** - with their hands or other things. Some people **hit hard objects** (like walls).



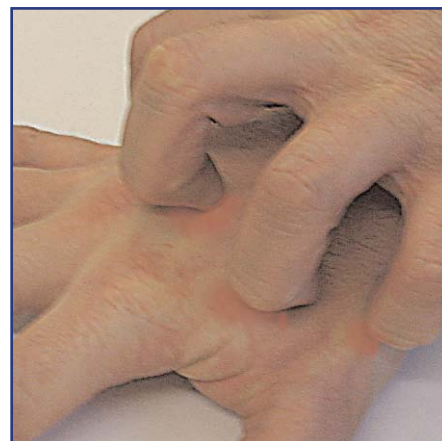
Some people **pull out their hair or eyelashes**



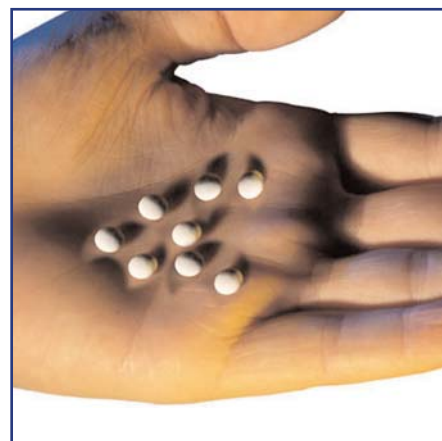
Some people **sniff harmful substances** like glue or gas.



Some people **scratch, pick or tear their skin** making sores and scars



Some people **take lots of pills.**
Sometimes they may take enough pills to hurt themselves, but **not** to kill themselves.



Why do People Self Harm?

Often people who self harm have had **upsetting things happen to them** in their lives. They may find it difficult to tell people about what has happened to them.



Some people feel that hurting themselves **stops them thinking about painful feelings**. It may help them feel more **in control** of those painful feelings. Some people feel a **release** from the painful feelings after hurting themselves. It's like they are **unlocking bad feelings and letting them out**.



They may feel a strong urge to hurt themselves to feel this release. This is partly because of the **natural chemicals** released on the body after the self-harm.



Also, some people feel better because when they feel pain on their body, it helps them **not to think about painful feelings or memories** for a short time. It can also help people who feel numb and empty to feel more "**real**".



Some people are trying to "cut the bad" out of themselves.



Some people find it difficult to let other people know how bad they feel. **They may hurt themselves as a way of letting other people know they feel very bad.**



Some people feel that they **do not get enough care and attention.** They may hurt themselves to try to get more care and attention from people around them.



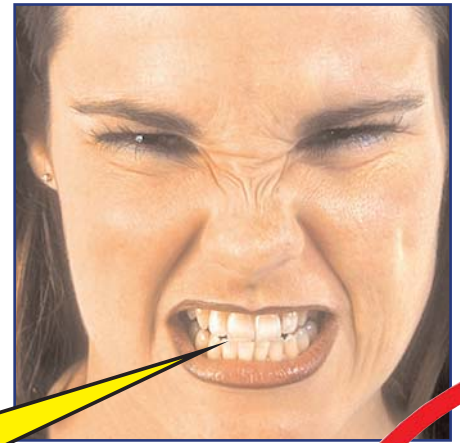
Some people feel so bad about themselves that they feel they **deserve to be hurt.**



What Can Help?

Many people find that they can learn to let people know how they feel using **words**, instead of hurting themselves.

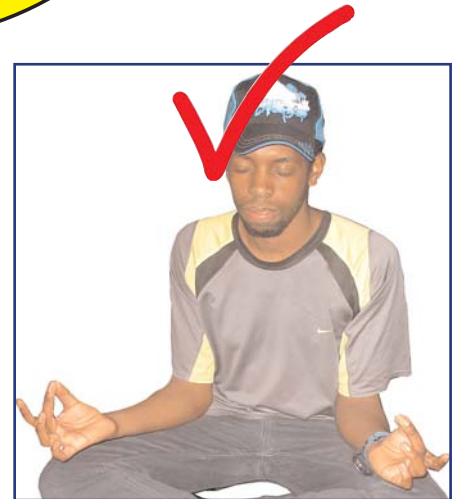
However, this can be very difficult and painful.



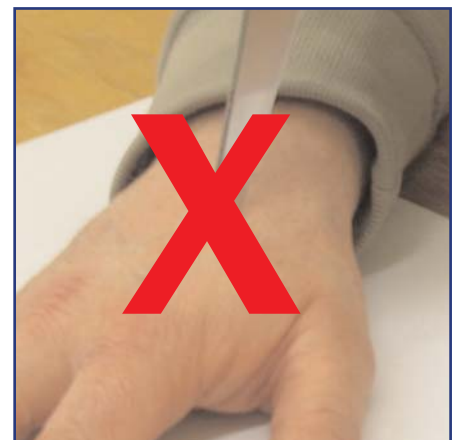
**I'm angry!
Please listen
to me!**



It may also be helpful to find other ways of making your body feel better through **exercise** or **relaxation**.



If you self harm, you will need lots of help from the people around you to learn to stop hurting yourself.



Things to try to stop hurting yourself

1 Talk to **someone** about how you feel.

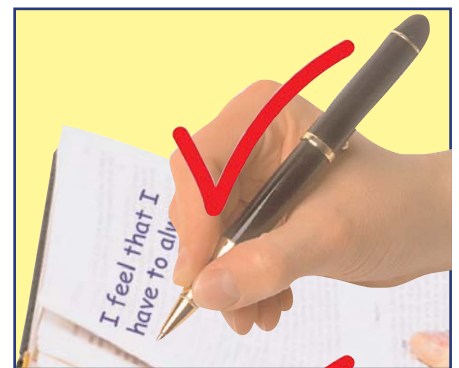


2 **Drawing or painting** - to **express the painful feelings**. It is important that you know where you can find paper, pens, and pencils.

You may want to talk to someone about these pictures, or you may want to keep them private.



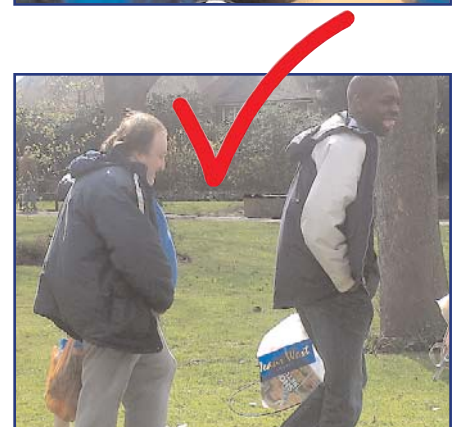
3 **Writing a journal**. It may help to write down your difficult feelings. You may want to keep this private or show it to someone you trust.



4 **Listen to music**. You might find that your favourite happy or sad music helps.



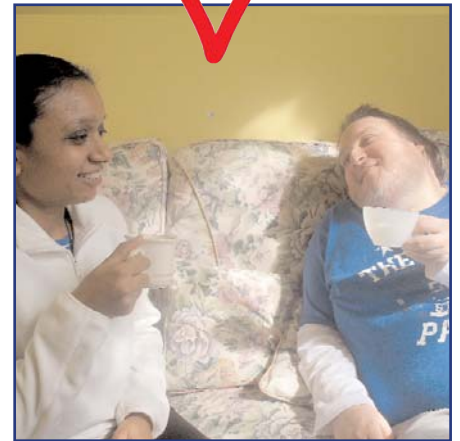
5 **Going for a walk** on your own or with someone else.



6 Taking regular exercise - swimming, running or going to the gym.



7 Go and visit a friend or someone in your family who you get on with.



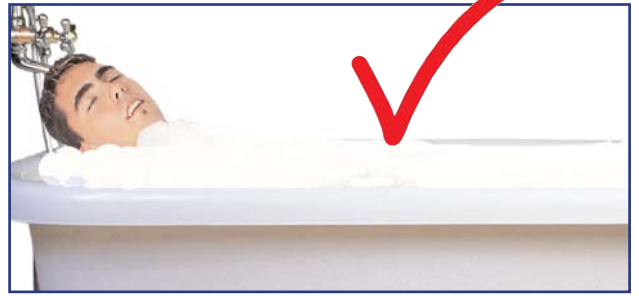
8 Relaxing. For example, breathing deeply and slowly, sitting in a comfortable chair.



9 Learning Yoga.

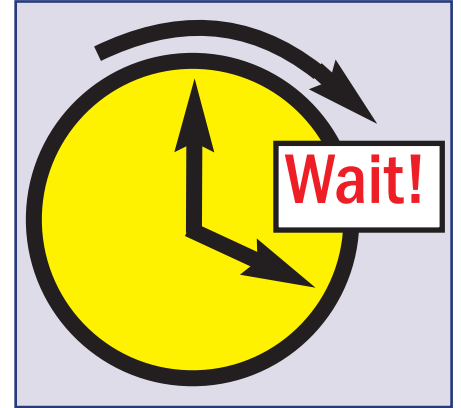


10 Have a bath - maybe with relaxing bubbles.



11 Tell yourself you won't hurt yourself for an hour or until tomorrow.

You **may** find you don't feel you need to later.



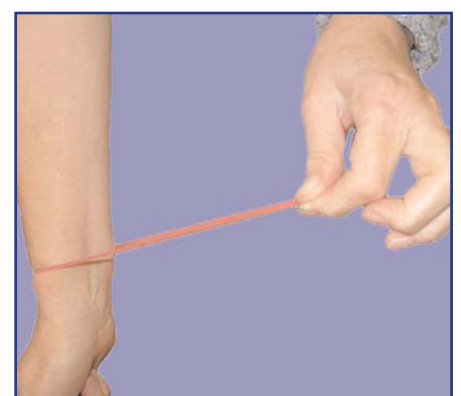
12 Try not to have things nearby that you can hurt yourself with.



13 Try not to drink alcohol or to take drugs, if you find this makes you more likely to hurt yourself.



14 Do other things that are less painful or dangerous. Some people do other things that have a similar release to self harm, but are less dangerous. For example: wearing an **elastic band** round your wrist and 'pinging' it. Some people draw **red lines** on their skin using ink or lipstick. Other people put **ice** on their skin.



How CLDT may help you

Individual Therapy - Psychology

You may find talking to a psychologist could help. You can ask to talk to a member of the psychology department about what sort of help you need.



You may have **never** talked about any upsetting things that have happened to you. You may have been **abused** by someone.

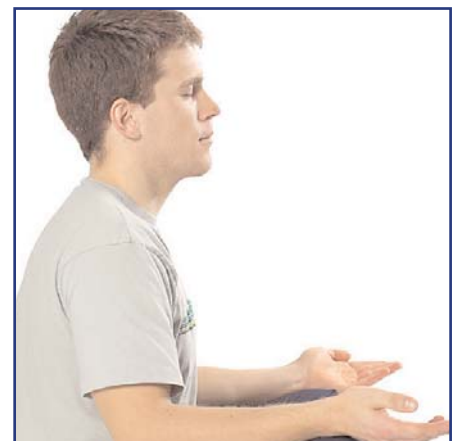


You may find talking about what has happened to you will help you **understand** your self harm.



You may feel you do not need to self harm after talking about your feelings. Or, you may want some practical help - to learn other ways of coping with painful feelings.

These may include relaxation or learning more about feelings.

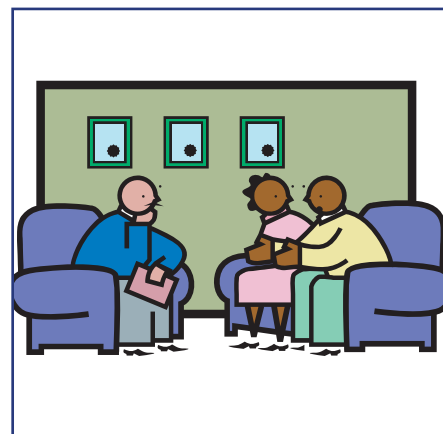


Family Sessions - Psychology

You will need support from the people around you to learn not to self harm. We can work with you and your family to help you all understand the self harm. You may want all of your family or just one or two people you get on with to come along.



If you feel family sessions would help, you could find out more information about these in our "**family sessions**" leaflet, available from CLDT.



Group Therapy - Psychology

You may find it helpful to join one of the groups we run. You can talk to other people in the group about your feelings. You can get help and support from the other people in the group. You can also learn to feel better about yourself, by helping the other people in the group.



Nursing - Individual Support

The community nurses give advice and support on your health needs. You may find talking to a community nurse could help. They can provide support in how to safely manage your self harm.

