

Support With Suicidal Thoughts and Self Harm



Thoughts about self harm and suicide are common. They can be linked, or you can have one without the other. They can be linked to low mood, flashbacks or triggers.

Emotional Triggers

Emotional triggers are situations, people, words or environments which cause an intense emotional response – anger, sadness or fear. You may have physical reactions (e.g. raised heart rate) or psychological (e.g. negative thoughts). Triggers can cause panic attacks, anxiety, crying, screaming, urges to self harm – these are all normal responses. Identifying triggers can help you better understand yourself and be prepared. You can write down the times in the recent weeks where you have felt intense emotion, and think about your thoughts and physical feelings, as well as the situation – this exercise can sometimes cause distress. Or you can keep a mood diary and write down situations and emotional responses as they happen. It is tempting to avoid triggers but they are hard to avoid so it is best to work on skills to manage triggers.

Coping with Self Harm

The urge to self harm can be sometimes managed with grounding and distraction techniques, however sometimes the urge will not go away. For some it is the pain that provides release, for some it is the sight of blood. Some alternatives to manage the urges:

1. Drawing with red pen or red paint on your arm
2. Keeping a rubber band/hair tie on your wrist and flicking it
3. Shocking sensations such as squeezing ice or sucking lemon
4. Rip up old newspaper
5. Punch a pillow
6. Write down your feelings
7. Scream/cry
8. Try to confide in someone, either friend or professionals about these urges so that when you experience them in the future, they can help you use safer techniques.

Important Contacts

Emergency: 111 or 999 if you feel you are unsafe

Samaritans: 116 213 (e: jo@samaritans.org)

Jothy (Tamil speaking): 020 3371 0006

Myths about self harm and suicidal ideation

1. They are a cry for attention – this is not true. The thoughts are an expression of your internal state and are completely valid
2. People who self harm are suicidal – this may be true, but for some people self harm is a coping mechanism to manage intense emotional pain. It is not safe and therefore increasing skills in other ways of coping can help
3. Only people with mental illness have suicidal thoughts – suicidal thoughts can happen with life stress such as relationship breakdown, debilitating illness or legal problems
4. People with suicidal ideation don't want to live – this is not true. Suicidal thoughts occur as a way of coping with intense suffering – the thoughts don't mean you want to end your life, you just want to alleviate the pain.
5. People who self harm and experience triggers have borderline personality disorder (BPD) – not all who respond to triggers or self harm have BPD, and BPD is a diagnostic label for symptoms and does not define a person's personality

Coping with suicidal thoughts

Suicidal thoughts typically come and go in intensity over the course of a day. Keeping busy can push these thoughts away, and making a safety plan means you have an automatic way to keep yourself safe.

Distraction techniques can be included in the safety plan and can include:

- 1. Download uplifting music playlists, an interesting audiobook, podcast or TV show, or game to your phone/tablet
2. Go for a walk
3. Call/text a friend

Keeping yourself well and healthy helps with negative thoughts, anxiety and thoughts of suicide/self harm:

1. Exercise – you don't have to go the gym, do a YouTube workout or go for a walk, Hoover the house or dance in your room
2. Diet – healthy, balanced meals with lots of vegetables will keep your blood sugar stable. Sugar, caffeine and alcohol can have negative effects on mood
3. Sleep – 7-8 hours sleep a night will ensure you aren't chronically tired which reduces your emotional resilience
4. Meditate – using meditation apps, mindful colouring, chanting
5. Relax and reward
6. yourself with a soothing bath, funny film, coffee with a friend



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