



## Self-Injury

Self-injury is a common response to intense, unbearable emotional pain and distress. Studies show that approximately 15% of young people injure themselves to help them cope with their emotions. It is a coping mechanism that helps them survive.

There are different types of self-injurious behaviours, but they may include: cutting, burning, scratching, picking, hair pulling, hitting oneself, headbanging.

The reasons why a young person may self-injure will be specific to that individual. However, there are common themes that regularly emerge and these are: loss (of a person, or a situation), abuse (emotional, physical, sexual and or neglect), a long-term or chronic illness, and any other significant life event.

Because each case is different it is important to find out what is happening for the individual concerned. The easiest way to find out what is going on for a young person is to talk to them, ask them and listen to them.

If a situation continues then the behaviour is unlikely to stop. How we think and feel affects what we do. It may also be that the person doesn't know how else to cope with and process their emotions. Discussing alternative coping strategies with a young person highlights self-care and healthier options.

Sometimes the most important thing you can do for the young person is listen to them, give them positive validation, and be there for them.

If they engage with you they are more likely to talk to you when things are tough for them. By talking through issues, problem solving and processing skills may be enhanced and the sense of isolation and feeling alone should be reduced.

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01559 371 724

[www.cariadyncyfri.org](http://www.cariadyncyfri.org)

[enquiries@cariadyncyfri.org](mailto:enquiries@cariadyncyfri.org)