



Information Guide on Self-Harm

What is self-harm?

A form of coping with negative emotions. A way of releasing the internal pain, by inflicting the pain or harm onto ourselves. For many individuals it is an emotional escape or a sense of gaining control to block out the painful thoughts and become grounded in the here and now.

It can take form in many ways;

- Cutting
- Scratching
- Burning
- Over/under eating
- Overdosing on alcohol/drugs
- Over working
- Over exercising
- Neglecting emotional/physical wellbeing
- Biting oneself
- Inserting objects
- Risk taking behaviours

Myths of Self-harm

There are many myths surrounding self-harm, which can be quite emotionally distressing for individuals.

Some include;

- Self-harm is done intentionally
- Seen as attention seeking
- Done to lead to suicide (the risk of suicide is still there)
- Done to manipulate those around us
- Stereotypes of young teenage girls going through a phase
- That it can just be stopped
- Individuals who self-harm enjoy the pain

How does self-harm impact survivors?

Sexual violence is traumatic and can impact individual's self-esteem and confidence in many ways. Many survivors can feel isolated due to the lack of support or not having the opportunity to talk about the complex and painful feelings associated with the trauma. Therefore, self-harm can be a way to cope with those intense feelings of betrayal, anger, pain and isolation. However, this coping strategy may 'help' in short-term and can be problematic over time. It is really important to understand the physical health consequences from self-harming. For example, injury, infection and addiction.

Survivors may have to cope with other individual's negative attitudes and lack of understanding surrounding self-harm. These can also include professionals, as they see the behaviour and not the underlying reasons. Their reaction could be shock, anger, negative body language or panic. It is important to be mindful of these individuals as they can be triggering and enforce the anger that may already be within you.

What can you do:

There are a few things that can be done to help manage the thoughts and feelings that lead to self-harming. These can help stop or reduce the urge to self-harm, some include;

- Talking to someone supportive and understanding, for instance the RASAC helpline; 0300 303 4787
- Focus on the achievements
- Reduce the self-blame, stress and anxiety
- Journaling
- Refer yourself for support sessions or counselling
- Some alternative ways of releasing the intense feelings can be;
 - Tearing up phone books, magazines or newspapers
 - Punching a mattress or punching bag
 - Writing a letter or drawing a picture of what's bothering you and then tearing it up
 - Going for a walk, run and exercising



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