



Dear
Professionals,

THINGS WE WANT YOU TO KNOW

A guide on supporting a young
person with self harm

Sheffield Children's 
NHS Foundation Trust


Sheffield
Clinical Commissioning Group



WE'RE NOT DOING IT FOR ATTENTION!



This stereotype is one of the most common reactions to self harm, and it is widely incorrect. Self harm is typically a very secretive habit, and often there is a lot of effort put in to hiding it from others.

Writing self harm off as 'attention seeking' is invalidating, belittling and unhelpful when you're supposed to be supporting us.

Even if someone was doing it for attention, that wouldn't mean they are any less deserving of support and compassion!

Ask yourself, 'why would they feel the need to self harm to gain attention?'

EVERY ONE OF US IS DIFFERENT



Every single one of us has completely different reasons to self harm, different home lives and different minds. Self harm takes many different forms other than the more common methods, such as drinking, using drugs and starting fights.

We're the experts in our own mental health, so believe us when we say that a coping method/distracted technique/strategy doesn't work. Just because something helped another young person with their self harming doesn't mean it will help everyone!

There's no instruction manual for supporting young people who self harm- treat us all as individuals

TALK TO US- OPENLY AND HONESTLY



We're not that hard to talk to! Just ask us. Find out why we do it, what it achieves for us specifically. However, you need to be careful not to be judgemental.

We can't always put our feelings into words so help us communicate in ways that are accessible to us.

Sometimes not talking directly about a problem makes it worse!

It might be hard, but it needs to happen!

BE ON OUR SIDE



Work with us not against us. None of us enjoy having a self harm problem- be person centred and give us our autonomy. A lot of professionals' first response to a young person self harming is to restrict access to sharps- this can escalate risk and force those young people to be 'sneaky', encouraging an already hidden habit.

Please don't put the responsibility on our parents to stop us from self harming. This adds even more conflict to an already unfortunate situation.

Explain confidentiality and it's limits explicitly to us. If you have to tell our parents, work with us collaboratively on how and when to tell them, or support us to do it ourselves. we understand that sometimes you have to, but involve us in that and tell us what kind of information is being shared and why.

Don't make us feel like we're misbehaving!

LETS BE PRACTICAL



We need basic first aid skills! Give us a practical demonstration on how to safely and properly dress wounds.

Give us access to sterile dressings/plasters etc. Not all of us have the ability to get our own or the funds to buy them. This leads to homemade fixes which are often not ideal and increase risk of infection.

This won't 'encourage' the habit- only make us safer

SELF HARM DOESN'T HAPPEN IN A VACUUM

Self harm is a complicated issue that is influenced by so many factors. Underfunded services, housing, discrimination based on ethnicity, sexuality & gender identity, school pressure, physical ill health and trauma are some of the problems that can produce and exacerbate self harm. We need timely, holistic and appropriate support.

Prevention is better than the cure- support the young people that seem 'low risk' before it develops to a point where they are driven to self harm.

Not everyone who self harms tell people about it- make sure these YP are supported too.

Work together

Young people accessing support for self harm can have entirely different experiences depending on the worker they see. The threshold at which different professionals ring parents or emergency services differs dramatically!

Attitudes towards self harm vary a lot too- some professionals seem to think that if a young person is asking for help it means that the problem isn't actually that bad- this is not true! Make sure you're all on the same page.