



For GPs and Health Care Professionals

PORTUS

Understanding
Self-harm

Self-harm and Suicide Prevention

Guidance on how Primary Care can help



Understanding Self-Harm and Suicide – Kingston, Richmond & Wandsworth

visit: www.richmond.gov.uk/portus

Self-harm and suicide ideation in children and young people and how Primary Care can help.

National studies highlight that mental health and emotional disorders are increasing in children and young people. Alongside this rise we have also seen an increase in self-harm and suicidal ideation.

Key Facts

11-to-16 year olds... with a mental health disorder

...were more likely to have self-harmed or attempted suicide at some point (25.5%) than those without a disorder (3%).

The association with mental health disorder was clear in both boys and girls.

In 17-to 19-year-olds with a mental health disorder, nearly half (46.8%) had self-harmed or made a suicide attempt (ONS, 2020)

...were more likely to have self-harmed or attempted suicide in the past four weeks (13%) than those without a disorder (0.3%).

They were also more likely to have spoken about self-harm or suicide (16.5% compared with 1.4%)

34%

Rates of having ever self-harmed or attempted suicide varied by type of disorder present, and at one in three (34%) this was highest in children with an emotional disorder.

Working together to keep children and young people safe from harm.

- If a child or young person is seeking your support, **ask explicitly for consent** to speak to someone at their school.
- Most schools and colleges have psychological support and many have Mental Health Support Teams available for their pupils.
- In the first instance ask the school to put you in contact with the Designated Safeguarding Lead or Mental Health Lead.
- An integrated and coordinated approach to support is more likely to encourage the best conditions for recovery.
- Ensure that a designated lead worker and support plan is in place to support the child with risks and strengths assessment, ongoing care and support including safety planning.



Top Ten Tips

01 Be aware many cases of self-harm are hidden

People often try to keep self-harm a secret because of shame or fear of discovery. If you are concerned that someone has self-harmed, for example by observing unusual behaviour or mannerisms, through history or upon examination, sensitively enquire and follow up where needed.

02 Consider Risk Factors for Self-Harm

- Girls and young women are more likely to harm themselves than boys and young men
- Boys and young men are more likely to die by suicide
- Suicide rates increase in older adolescence
- Experiencing low income and poverty
- Experiencing gender dysphoria, or identifying as LGBTQ+
- Experience of bereavement
- Experience of past physical or sexual abuse
- Family history/experience of mental illness, substance misuse or suicide, low self-esteem or hopelessness
- Evidence of neurodivergence

03 Recognise different types of Self-harm

- Self-poisoning – own or others over the counter or prescription medication, drinking harmful chemicals
- Self-injury – hitting, cutting, burning, pulling hair, scratching, squeezing, punching walls, swallowing objects other than food and drink
- Risk taking behaviours – drug and alcohol use, risky sexual behaviour, absconding
- Some self-harm in boys can manifest differently eg: getting into fights, deliberate injury in sports

04 Understand Why, and consider Underlying Issues

People self-harm for many reasons, and someone who self-harms repeatedly may not always do so for the same reason each time, or by the same method.

Self-harm can effectively help people cope with distress in the short term. But it often plays out in a habitual need to continue the behaviour. Familiarise yourself with the Self-harm Cycle.

It is important to spend time exploring and addressing these underlying problems and the function the self-harm fulfils. Only then can we make any progress in supporting someone to stop self-harming.



05 Risk Assess for Suicide

Always ask about suicide: 'have you had thoughts of ending your life?' There is no evidence that asking increases risk. Conversely, talking about suicide may well reduce the risk of suicide and help to reduce the stigma associated with suicidal feelings. Always remember to document thoroughly.

The self-harm and suicide prevention pathway has the following documents to help you understand levels of need and risk.

- **Categories of Need and Pathway** ►
- **Risks and Strengths Assessment** ►

06 Consider Referral, Create a Safety Plan

Do they need urgent psychiatric or medical assessment?

If so, contact the **SWL St. Georges Crisis Line** or refer to emergency department. If a young person is harming themselves and or is suicidal it really important for them to have a safety plan in place to keep them safe.

- **Self-harm Safety Plan** ▶
- **Suicide Safety Plan** ▶

Safety plans have been shown to be effective in mitigating risk of self-harm and suicide. They work best when they are coproduced and involve the family and relevant professionals working with the young person to produce a personalised plan.

The young person should be the centre of the process. This helps identify their strengths, how to cope with challenges and a receive the help of a support network.

It's important to identify the right person to develop a safety plan with the young person this should be part of your conversation with the school and other relevant professionals.

07 Think Prevention as well as Acute Treatment

Check out the resources following this section and signpost patients, families and staff.

If an individual feels unable to stop, consider 'harm minimisation', while they address any longer-term underlying problems and find alternative and healthier coping strategies.

08 Prescribe Safely

Be mindful that medication intended for relatives is often used in self-poisoning. If someone is at risk of self-poisoning, prescribe, whenever possible, medication which is effective for their intended use, but least dangerous in overdose, and consider prescribing fewer tablets at any one time.

09 Think Safeguarding

Always bear in mind the possibility of abuse and sexual exploitation, especially in younger people. Be familiar with local safeguarding contacts if there are safeguarding concerns.

Contact Kingston & Richmond

To make a referral online contact:
[Single Point of Access](#) ▶

During Office Hours, call: **020 8547 5008**

Outside Office Hours,
Emergency Duty Team call: **020 8770 5000**

Contact Wandsworth

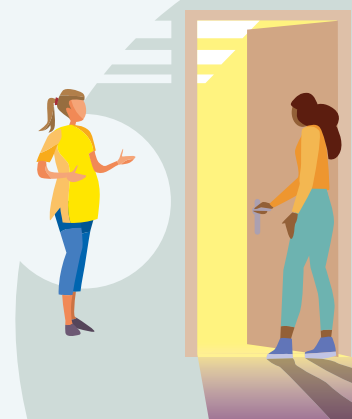
To make a referral online contact:
[The Multi Agency Safeguarding Hub](#) ▶

During Office Hours, call: **020 8871 6622**

Outside Office Hours,
Emergency Duty Team call: **020 8871 6000**

10 Be Open: Listen, Believe, Support

You may be the first person that they have spoken to, and it is important to establish a non-judgemental and trusting relationship. Often, individuals may feel ashamed, embarrassed, confused, or powerless. Take time to listen, to believe in what they are telling you and to support them through their journey.



Useful Resources

SUPPORT AND TRAINING FOR YOU

National Institute for Health and Care Excellence

Overview | Self-harm: assessment, management and preventing recurrence | Guidance | NICE
<https://www.nice.org.uk/guidance/hg225>

Crisis Tools.

The tools to help you support young people in crisis:
<https://crisistools.org.uk/>

RCGP Mental Health Toolkit

<https://www.rcgp.org.uk/clinical-and-research/resources/toolkits/mental-health-toolkit.aspx>

Free E-Learning for GPs

Dealing with self-harm presentations in primary care.
<https://elearning.rcgp.org.uk/enrol/index.php?id=166>

Zero Suicide Alliance

FREE online training courses teach you the skills and confidence to have a potentially life-saving conversation with someone you're worried about.
<https://zerosuicidealliance.com/training>

Papyrus, prevention of young suicide.

HopelineUK
<https://www.papyrus-uk.org/papyrus-hopeline247/>
Call: **0800 068 4141**
Text: **07860039967**
Email: pat@papyrus-uk.org

MindEd is a free educational resource on children, young people, adults and older people's mental health.

MindEd

<https://www.minded.org.uk/>

Doctors Support Network

Peer support for doctors and medical students with mental health concerns Doctors Support Network
<https://www.dsn.org.uk/support-for-doctors>

Helpful Resources for Families

The following resources can help families feel more confident about supporting their child:

- **Combined Minds**
A free app helping parents and carers support young people's mental health
<https://combinedminds.co.uk/>
- **Coping with Self-harm, a guide** for parents and carers
- **Free online course** helps parents discuss self-harm with their children.
- **Free e-training by the Zero Suicide Alliance** (20 minutes)
- **Self-harm: Parents' experiences - Overview** (healthtalk.org)
- NSPCC self-harm **support for families**
- Young Minds Parents **support line and webchat**
- MindEd for Families **website**
- **Calm Harm** is a free app that helps you manage or resist the urge to self-harm
- **7 ways to support children and young people who are worried or anxious** (annafreud.org)
<https://www.annafreud.org/schools-and-colleges/resources/7-ways-to-support-children-and-young-people-who-are-worried/>
- **How to Talk to Your Child about Mental Health** | YoungMinds
<https://www.youngminds.org.uk/parent/how-to-talk-to-your-child-about-mental-health/>
- **Families Under Pressure** - Maudsley Charity.
<https://maudsleycharity.org/familiesunderpressure/>

SUPPORT FOR CHILDREN, YOUNG PEOPLE, AND FAMILIES

South West London and St. Georges Mental Health NHS Trust

24/7 Mental Health Crisis Line
0800 028 8000.

Papyrus, prevention of young suicide.

HopelineUK

<https://www.papyrus-uk.org/papyrus-hopeline247/>

Call: **0800 068 4141**

Text: **07860039967**

Email: pat@papyrus-uk.org

Samaritans

Tel: **116 123 (24/7)**

www.samaritans.org

YoungMinds – Self harm factsheets for young people

Parent Helpline and webchat. You can call us for free on **0808 802 5544** from 9:30am - 4pm, Monday - Friday.

<https://www.youngminds.org.uk/parent/>

Childline - If you're under 19 you can confidentially call, chat online or email about any problem big or small. Free 1-2-1 counselling available.

Call: **0800 1111**

Kooth. Online well-being community. Free 1-2-1

online counselling.

www.kooth.com

Shout

Text YM to **85258**.

Shout provides free, 24/7 text support for young people across the UK experiencing a mental health crisis.

All texts are answered by trained volunteers, with support from experienced clinical supervisors.

Texts are free from EE, O2, Vodafone, 3, Virgin Mobile, BT Mobile, GiffGaff, Tesco Mobile and Telecom Plus.

Texts can be anonymous, but if the volunteer believes you are at immediate risk of harm, they may share your details with people who can provide support.

Opening times: 24/7

The Mix

Offers support to anyone under 25 about anything that's troubling them.

Email support available via their online contact form.

Free 1-2-1 webchat service available.

Free short-term counselling service available.

Opening times:

3pm - 12am, seven days a week

Call: **0808 808 4994**

The Mix – Essential support for under 25s

<https://www.themix.org.uk/>

Calm Harm

A free app providing support and strategies to help you resist or manage the urge to self-harm.

Can be downloaded from Google Play or App Store.

Home - **Calm Harm App**

<https://calmharm.co.uk/>

Tellmi

A free app for teenagers (11+) providing resources and a fully moderated community where you can share your problems, get support and help other people too.

Can be downloaded from Google Play or App Store.

Tellmi App

<https://www.tellmi.help>

Combined Minds

Supporting young people's mental health

<https://combinedminds.co.uk/>

Be Headstrong

Real Life and Real Faith in the Real World |

Head Strong

<https://www.beheadstrong.uk>

National Self-Harm Network

A supportive and dedicated forum.

<https://www.nshn.co.uk/downloads.html>

Alumina

Free online self-harm support for 11-19's.

<https://www.selfharm.co.uk/#help>



PORTUS
Understanding
Self-harm

Self-harm and Suicide Prevention

**Guidance on
how Primary Care
can help.**

PORTUS - Understanding Self-Harm and Suicide

A collaboration between The Royal Borough of Kingston,
Richmond & Wandsworth Borough Councils



visit: www.richmond.gov.uk/portus