
SELF HARM

Self-harm is three times more common among girls than boys.

The most common forms are inflicting wounds on oneself, eating disorders – including starving or bingeing - attempted poisoning and overdosing.

Deliberately hurting yourself in this way can be prompted by difficulties with relationships, drug or alcohol abuse or school-related pressures.

It is a problem experienced by families from all kinds of backgrounds and there can be different triggers for different people.

Self-harm is linked to trauma or distress and is recognised as a high risk factor in suicide cases. Most often the person is in turmoil – and without help.

There is 'emotional overload' – where the person affected just cannot deal with the problem in question.

At Parents Advice Centre, we advise anyone who sees signs of self-harm to treat it seriously and seek the right support. And we provide front line support for parents, helping them to understand and deal with this very complex issue.

Self-injury is a symptom – and by explaining this, we can help parents look for the root cause.

It is important to explore any unresolved issues with young people and help them deal with whatever is traumatising them. Self-harm isn't something that should be denied or dismissed.

Q.

I was distressed to see my neighbour's daughter with cuts on her wrists. I only noticed them one day when she was wearing a tee-shirt. Her mother knows I saw them – but she didn't say anything. And she's never mentioned the girl being unhappy or them getting help for her. Should I mention it ?

A.

You *should* mention it if your reason for doing so is to get this girl help. But say nothing if you're only interested in finding out what's going on.

As tactfully as possible, say to your neighbour that you have been really concerned since you saw the cuts – and you wondered if the family had been successful in getting outside help.

If it is clear the mother is getting help – well and good. But if she says that they are dealing with it as a family, you could suggest that she seeks the support of her GP.

Self-harming like this indicates that a young person is very troubled and unhappy.

Unless this girl's difficulties are in the past and resolved, the mother should be given every support and encouragement to identify the appropriate help.

