

# Understanding self harming behaviours

a seminar for parents and carers

**Ruth Woolhouse**

Senior Nurse & Team Manager  
East London CAMHS Crisis Service

**Lauren Cunningham**

Educational Psychologist , Specialist CAMHS clinician,  
Extended Crisis Clinician, Re-engagement unit link clinician  
Hackney Specialist CAMHS

**Duygu Bozkurt**

Family and Systemic Psychotherapist  
Hackney Specialist CAMHS

# Understanding self harming behaviours

- What is self harm?
- Why do people self harm?
- Warning signs
- Responding to self harm
- Making a safety plan
- Professional support
- Self care for parents

# What is self harm?

Any behaviour that is used to cope with intensive negative emotions that ultimately harms the person in the short- or longer-term:

- Physical harm
- Risky relationships
- Risk taking behaviours

# Why do people self harm?

All people (adults and young people) sometimes manage their emotions with behaviours that will harm them, especially when they don't know what they're feeling, when they are feeling too many hard feelings at once, or wanting to feel something.

# How common is self harm?

Self-harm is very common in young people, with 10-15% of young people in the UK reporting that they self-harm

It is more common among girls, increasingly common among boys, and very prevalent among children who are LGBTQ+

# Does self-harm lead to suicide?

Most young people who self-harm do so to manage difficult emotions and situations, with no wish to end their lives

However, most young people who die by suicide have harmed themselves before – so the risk is increased (by nine times)

# Warning signs

Look out for the changes (behavioural, emotional, relationships, thoughts/opinions) not only in school, but also at home and social situations.

How are you using your skills to reach out your child?

# Iceberg of self harm



# 8 Steps to responding to self harm

1. Breathe & Give yourself permission to FEEL!

# 8 Steps to responding to self harm

**2.** Check that your child is immediately safe

# 8 Steps to responding to self harm

**3.** Spend as much time with your child as you can.

Do things that you enjoy together in the coming days and weeks.

# 8 Steps to responding to self harm

4. Communicate that you care,  
and remain open, kind & curious

# 8 Steps to responding to self harm

5. Use a “Connect and Redirect” approach to setting boundaries and limits

# Connect & Redirect

*(Dr Dan Siegel)*

## **1. Connect**

Communicate care and comfort, ask questions and help them express feelings, validate the feelings (not the behaviour), reflect back what they've told you.

## **2. Redirect**

Think about why your child is doing this behaviour, what you want them to learn, and how you can best teach this lesson. Wait until they are calm, and be consistent (not rigid).

## **Why?**

Because children feel safer and more able to learn when they feel safe in their relationships.

What would you say to your child  
to communicate care and curiosity?

# 8 Steps to responding to self harm

## 6. Make a Safety Plan with your child

# Safety and Coping Plan

## Triggers & Warning Signs

## Coping Skills

(Distractions, Calming Body, Expressing emotion, Helpful Thoughts)

## How Others Can Help

## Professionals I can Contact:

- Child and Adolescent Mental Health Service (CAMHS) – 0203 222 5600 (9am-5pm Monday to Friday)
- City and Hackney Crisis Line (24/7)
- Text 'SHOUT' to 85258 for text message support (24/7)
- Go to A&E at Fomerton University Hospital, Newham University Hospital, or Royal London Hospital (24/7)

# 8 Steps to responding to self harm

**7.** Get informal and formal support for your child and YOU!

# Professional support available

- **At school**



Stoke Newington School  
& Sixth Form

- **Outside School**

- GP
- CAMHS Alliance  
<https://cityandhackneycamhs.org.uk>
- External services

- **In a crisis:**

- phone City & Hackney Crisis Line (*24hrs*)

**0800 073 0006**

- go to A&E

# Hackney local offer

<https://www.hackneylocaloffer.co.uk/kb5/hackney/localoffer/home.page>

The screenshot shows the Hackney Local Offer website homepage. The browser address bar displays the URL: [hackneylocaloffer.co.uk/kb5/hackney/localoffer/home.page](https://www.hackneylocaloffer.co.uk/kb5/hackney/localoffer/home.page). The website header is dark green with the Hackney Local Offer logo on the left. Navigation links include 'BROWSE SERVICES', 'What's On', 'You said, We did', 'Help & Advice', 'Documents Library', and 'Contact Us'. A 'SHORTLIST' button with a '0' count is on the right. A 'Select Language' dropdown menu is also present. Below the header is a colorful illustration of a cityscape with buildings, a double-decker bus, and a boat. A dark green banner across the illustration contains the text 'Services for 0 -25 with SEN, disabilities or additional needs' and a pink button that says 'DIFFICULTIES WITH USING THE INTERNET?'. Below the banner is a search bar with three input fields: 'Keyword(s)', 'Place name or postcode', and 'Browse Services'. At the bottom of the page, there are six colored buttons with plus signs, representing different age groups: '0-4 Years' (purple), '4-10 Years' (orange), '11-14 Years' (blue), '14-18 Years' (pink), '18-25' (grey), and 'Parents & Carers' (teal).

# 8 Steps to responding to self harm

**8.** Forgive yourself for any mistakes you make, and use these as an opportunity to apologise and repair.

# Self Care for Parent

Watching your teenager in pain and hurting themselves will bring up many of your own emotions, and it's important to take good care of yourself.



Any questions or thoughts?

# Resources

## Information for children, young people & families:

<http://www.ox.ac.uk/news/2015-12-01-new-guide-parents-who-are-coping-their-childs-self-harm-you-are-not-alone#>

<https://youngminds.org.uk/find-help/feelings-and-symptoms/self-harm/>

<http://www.rcpsych.ac.uk/healthadvice/parentsandyoungpeople/parentscarers/self-harm.aspx>

<https://www.minded.org.uk/Component/Details/448052>

<https://camhs.elft.nhs.uk/Conditions/Self-harm-and-suicidal-thoughts>

## Free accredited training:

<http://thcepn.com/ask>

<https://www.minded.org.uk/Component/Details/448052>

Thank you !