



# PARENTS

## Self Harm Help EBOOK



# Self Harm Help for Parents EBOOK

*"When one door of happiness closes, another opens; but often we look so long at the closed door that we do not see the one which has opened for us" Hellen Keller*

## **Hello and Welcome**

Thank you for taking the time to download this FREE Self Harm Help for Parents and congratulations on taking this step to get an increased awareness about self harming behaviour.

By way of introduction, we are Step-Up International ([www.stepup-international.co.uk](http://www.stepup-international.co.uk)), and our focus is *"Liberating Families To Find Their Truth!* What that means in reality is helping you and your family to regain more control of your life in order that you are able to create the lives that you want as opposed to potentially the lives that you "fall" into.

Additionally, we help parents to get rid of emotional roadblocks that might be preventing them from engaging or bonding with their child, whilst enabling parents to strengthen their families through self love and appreciation and to move towards having the family unit they want to be and have.

Parenting is one of the most rewarding, joyful, yet complex, challenging, demanding, job and experience for any adult.

And, there are times when parents need an extra helping hand, as we all do from time to time, irrespective of the nature of the help needed.

It can be scary for both you and your son/daughter when you find out that they self harm. Firstly, blaming yourself or your son/daughter won't help the situation and is likely to be a stumbling block to you both moving forward in addressing the situation.

Gaining help for you all and other family members from an external agency or professional might prove to be more helpful.

Importantly, seek to get help to support yourself during these stressful difficult times.

Self harm and self injury are words that are used interchangeably. For the purpose of this Ebook, we will use the term self harm.

*"Outer changes always begin an inner change of attitude" Albert Einstein*

## *What Is Self Harm?*

Self harm is any emotional, physical or psychological damage that is self inflicted. It is a coping mechanism or survival strategy to deal with overwhelming feelings of deep emotional distress. It could also be an internal “cry of help” or “cry for help”.

Some young people say that physical self harm helps them to feel “alive” again, provides instant release or to help them to feel numb; all in the aid of overriding the emotional distress.

Whilst the self harm provides instant yet temporary relief, the underlying emotional reasons that drives them to self harm in the first place, still remains and need to be dealt with in order for the your child to have a good chance of moving beyond self harming and see it as a thing of the past.

As they are using self harm as a coping strategy, stopping the harming suddenly would create a void which must be filled. Positively or negatively, it gets filled or by default

Some parents are concerned and panic about the possibility of their child’s self harming leading to suicide. Yes, it is true that long term self harming behaving over a number of years can lead to someone being more likely to attempt suicide or engage in suicide ideation, however self harm is generally a suicide prevention measure to help them to stay alive.

## *Why Do They Choose Self Harm?*

The bottom line is everyone self harms! What I mean by that is that we all do something, eat something or drink something that we generally know is not good for us. Some of these behaviours or habits can develop into socially accepted forms of self harming behaviour, such as alcohol abuse, drug abuse, smoking, excessive exercise or eating disorder. These socially accepted forms of self harming behaviour are not recognised or accepted by NICE (National Institute of Clinical &

Health Excellence) as self harm. In my opinion, however, they are forms of self harming behaviour. The other end of the spectrum are the other sort of self harming behaviour such as the burning, scratching, overdosing which is of great concern to us and are not yet accepted by society. These behaviours are stigmatized and are hugely misunderstood by parents, helping professionals and medical professionals alike.

*“We cannot hold a torch to light another’s path without brightening our own.”*  
*Ben Sweetland*

### ***SO WHAT AM I SAYING?***

I am saying your son/daughter is not abnormal because they self harm! They are just choosing a different method or strategy to manage their emotional distress. They are normal, whatever the word ‘normal’ means in today’s society, and not everyone is good at managing their stress or distress

## *How Do They Self Harm?*

Self harming is not just about cutting. There are many different ways that people self harm. Ask them which form/methods they use.

Examples include:

- Various eating disorders
- Excessive drinking
- Picking scabs
- Overdosing
- Scratching

- Head banging
- Injecting something into their body
- Punching walls or other hard objects
- Pulling their hair
- Burning their body using different methods

*“Lots of people want to ride with you in the limo, but what you want is someone who will take the bus with you when the limo breaks down.” Oprah Winfrey*

## *Managing Self Harm*

### **DO'S**

- ✓ Be available and listen
- ✓ Get help, e.g. health professional, G.P or family therapy
- ✓ Help your son/daughter to identify options available to them first or simultaneously before they are able to let go of self harm.
- ✓ Help your child to identify the function or purpose of their self harming behaviour. How does it help them? What does it help them to cope with?
- ✓ Once you've identified the function, help them to identify other ways/methods they could use to serve the same functions without harming themselves.
- ✓ Find out more about self harming behaviour and its related issues, alone or with other family members or as a joint activity with your child.
- ✓ Help to identify the underlying reasons behind the self harming behaviour. What is driving them to self harm? Research shows that in order to deal with self harm

effectively, we need to have an awareness or understanding of the underlying reasons.

- ✓ Help them to make the choices and changes necessary to move forwards, however, without enforcing your thoughts and ideas.
- ✓ Consider enlisting help and support from a counsellor, therapist or other professionals might be a useful help for you in doing so.
- ✓ Seek medical attention when and where necessary. If in doubt, contact your national health service for advice or seek assistance from medical practitioners, for instance General Practitioners or A&E services.
- ✓ Be mindful that your son/daughter may not want to stop self harming, even after receiving support.
- ✓ Seeing self harm as just a “smoke screen” or a “cry of help” might help you to focus easier on the real issue at hand, i.e. the underlying reasons that are driving them to self harm in the first place.
- ✓ Be aware, approachable and present for them generally and in readiness for them to share their story with you.
- ✓ Be mindful. There is always a purpose or function or benefit that they gain from self harming, otherwise it’s highly unlikely that they would be using it as a coping strategy.
- ✓ Be mindful that your son or daughter may be feeling ashamed or guilty about self harming and possibly about the extra pressure or strain it might be adding to the family situation or on you, therefore your approach to the self harming behaviour is crucial.

- ✓ See our website [www.stepup-international.co.uk](http://www.stepup-international.co.uk) for more information and our “Top 10 Tips for Self Harm Help For Parents” here: <http://stepup-international.co.uk/top-10-tips-for-self-harm-help-for-parents/>

## DON'TS

- Don't tell them to stop. Self harm is how they cope and get through each day, week or month. They must have something else in place to replace the self harming behaviour before they are able to stop. It's their survival strategy and coping mechanism right now. Once a negative thing or activity has been removed for example self harming, drug or alcohol abuse, **filling the void** that has been created with something positive is essential. It will help to reduce drastically the likelihood of them repeating the unhealthy behaviour.
- Don't criticise. This is likely to bring about a continuation or increase self harming behaviour.
- If your son/daughter's form of self harming is self cutting, suddenly removing accessible tools/items for cutting may cause the situation to worsen for them and they may seek out other items which might cause even more damage than their chosen tool or form of self harming. Generally speaking, they are likely to replace that tool. Be mindful to ask them what they use to self harm and explore healthy ways of replacing it. ***Help them to fill the void!***
- Don't focus on blaming, but rather on how the situation can be resolved.

*“Security is mostly a superstition. It does not exist in nature, nor do the children of men as a whole experience it. Avoiding danger is no safer in the long run than outright exposure.”*

*Helen Keller*

## *Other Useful Information About Self Harming Behaviour?*

- Children and young people self harm generally because they are unable to manage deep emotional distress. This distress could be related to one single situation or it could be a combination of incidents/situations over a period of time which still need to be addressed.
- One of the main myths about self harm is that it is attention seeking. Self harm generally is not about attention seeking and focusing on attention seeking does more harm than good. One of the drawbacks of focusing on attention seeking is that it gets in the way of the real issues that need to be dealt with. Essentially, it gets in the way of your child getting the real help that they need.
- How you approach the subject matter with your son/daughter makes all the difference to them opening up or shutting down. Shouting at them and pointing the finger is one way of bringing about an immediate close and shutdown. However, *sharing* your concerns with them about their health and well being is likely to go along way to them opening up and talking to you.
- Manage your own emotions as much as possible. Reacting with disdain, disgust, anger, threats or other negative emotions is also likely to bring about an immediate shutdown, possibly

withdrawal and may well act as a trigger for further self harming.

- Adopting a curious stance might help in opening up the gateway to more open communication and dialogue between you.
- Initially, you don't have to understand why your son/daughter self harms and they might not want to readily tell you why. However, letting them know that you are there for them, and are ready to listen to see how best you can help them. This is a foundation and starting block from which they can come forwards with more information for you to then be in a better position to support them more relevantly, which could include the support and help from others.

### **A few useful questions to ask initially could be:**

- “Have you been to the doctors?”
- “Where do you receive help?”
- “Who else have you received help from?”
- “Do you know what sorts of things trigger your self harm?”
- "How can we help?"
- “How do you self harm?”
- “What do you need right now?”

*We suggest that you do not ask these and other questions all at the same time. Young people don't like too many questions nor do they like to feel as if they are being interrogated. Also **focus on other***

*areas of their life instead of just the self harming. For instance, friendships, school, hobbies, and relationships, again being mindful that self harming is generally a smoke screen for what is going on underneath.*

*"To create more positive results in your life, replace 'if only' with 'next time'."  
Unknown*

## *Alternative and Distraction Remedies That Your Child Could Consider, Include:*

- ✓ Physical activities/exercise e.g. dancing, sport, walking, running
- ✓ Phone a friend
- ✓ '5 -15 Minute Rule'
- ✓ Helping someone else
- ✓ Soak in bath
- ✓ Popping bubble wrap
- ✓ Putting plasters on spot where want to self harm
- ✓ Snapping elastic band on wrist
- ✓ Use red marker or lipstick to draw on self ; or use plasters
- ✓ Ice cube against the skin
- ✓ Go for a walk

## *Develop Your Confidence*

We are aware that some parents for whatever reason, find it difficult to liaise with teachers about their children's well being and academic achievements. If you fall within this category of parents, be rest assured that you are not the only parent that has this challenge and that it is a common occurrence.

Some parents also feel apprehensive about teachers judging them. Generally this is not the case and we find that teachers want to help. Yes it is true that some teachers are better than others at managing the parent-teacher relationship, and some can make life challenging for you, due to their skills set, however, remember that teachers and school support staff are humans also with their own human related 'challenges'!

We ALL have something going on in our lives at some time or other, and teachers are no exception to this rule.

We are also aware of parents removing their children from school or stopping therapy sessions once the child has embarked on receiving the help for emotional challenges, including self harming behaviour. This is possibly for fear of being judged as a parent by teachers.

Some parents genuinely lack confidence in dealing with professionals and people in authority, whilst others abdicate their responsibilities for their child to others, such as to the education system.

If you find that you are having such a challenge, embark on a course or journey of developing your self confidence to regain control and

take back the responsibility for your child and for their well being and welfare.

Essentially, get yourself in a position to help your child's teachers to help you to help them. For instance, bring a friend, family member or associate with you to meetings or deal with the matter over the telephone rather than not engage with school at all.

Similarly with attending A&E or your General Practitioner/Doctors. People can feel intimidated when interacting with their doctors, however, to overcome this, it might be useful if you have what you want to say written down beforehand. Also, some doctors can be dismissive of people who self harm, and especially if they regularly attend their practice for this reason. In the same vein as above, develop your confidence or bring someone else with you, to ensure that your doctor does not mistreat your child in any way, or treat them as a nuisance.

Increase your confidence levels by gaining support for yourself in other ways. For instance, reading self development books, therapy; counselling; share your concerns with other parents that you have a good relationship with; speak to your son/daughter's friends parents.

*“Expect problems and eat them for breakfast.” Alfred A. Montapert*

## *Moving On...*

We know it is tough being a parent! It is ok for you not to understand or to feel frightened about your son/daughter's self harming

behaviour. It is also ok for you not to know what to do, however, not knowing is not an excuse for not doing something. Get other help and find out what else you could do.

Our intention in bringing this Ebook to you is to help you to have a different perspective on self harming behaviour. Take what works for you from the Ebook and throw out what doesn't work.

Importantly, ***get help and support for yourself***. Dealing with self harming behaviour can be emotionally draining and/or pretty intense. Help could be sought from other family members, friends, penpal, members of the community, a church, or therapy. Additionally, contact your local school to get access to any other information that they may have to support parents with children who self harm.

Wishing you every success in moving forwards with this 'character building' challenge and experience!

I wonder when you will begin to see how much stronger you are at the end of the process?

**Wishing you love, health and success!**

### ***How Step Up International Can Help You Further?***

- ✓ Sign up to our free newsletter to get more tips on managing self harm
- ✓ Watch out for our free "Inspirational Tips To Help You Take More Control Of Your Life" Ebook coming soon.

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- ✓ Ask your child's school/college/university about one of our "Self Harm Help for Parents Workshops or Webinars"
  - ✓ Ask your local Children's Centre or your child's school/college/university about one of our Easy Tiger Parents Programmes [www.easytigerparentssystem.com](http://www.easytigerparentssystem.com) that you would like to attend
  - ✓ Contact us for a free no obligation consultation about 1:1 coaching or therapy for yourself or your family
  - ✓ Contact us directly for further information about our Easy Tiger Parents Programmes [www.easytigerparentssystem.com](http://www.easytigerparentssystem.com)
  - ✓ See our websites for further information  
[www.stepup-international.co.uk/about](http://www.stepup-international.co.uk/about)
  - ✓ See our "Top 10 Tips for Self Harm Help for Parents" here: <http://stepup-international.co.uk/top-10-tips-for-self-harm-help-for-parents/>



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We are always happy to receive feedback and comments

Please send us your comments about this Free Ebook here: [info@stepup-international.co.uk](mailto:info@stepup-international.co.uk) and also let us know what other service or products you would like us to provide

We look forward to hearing from you soon

**With Inspirational Blessings**

**Jennifer McLeod**

**Founder, CEO**