

# ADDICTED TO HURTING YOURSELF? SELF-HARM, ALCOHOL AND DRUG-USE

This leaflet is based on research with 122 young people aged 13+



## What young people said about self-harm

### What is self-harm?

- Self-cutting.
- Burning your skin.
- Having negative thoughts about yourself.
- Bullying yourself online.
- Hitting yourself, either punching or with an object (wall, hammer...).
- Drinking too much alcohol (and being sick).
- Taking too many tablets (an overdose).

### What helps young people who have self-harmed?

- Understanding.
- Access to safe information about how to care for their injuries themselves.
- Not being judged.
- Being listened to, and taken seriously.
- Having someone to talk to.

### Who took part?



89 young people who had self-harmed took part in the research



33 additional young people\* in Edinburgh took part in group discussions



66% girls took part  
27% boys took part  
7% genderfluid/didn't say

For more information on the study and findings, check out:

<http://sashresearchproject.wordpress.com>

The SASH (Social Aspects of Self-Harm, including drug and alcohol use) research project was led by Amy Chandler at The University of Edinburgh and funded by the Sir Halley Stewart Trust Fund.

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\*These young people were not asked about their own experiences with self-harm, drug or alcohol use

## Who self-harms?

There are some stereotypes about who self-harms, especially the idea that people who self-harm are either a) goths or emos; b) girls.

- Young people in the study said that there were no 'typical' people who self-harmed.
- Studies have found that at least a quarter of people who say they self-harm are boys.
- The idea that self-harm is a 'girl thing' might make boys less likely to say they self-harm, even if they do.

## Is alcohol and drug use like self-harm?

### Yes

"Makes you forget [...] You feel like it's something you can go back to when things go bad" Lee, 16

"Can [all] harm you seriously the more you do it [and can] destroy your body" Louise, 15

"They can all start out as an experiment and end in addiction" Leon, 15

### No

"Well, you don't celebrate a marriage by cutting yourself" Cody, 16

"The price [is different]. Self-harm is free and can use things you already have. Alcohol costs a bit but is easy to get. Drugs cost a lot if you want anything decent" Matt, 16

"Self-harm is on your body so it's a lot harder to hide" Jamelia, 15

### Christy, 15

"There's a really fine line in people thinking that seeking help and seeking attention, there's a lot of conflict about that kind of stuff, like if you see someone who self-harmed coming out and speaking about it, then people either go on the seeking help side, or the seeking attention side. People don't really know the difference"

## Is self-harm mostly about attention seeking?

No. Most people who self-harm say that they keep it hidden and private. Attention-seeking is a very negative phrase, that suggests any attention given is not deserved.

- Young people talked about self-harm that was seen by others (especially online) as being more likely to be 'attention-seeking'.
- The two ideas that a) self-harm that is visible is attention-seeking, and b) self-harm is mostly private and hidden, may make it very difficult for young people who self-harm to tell others, or talk about it.

### Paula, 16

"I felt like no one could see that I was really truly falling apart and no one was offering help, and if I self-harmed they would get that message"

### Gita, 14

"I don't feel happy anymore, nor sad, just empty. When I break the skin, it fills me with this exciting rush and distracts my mind"

## Why do people self-harm?

Reasons young people gave for self-harm:

- It helps with difficult emotions – anger, frustration, sadness, hatred.
- It helps people to 'feel something' when they feel empty.
- It helps people feel better, when they feel bad.
- It can show others that a person feels bad.
- It is related to depression, anxiety and other mental health problems.

### Aaron, 17

"Boys don't talk about it, or show it much, like, or are as open to, like, self-harm. They won't tell anyone or show anyone. They'll deny it if they're asked"

### Sidney, 15

"I tried healthier methods of releasing my built-up emotions but they would never work. At first I did it because I was extremely sad but there was also a lot of curiosity. None of my friends helped me when I told them of my problems, so only I could help myself. Now I do it whenever I get the chance, am angry, excited, bored stressed, or sad"

