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## Self-Harm: Tips for Parents

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Self-harm is an unhealthy coping mechanism for dealing with overwhelming thoughts, feelings, and experiences. Finding out that your child is self-harming can be hard to process, and it is natural not to know how to react at first.

Sadly, self-harm in children is on the rise. But with time and the right support, children can learn healthier ways to manage difficult emotions. Here are eight tips from experts on supporting children who are self-harming.

### Tip 1 — Recognise the signs

Common warning signs of self-harm include:

- Unexplained cuts, bruises, burns, or bald patches.
- Keeping arms or legs covered up, even in hot weather.
- Blaming themselves for things that are not their fault.
- Bloody tissues in the bin.
- Low mood or angry outbursts.

### Tip 2 — Find a support network

Taking time to learn about self-harm can help you feel more equipped to support your child. Try to find a support network to help manage your own feelings of distress. Remember that your child is not trying to get attention or upset you.

### Tip 3 — Remain calm, present, and patient

When you talk with your child, try to stay calm and present without overwhelming them. Making sure they are safe is important, but too much scrutiny can be counterproductive.

### Tip 4 — Keep communicating

What your child needs most right now is your love and support. Listen, empathise, and avoid being judgemental. With time they will begin to make sense of what is going on, and you can work with them to find better ways of coping.

### Tip 5 — Practise empathy and validation

It can be hard to know how to respond when your child shares something upsetting. They are more likely to feel supported if you acknowledge and validate how they are feeling, rather than immediately trying to problem-solve.

### **Tip 6 — Work together and make a plan**

With open communication and trust, you can work with your child on a plan to help keep them safe during a crisis. A written plan might include:

- Things that help me get through the next minute.
- Steps I can take to make my situation safer.
- Things that help me feel calmer.
- People I can turn to for support.

Write the plan down and check in regularly to see whether these steps are having an impact.

### **Tip 7 — Get professional advice**

Your child's GP will likely refer them to a mental health professional for a risk assessment. If you are concerned about your child's safety while waiting for support, contact emergency services.

### **Tip 8 — Take it slowly**

For many young people, the best approach is one day at a time. Nothing will improve overnight — but knowing you will be there for them consistently makes a real difference.