

Psychology in
Schools Team
Children and Young
Peoples Services
NSFT

UNDERSTANDING YOUNG PEOPLE'S SELF HARM

SESSION AIMS



To increase understanding of self harm and why people do it

To encourage you to consider the **function** that this behaviour serves for them

Introduce ways to find some helpful coping strategies

How you can best support your students through this

Give additional resources for if you / your student needs more support with this

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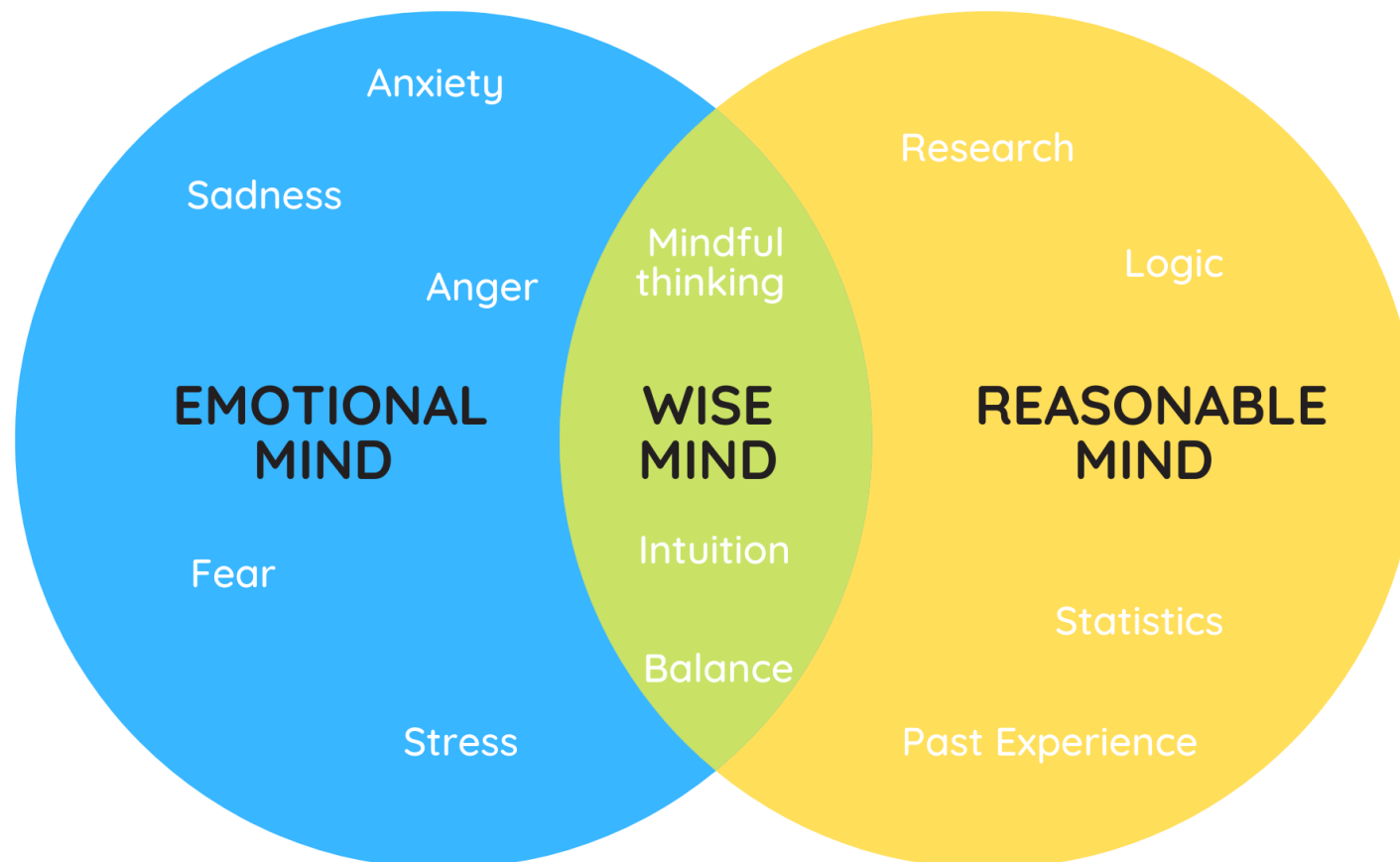
- ❖ Individual differences will exist across children and young people
- ❖ No 'one size fits all'
- ❖ Aim in supporting young people is to provide a helpful environment which lessens risk

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**How do you feel when you think of a child/
young person self-harming?**

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LOOKING AFTER YOURSELF

- Self-harm and the issues that underpin it can evoke strong emotional responses
- Putting your oxygen mask on first
- Supporting yourself- taking a break, connecting with others, establishing safety

WHAT IS SELF HARM?

Self harm is the act of deliberately causing harm to oneself either by causing a physical injury, by putting oneself in dangerous situations and/or self neglect

(National Self Harm Network, 2013)

Examples include:

- Cutting
- Scratching
- Hair pulling
- Burning
- Hitting self
- Head banging
- Poisoning/overdose

INDICATORS OF SELF-INJURIOUS BEHAVIOURS

- Clothing and covering up
- Unexplained cuts, bruises, burns / bald patches
- Sharp objects
- Low or fluctuating mood, irritability
- Becoming withdrawn
- Low self-esteem
- Changes in eating / sleeping
- Changes in drug / alcohol intake



- These 'signs' do not necessarily mean that an individual is self-harming
- Multiple indications are greater cause for concern than any single one in isolation.
- Self harm method can change
- Concerns with escalating self-harm

Understanding why young people self-harm

“Why do young people hurt themselves intentionally?”

- Self-harm is often a solution to how a child feels in the moment
- It can become a stable way of managing or escaping painful emotions
- For many, it is not a viable long-term strategy and can lead to feeling worse overtime



UNDERLYING ISSUES THAT CAN LEAD TO SELF-HARM



SUPPORTING TO PROBLEM SOLVE

- When self harm presents we need to help understand what is underlying it
- Support to understand any problems and how they may be addressed
- Finding safer ways to cope with the difficulties



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What functions may self harm serve for young people?

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Functional analysis

Self-harm can serve various functions (in the pursuit of managing emotions):

- To feel more alive/real.
- Keeping people away/making oneself unattractive
- Enlist help or concern by communicating distress
- Coping with difficult overwhelming emotions
- Relieving emotional tension
- Redirect intense anger felt towards someone who has inflicted pain (sexual abuser, bully etc.)
- Coping mechanism to prevent suicide
- An attempt to get others to change their behaviour/take control

Each individual's relationship with self harm is complex



RESPONDING TO SELF-HARM WITH COMPASSION

Listen and be curious

Do not interrupt or be judgmental

Validate emotions and difficulties underlying self-harm

Come alongside

Let them know you want to support them and ask / discuss how you might do that



QUESTIONS TO HOLD IN MIND

Questions to consider:

- What are they doing to hurt themselves?
- How often?
- What was the impact?
- How badly were they hurt?
- How do they look after themselves after they have hurt themselves?
- When did it start?
- Can they recognise any triggers? Have these changed over time?
- What makes it more likely that they will self harm?
- What makes it less likely that they will self harm?
- Do they have any alternatives to self-harm to help them cope with distress?
- Who knows about the self-harm?
- How do others react?
- What are the positive things about hurting themselves in this way?
- What are the negative things about hurting themselves in this way?
- What are the short term and long term risks of harming themselves in this way?

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What kind of things do young people find helpful to reduce their urge to self harm or reduce distress?

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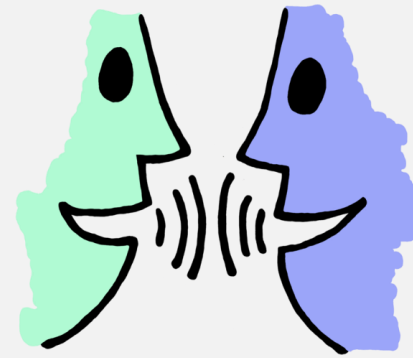
SELF-SOOTHE BOX

- Emotional support
- Look at developing self soothing strategies
- Consider who in their network may be able to support them with this



ALTERNATIVES TO CONSIDER

- Consider other ways to help manage symptoms
- Alternatives should be linked to the **function**
- Consider time postponement



SUPPORTING ALTERNATIVE STRATEGIES

FUNCTION OF BEHAVIOUR	SUPPORTING ALTERNATIVE COPING STRATEGIES
Distract	Find another method of distraction e.g loud music
Snap out/sensation/feel something	Chilli, ice, ginger, sour sweets, all types of food
Communicate	Draw on self where would usually self harm. Help more effective communication – agree on traffic light system, colour coded cards to express levels of distress
Elicit care	Spend more time with young person <u>before</u> self harm occurs
Let emotion escape	Scream, hit pillow, write it out, do a short burst of high impact exercise
Punish	Encourage reparation and self soothing afterwards, which will in time moderate anxiety

MEDICAL MANAGEMENT

Apply pressure to any bleeding cuts, then clean them under a running tap. Use of a sterile adhesive dressing

With burns, cool with water for 10-30 minutes, then cover with cling film

If a wound is infected, seek medical help

If concerned about any injury, or a child has taken tablets/harmful substances, seek urgent medical help. Always follow NHS advice

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WHAT IS SAFETY PLANNING?

A way of helping young people achieve and maintain safety through clearly identified plans which can be shared appropriately throughout the system and used in a timely manner.

These plans should be developed in collaboration with YP/families/others and cover safety and support for:

- General coping and wellbeing
- Plans for support and coping if things start to deteriorate
- Achieving immediate safety in a crisis

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Do you use safety planning with young people who self-harm or have suicidal thoughts?

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PAPYRUS SAFETY PLAN

What helps me to feel good?

**HINT: What activity do you like to do? What is your favourite food?
Who or what makes you laugh**

Type here...

What makes me feel bad? What does this feel like?

HINT: Has something happened to make you feel this way?

How can I keep myself safe right now?

HINT: Do you speak to someone for some help? Are there things around you that makes you feel unsafe? Can being somewhere else make you feel safer?

Type here...

If I can't stay safe, who will I tell?

HINT: Who do you trust?
Who is suitable to help you?

If I need help, who can I ring?

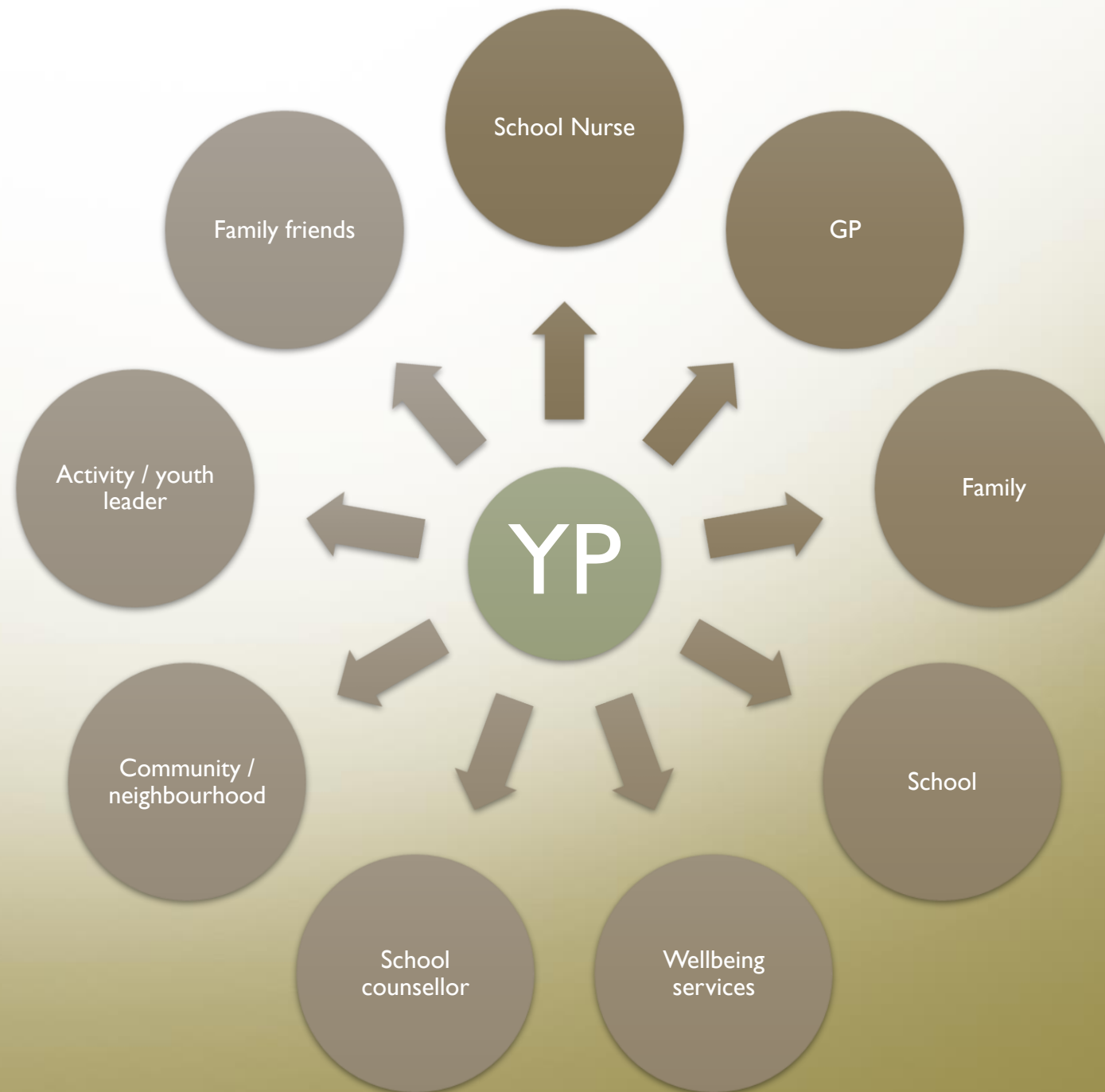
HINT: Can you ring an adult, a friend or helpline?

What do I love right now and what are my hopes for the future?

HINT: Who is important to you in your life? Who do you look up to? What would you like to achieve?

SUPPORT NETWORKS

Who else can
support the YP/
child?



SUPPORT NETWORKS



KEY RESOURCES FOR YOUNG PEOPLE

- Calm Harm app: <https://calmharm.co.uk/>
- [HelpGuide – Self-Harm](#) “A Guide to Self-Harm & How to Feel Better Without Hurting Yourself”
- School nurse
- [Self-Harm UK](#) – free online group courses for 14-19 year olds
- kooth.com – free online counselling for 11-25 year olds (N&S)
- **First Response Service (NSFT)**
- [Samaritans](#)
- [ChildLine](#)



RESOURCES FOR PARENTS/CARERS

- **Young Minds parent helpline** 0808 802 5544 (9am -4.30pm M-F) and webchat service: <https://www.youngminds.org.uk/parent/parents-helpline-and-webchat/>
- **Parent guide** to coping with self harm
https://www.psych.ox.ac.uk/files/news/copy_of_coping-with-self-harm-brochure_final_copyright.pdf
- The Truth about Self harm: <https://www.mentalhealth.org.uk/a-to-z/s/self-harm>
- If child is really struggling: First Response Service: [Help in a crisis | Norfolk and Suffolk NHS \(nsft.nhs.uk\)](#)
- Suffolk mental health services [Suffolk Children and Young People's Emotional Wellbeing Hub | Suffolk County Council](#)
- Norfolk mental health services : <https://www.justonenorfolk.nhs.uk/emotional-health/children-young-peoples-emotional-health>

Other useful contacts and websites for self-harm/suicide prevention

www.themix.org.uk - (0808 808 4994) Helpline, email help, webchat, crisis messenger, counselling and general info.

www.nshn.co.uk/downloads.html - Ideas to help distract you when you want to self-harm

www.papyrus-uk.org - (0800 068 4141) Young suicide prevention society

www.samaritans.org.uk (116 123) Email: Jo@samaritans.org Listening support 24 hours a day, no matter the issue.

www.childline.org.uk - Freephone: 0800 1111) - ChildLine is a free service for young people that are available at any time for any issue. You can either call or email them.

RESOURCES FOR SCHOOL STAFF

- This toolkit is designed for people within educational settings who support young people. It aims to help increasing understanding of self-harm and provides advice on ways to get support for self-harm including resources for parents and young people [SELF-HARM-DIGITAL-TOOLKIT-ESSEX.pdf \(nspa.org.uk\)](https://www.nspa.org.uk/self-harm-digital-toolkit-essex.pdf)
- [Self-harm guidance to include advice for schools and prisons - BBC News](#)

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What things may you take away when supporting young people with self harm?

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