

## about us

We are a women only service which provides free and confidential support to women and girls aged 12 and over, who have experienced rape, sexual assault or sexual abuse at any time in their lives. We offer phone, face-to-face, group, letter and email support. Our helpline number is **0131 556 9437**.

All our support workers have had training on self-harm and we can offer you a safe and confidential space to talk about your feelings. We will not judge you or tell you what to do. Remember, you are not alone and support is available.

## further information

We have an information and support pack which is available for free to female survivors of sexual violence. Please contact us directly on **0131 556 9437** to ask for a pack.

### Leaflets available:

- Information for family, friends and partners
- Information for survivors of childhood sexual abuse

**All our leaflets are available in larger print. If you would like a copy please contact us on 0131 556 9437.**

## useful contact numbers

### Bristol Crisis Service for Women

National helpline and information for women who self-harm

0117 925 1119

### Penumbra Self-Harm Project

Edinburgh based project for young people who self-harm

0131 225 7566

### Edinburgh Crisis Centre

24-hour helpline for adults who have used mental health services

0808 801 0414

### Edinburgh Women's Rape and Sexual Abuse Centre

0131 556 9437

### Samaritans

08457 909090

## useful websites

[www.lifesigns.org.uk](http://www.lifesigns.org.uk)

LifeSIGNS aims to support all people who are affected in any way by self-harm

email: [info@lifesigns.org.uk](mailto:info@lifesigns.org.uk)

We are committed to providing a high quality support service. For this reason, from time to time, our helpline is monitored internally for training purposes.

**November 2006**

# edinburgh women's rape and sexual abuse centre

information about  
self-harm for survivors  
helpline: 0131 556 9437

**administration, outreach  
& training: 0131 557 6737**

**minicom: 0131 557 6757**

**fax: 0131 558 1612**

**support@ewrasac.org.uk  
info@ewrasac.org.uk**

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## about self-harm

Self-harm is also known as self-injury. It is any action which causes physical harm to oneself. People self-harm to relieve emotional distress. It can take many forms and includes cutting, burning, bruising, abuse of food or overdosing.

Physical pain is often easier to cope with than emotional pain. As a way of coping, self-harm can provide temporary relief and a sense of calm to survivors.

### Myths about self-harm:

**Myth:** Self-harm is a failed suicide attempt

**Truth:** It is a way of coping and carrying on with life – not an attempt to die. Injuries can sometimes be serious but are rarely life threatening. A survivor may want to kill her feelings – not herself.

**Myth:** It's attention seeking, ignore it  
**Truth:** Often people who self-harm hide their injuries from others. It has far more to do with coping than seeking attention. Everyone needs attention. It is about helping oneself cope with emotional pain. For some, self-harm is a desperate physical attempt to draw attention to the mental and emotional pain they are suffering. This should not be ignored.

**Myth:** Someone who self-harms is a danger to others

**Truth:** Self-harm is very private and tends not to be openly discussed due to the negative response it receives. Someone who self-harms is no more likely to be a danger to others than anyone else.

**Myth:** Self-harm is a sign of madness

**Truth:** This isn't true. It is a sign of distress and of someone trying to cope with their life.

## what you can do to minimise the harm

**Avoid drugs and/or alcohol** if you feel you are likely to self-harm, so you don't accidentally inflict a more severe injury than you meant to.

**Prevent infection** by using something clean if you cut. Never share what you use to self-harm. Try to avoid areas where there are major veins and arteries close to the surface, and make sure your tetanus jabs are up-to-date.

**Be prepared.** Have dressings and antiseptics ready so you can care for your injuries.

**Clean any cuts with gauze swabs**, not cotton wool. Cover with dry, non-adhesive dressing. It may be useful to keep antiseptic cream and spray handy.

**Put burns under cold water** for 20-30 minutes. Burns and scalds can be more severe than you think – the pain can be far worse later. Have cream and spray ready so you can care for your injuries. You can buy these from a chemist.

**Call an ambulance (dial 999)** if blood is spurting from a wound. Wrap the injury in a clean towel or material and try to stay calm.

## seeking medical advice

**Serious injuries.** If any of your cuts are deep you will need medical attention. Try to keep the injured part raised and press it until you get to hospital, to reduce the bleeding. You should also seek medical attention for burns larger than a fifty pence piece, or that have gone deep into the skin.

**Infection.** If cuts or burns get infected it is important to get medical treatment or you may become seriously ill.

**Shock** can occur if you lose a lot of blood or if you have severe or large burns. Call an ambulance if this happens.

**Poisoning.** If you drink bleach or any other corrosive liquid you can be in danger of poisoning. In these circumstances you should get medical advice or attention immediately.

**Overdoses.** If you think you may have taken too many drugs (prescribed/illegal) it is important to get medical help quickly.