

# Psychological Perspectives in Education & Primary Care

## Supporting young people who self-harm

Presented by

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With thanks to

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# Overview



- Definition and function of self harm
- Understanding the association between self harm and suicide
- Supporting young people & offering alternative coping strategies including the use of safety plans

# Common misconceptions

# Defining self-harm

# Prevalence in young people?

11%



3%

Most people who self-harm are between 11-25  
Average age of onset is 12  
4 times more common in girls than boys

# Understanding self-harm

**Self-harm can be  
direct or indirect**

e.g. cutting vs risk taking

**Self-harm can be  
transient or  
longer term**

**Self-harm is usually  
conducted at times of  
anger, distress, fear or  
worry...**

**...and is a way of  
coping with these  
feelings**

*Cutting for me releases all the built up anger and frustration and pain I feel inside. There are many things that happen to me in my life which cause the pain I feel and how I release it. Mostly the feelings of isolation like being outcast pretty much from relationships altogether. I don't feel like I am a very stable person and I hate myself a lot of the time. I think body image also has a lot to do with my cutting. School is stressful, home life I can't handle sometimes.'*

Truth hurts (2006)



Put simply, self-harm is a coping mechanism

We're more accepting of other types...



# Why do young people self harm?

**Emotional pain (sadness, grief, hopelessness, depression) 57%**

**Self-hatred (shame, guilt, dirtiness) 51%**

**Anger (frustration, powerlessness) 50%**

**Anxiety (fear, tension, panic) 34%**

**Neediness (unsupported, unheard) 30 %**

**Unreality (numbness, Empty) 9%**

Truth hurts (2006)

# Common triggers

Relationship  
difficulties  
(family &  
friends)

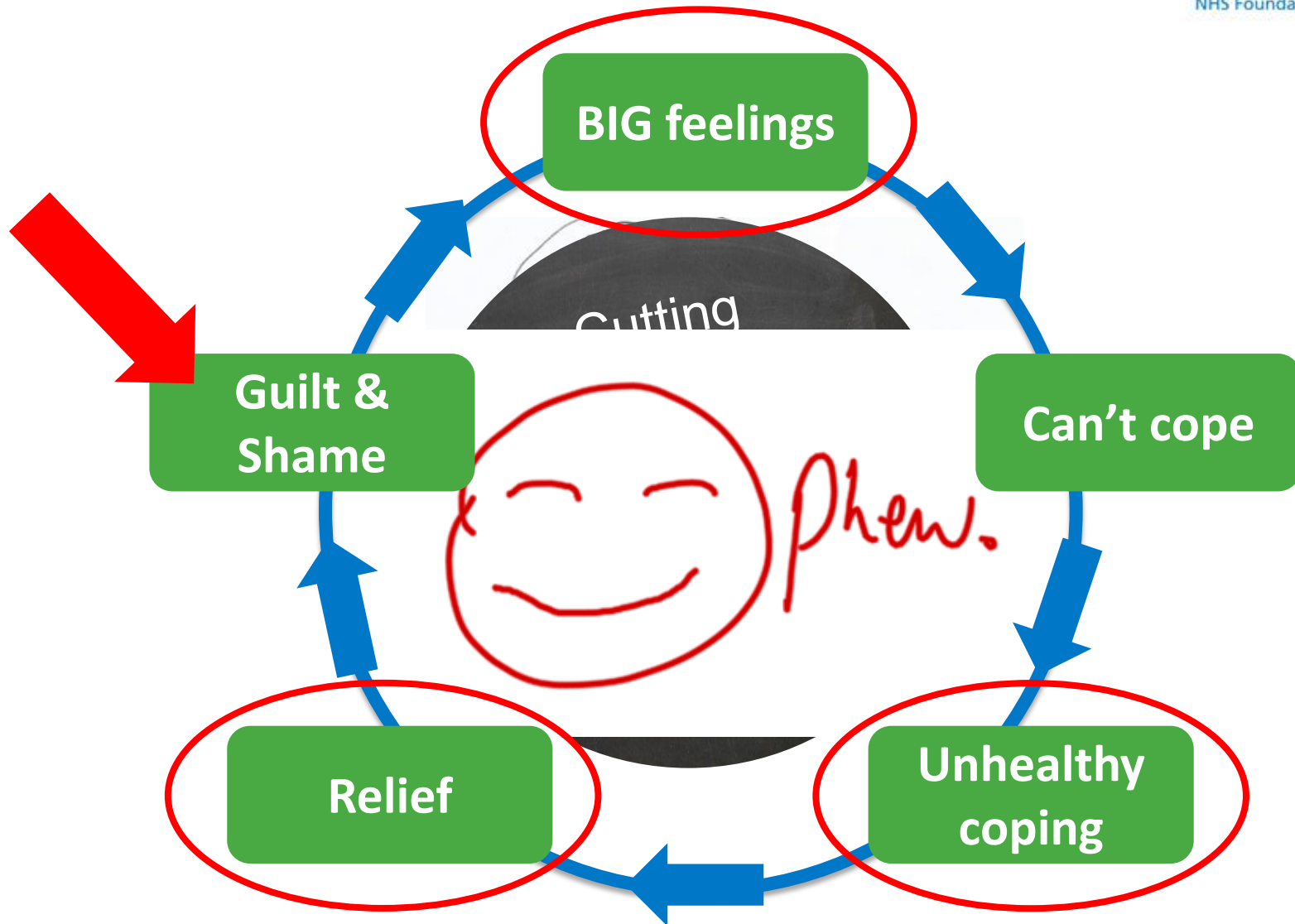
Bullying

Trauma  
(bereavement/  
abuse)

Self harm in  
friends or  
media

Life events  
(e.g. divorce)

Pressure (e.g.  
exams)





What are  
the  
warning  
signs?

# Telling other people

- Could be one of the most difficult and most important thing to do – often the first step in breaking the cycle
- The reaction of others is seen as very important in the decision about whether to seek further help
- Young people need to feel comfortable with who they speak to and often experience huge relief when they have shared their difficulties

# Suicide or Self-Harm?

Some people who self-harm have a strong desire to kill themselves, but most will not

Even if the intent to die is low, self harm needs to be taken seriously – **people who do not intend to kill themselves sometimes do so because they don't realise the seriousness of their injuries**

INTENTION is our best guide

Self-Harm or  
Suicide?

Lethality is NOT a  
reliable guide

Not always clear



You learn a young  
person is  
self-harming...  
What next?

# Four Helpful Responses:

1

LISTEN!

2

Manage your reactions

3

Offer practical support

4

Involve the student in decisions

# Possible scenarios



Jade shows you fresh cuts  
her arm.

They look clean and shallow and she has  
no visible signs of shock.



Seb is changing for PE and  
a series of burns on his leg.

There are other young people nearby  
who may have noticed what's happening.

Anika comes to you crying and clearly  
very distressed.

She says she has taken a packet o  
paracetamol but she o  
want to die.



Rohan has been unwell with a fever.

He shows you cuts on his arm, they look  
red, oozing & angry.



# Questions to Consider when Responding

Is there an immediate need for medical care?

First Aid first

A&E if needed

Wound  
management

# Questions to Consider when Responding

Is the young person a danger to themselves?

If you are concerned that an episode is a serious attempt to end their life,

and they are known to CAMHS:

Contact your local CAMHS Tier 3 Team Duty Line

If they are not known to CAMHS:

Refer to the Children, Young People and Families (CYPF) HealthHub:

Tel: 0300 365 1234

# Questions to Consider when Responding

What message do you want to give the young person?

Listen

Remain calm

Ask how you can  
help

# Confidentiality

**Be aware of your safeguarding policy and any potential issues**

**When telling other people:**

- Always check with young person beforehand **if possible**
- Work out together who you need to talk to – discuss the importance of letting parents know and address concerns they may have about this.
- Contact parents (unless there are reasons for not doing so - in this case, consult with local safeguarding lead).

# Confidentiality

- If a child or young person is known to CAMHS, contact the Lead Professional/Care Co-ordinator or local team's duty line
- Consider referral to other services



# In a nutshell

Is it in the young person's best interest to share this information?

Yes

What? How? Who  
with?

No

Why not? Could  
you defend this  
decision?

Thanking the  
young person  
for sharing  
this  
information

Showing that you care  
about them as a  
person

## What can be helpful



Asking  
how you  
can help

Giving the young  
person  
permission to  
talk about the  
self harm

Staying  
calm

## What can be unhelpful



Asking the  
young person  
to stop

Seeing them as just  
a self-harmer

Giving ultimatums  
or applying  
pressure

Telling them that  
self harm is  
wrong

Giving a  
negative  
reaction

Assuming that every  
episode of self harm  
is for the same  
reason

# Explore alternatives ways of coping

Confide in  
family and  
close friends

Speak with a  
favourite  
teacher

## Identifying a young person's safety net



Access to  
appropriate  
information or  
helplines

Identifying other  
ways of coping with  
difficult feelings

# Help the young person to identify less risky ways to cope with difficult emotions



**Write or draw  
about feelings**

**Talk to a person or  
helpline**

**Go to a quiet  
place and scream  
/ scream silently**

**Hit a pillow / soft  
object**

**Listen to music**

**Look after an  
animal or sibling**

**Draw red lines on  
the skin**

**Clench ice cubes**

**Snap elastic band  
on wrist**



# Box of Tricks...

Candy :p      Funky Stress Ball      A colouring and activity book      Mazes and Word-Searches

Brave (DVD)

A cuddly toy  
(that also ribbets!)

Coloured pencils

Play-Dough

Chinese Finger Puzzle

Feather

Rubber Bands

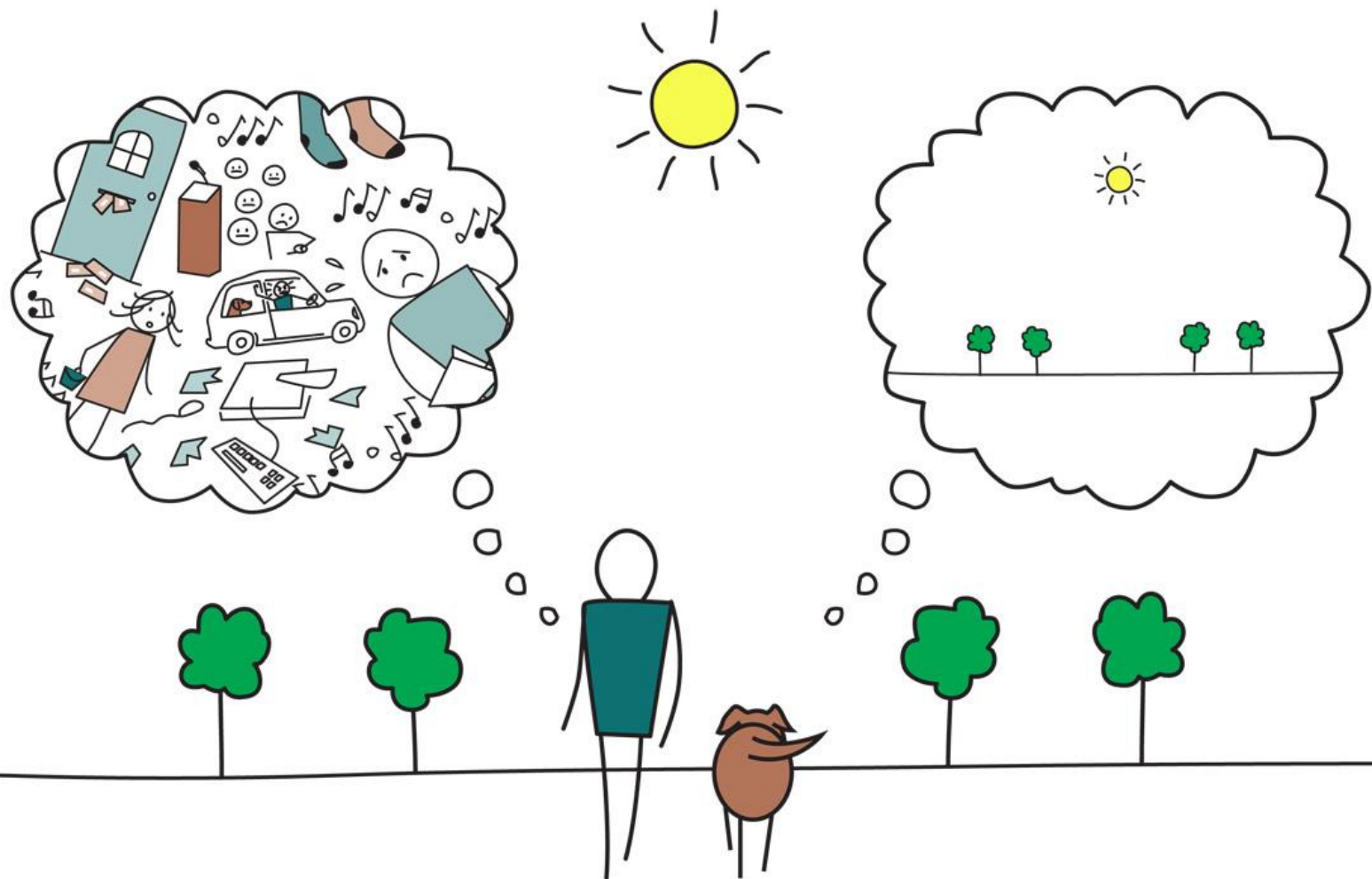
Finger Paints

Meaningful  
Journal

Books that make  
me happy!







# Mind Full, or Mindful?

# Any questions?

# Further Sources of Support

[www.selfharm.co.uk](http://www.selfharm.co.uk)

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

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

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

[www.nshn.co.uk/downloads.html](http://www.nshn.co.uk/downloads.html)

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

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

#No Harm Done

[Inourhands.com](http://Inourhands.com)