

## Self help ideas for coping with self harm

Because we are all individuals we all have our own unique ways of coping. Part of life's journey can be discovering what is helpful to us and what is not. Timing and circumstances influence what is helpful at a particular time.

Most coping strategies start off being helpful but when used too much, may become harmful and then not so helpful.

It is more effective to use coping strategies at the beginning of getting stressed, rather than later on when emotions and actions become out of control.

Many complementary therapies are useful by relaxing you sufficiently to safely cope with the distress. Depending on the experience of the therapist, they may or may not be able to give in depth help with your specific distress. Often it is not so much which therapy is helpful (there are many) but how safe and at ease you feel with the therapist.

The following suggestions have been used by people in the past and found to be useful in coping with their distress and sometimes being able to prevent their self harm. They do not replace seeing either a good therapist or contacting medical services, but can help in between times.

The activities are divided into groups depending on what is your strongest feeling at the time and a possible trigger to self harm. Remember these are only suggestions.

It is important to find your personal help list.

If you want to share what has been helpful to you and why, or for more information contact Harmless at [info@harmless.org.uk](mailto:info@harmless.org.uk)

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## Anxiety / Panic

### Breathing Exercises.

Slowly breathe out for a count of 7. Breathe in for count of 5 (through nose, tongue to the roof of your mouth).

Hold your hands over your abdomen just above naval – feel the rise and fall as you breathe.

Imagine breathing out the tension/anxiety and then breathe in calm (however you imagine it).

If you start to feel dizzy just breathe normally or cup your hands round your mouth & nose.

### Visualising.

Imagine you are in your favourite safe place (a picture may help).  
Imagine smelling the smells, feeling the ground, hearing the sounds.

Now imagine having a protective bubble around you, you can see out but no-one can get in, it can be any colour or material or thickness you like.

Now imagine walking around with this protective shield and see how safe you feel. You can get this safe feeling any time by thinking about your bubble.

### Physical.

The area above the naval (tummy button; known as the solar plexus) is often where we feel distress, just by resting our hands here is calming. This area is also calmed by massaging connecting areas in the hands (middle of palms) And in the feet (just under the ball of the foot in the middle) (Reflexology).

- Gently press acupuncture points between the eye brows (Ying tang), temples (Tai yang).
- Gently massage the entire ear between fingers and thumb, especially tender parts.
- Massage base of skull /top of neck, in the hollows either side of the spine (GB 20).
- Gently hold forehead with finger tips and thumbs on temples – (neuro vascular stress points).
- Stretch arms out to side and slightly back with thumbs upwards (titanic pose).
- Try 'relaxing' aromatherapy oil in roll on for easy application (often lavender, rose, chamomile).
- Take a warm bath with oils (can buy ready mixed from shops).
- Sea-bands which press on acupuncture point on the inside of wrist (PC 6) – although these are sold for sickness – they can help with anxiety. Can also use sleep bands for wrist but different point (HT 7). (Boots).

## Anger / Frustration

Often anger gets labelled as a negative emotion, but it is natural to feel angry or frustrated. It's important to learn to recognise and deal with these feelings; you do not need to feel ashamed to have these feelings.

Think of what you are angry about whilst doing the activity; as you become more fired, you will become less angry.

- Punch pillows, beach ball, exercise ball.
- Wring out a wet towel.
- Rip up scrap paper, newspapers.
- Throw soft objects against a wall.....game of squash, tennis etc.
- Go to the gym and use resistance gym equipment – stepper, rower, cross trainer.
- Go for a run or a walk, or go up a flight of stairs - 2 at a time, or just step ups, swinging arms on each stride.
- Dig in the garden, scrub the floor.
- Stamp on soft ground – soil, sand, springy grass.
- Slowly walk backwards pressing heel into ground.
- Press/massage between 1<sup>st</sup> & 2<sup>nd</sup> toe, below web, between bones on top of foot (LR 3).
- Shout, sing loudly (to car radio or where no-one can hear you).
- Do some drumming.
- Yoga –pose of the child/hare.

## Spacing out / Dissociation / Not Feeling Real.

It is very common for people who self harm to describe feeling 'spaced out'; this is called dissociation. This can leave you feeling disorientated, out of touch with reality, and withdrawn. It's important that you do things to try and nurture yourself, and help you feel grounded again; this can often mean getting in touch with your body again. This is not a sign of madness, but people are very good at distancing themselves from their feelings in order to survive.

- Standing- bounce on your heels, knees loose.
- Shake hands and arms –as though shaking off water.
- Walk bare-footed on grass, pebbles, cold tiles, different textures, – take care nothing sharp.
- Hand clapping.
- Ear pinching.
- Clap/tap with flat hand or finger tips or loose fist over entire body. To follow energy lines:  
Down front of arms, up back of arms, down back/side of legs, up front of legs
- Massage body, spine over clothes with roller balls, spiked massage balls (see massage exercises).
- Press in groove between upper lip and nose (GV 26).
- Press either side the ankles (KI 3, UB 60), in the hollows, on level with the tips of ankle bones.
- Strong massage of feet, use heel of hand for under the foot, gently pull toes
- Reflexology insoles, foot roller, foot spa.
- Lean with back against the wall – feel entire back pushed against wall. Slowly bend knees (no more than 90 degrees or half way) stay in this position as long as is comfortable & keep breathing.  
Slowly straighten knees. – now be aware of more feeling in legs and feet.
- Strong smells – peppermint (can buy as roll-on for temples) olbas oil, Tiger Balm.
- Swimming.
- Cool shower using soft brush or shower sponge.
- Whole body yoga stretches – cat, dog, cobra.
- March on spot with opposite hand touching knee. (Cross crawling).
- Talk out loud.
- Stroke pets.

## Distraction.

This is useful for anyone who starts to feel preoccupied with their negative thoughts, a good distraction will be any activity that occupies mind & body & needs full concentration – especially when learning.

- Dance eg. salsa, ballroom, jazz dance to home video.
- Tai chi & Qi gong – join class or use home DVD.
- Play a musical instrument. Paint, juggle.
- Balance on one leg (yoga –tree pose).
- Just being around people (even if they don't know any of what you are going through).
- Online puzzles / jigsaws.

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## Self Punishment / Low Self Worth.

Often people hurt themselves because they want to punish themselves, or because they have low self esteem. Try and use some of these things to help you while you are feeling this way.

- Find a small part of you which is good / pure, like a small pilot light or candle flame or seedling. Imagine protecting and nourishing it and imagine watching it grow and become stronger.... Perhaps refer to the positive things that you have listed about yourself at the beginning of this workbook.
- Pamper yourself, eat your favourite food or watch your favourite film.
- What job have you been putting off for some time? – do it! E.g. cleaning the cooker, tidying a room, or writing a letter to a friend.
- High jumps on the spot.
- Stand for a while on one leg.
- Use a TENS (Transcutaneous electrical Nerve stimulator.) Put the pads over where you intended to self harm.
- Twang elastic bands, or hold ice.
- If you harm yourself by cutting, then writing words with red pen where you intend to self harm may help you express your feelings on your body.
- Running.

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