



Scouts Australia NSW Fact Sheet

Self Harm

Why use this Guide?

Scouts Australia NSW is committed to the health, safety and wellbeing of its Members and recognises that self harm is a challenging problem facing many young people today.

This Fact Sheet will:

- explain what self harm means
- outline some common signs/symptoms of self harm
- provide Leaders, Youth Members and parents with links to information and resources that will assist them to better understand self harm, where to seek help, and how to support someone who is self harming.

What is self harm?

Self harm is when someone deliberately hurts themselves without wanting to kill themselves. The most common form of self harm involves cutting the skin using a sharp object, like a knife or razor blade.

A young person may also self harm by:

- unnecessary risk taking
- taking an overdose of medication
- banging their head
- burning themselves
- scratching or picking at their skin until it bleeds
- strangling themselves
- jumping from a height.

Drug taking, excessive drinking, and having unsafe sex can also be forms of self harm.

Why would someone self harm?

People who self harm usually do so because their emotions or circumstances feel too overwhelming to deal with. They do it to relieve, manage or express their distressing feelings, which they may not be able to put into words or explain properly to another person.

Some risk factors associated with self harm include:

- mental health disorders including depression and eating disorders
- drug/alcohol abuse
- recent trauma e.g. death of relative,
- problems in the family e.g. parental separation or divorce
- difficulties with peers, a boyfriend or girlfriend
- negative thought patterns, and low self-esteem

- bullying and other forms of abuse.

What do I do if I know someone who is self harming?

Understanding why someone close to you hurts themselves can be very difficult and scary. People have all sorts of feelings about self harm including fear, anger, frustration, helplessness and worry.

If a Leader becomes aware that a Youth Member is self harming, they should

- Listen to the young person calmly and in a non-judgmental way.
- Reassure the young person that they are safe with you and that they can be honest with you.
- It is important not to promise the young person that you will keep their secret. Their safety is more important than this and keeping the young person safe might mean telling someone else, including notifying their parent/guardian and seeking professional support for them.
- Tell the young person that in order for you to keep them safe and happy, other people might need to know about their problem so that they can help. Reassure them you will handle this sensitively and with their best interests in mind.
- For young people under 18 years' old, their parent/guardian needs to be spoken with.
- Encourage the young person to seek help from a professional.
- Consult with your Section Leader or Group Leader, who can seek support and assistance for you.
- You can also directly contact the Members Support Team, which comprises a number of State and Region Commissioners who are qualified and well-equipped to provide help to Scouts Australia NSW Members who are in need of support and guidance. Requests for Members Support should be made via your Region Commissioner or Region Office who will direct you to the appropriate person.
- All incidents should be documented in an Incident Report Form and then sent to whs@nsw.scouts.com.au. A copy should also be forwarded to the Region Office. The Incident Report Form is called an M6 form and is available on our website: <http://www.nsw.scouts.com.au/leaders/scouts-nsw-forms>.

Youth Members should be encouraged to talk to their Leader or other trusted adult if they are in emotional distress.

If a Youth Member becomes aware that a peer is self harming or is at risk of harm to themselves, they should alert their Leader or other trusted adult.

IMPORTANT: If a young person is in immediate risk of harm or needs urgent medical attention, call Triple 0 (000) for an ambulance or take them straight to the nearest hospital.

Take care of yourself too!

Dealing with self harm issues can be very difficult emotionally. Leaders should be aware of how they are managing and know when to seek help to deal with their own feelings and distress.

What services are available?

There are a number of services that exist that can help young people who are going through a hard time. Encourage the young person to connect with one of these services. You could be there with them when they take this step.

Support Services

headspace

headspace is the National Youth Mental Health Foundation and they provide health advice, support, help and information for young people aged 12-25 years old who are going through a tough time.

headspace can assist young people with issues concerning mental health, as well as general health, alcohol and drug services, sexuality and sexual health, bullying and stress.

Visit the headspace website at www.headspace.org.au

Headspaces Centres are staffed by qualified psychologists, counsellors and social workers that are experts in dealing with young people. To visit your local headspace centre, see the list of centre locations and contact details on the website.

headspace also provides an online support service that it enables young people to chat online to a youth mental health professional: <https://www.eheadspace.org.au/>

Their website contains really helpful information for young people as well as their parents, carers, friends and others who care about them.

Helplines

If a young person is reluctant to get help it might be worth talking to them about anonymous phone support lines. These can be a great start point for the young person as they provide an anonymous opportunity to talk about what is going on, while the phone counsellor can also offer some information about local support options and what to expect when they see a counsellor.

Kids Help Line

Phone: 1800 55 1800

www.kidshelpline.com.au

Kids Help Line is a 24-hour telephone and online counselling for 5 to 25 year olds in Australia.

Lifeline Australia

Phone: 13 11 14

www.lifeline.org.au

Lifeline provides 24-hour confidential telephone counselling to anyone within Australia. You can talk to them about any problem, big or small!

Where can I find out more?

headspace

headspace has published an information sheet on self harm. Click this link to be taken to the Self Harm Mythbuster Fact Sheet published by headspace:

http://www.headspace.org.au/media/27559/self-harm_mythbuster.pdf

ReachOut.com

ReachOut.com is Australia's leading online youth mental health service. The website contains facts sheets on various challenges young people face and explores the stories of real young people who share their experiences.

Visit the ReachOut.com website at <http://au.reachout.com>

ReachOut.com has a number of resources that relate to self harm. Find them on their website under the "Tough Times" - "Physical Health" tabs.

Self Harm Booklet on Scouts Australia NSW Website

Psychologist Matt Strickland and Queensland Health have released an information booklet about self harm. The booklet is called *Self Harm– An Information Booklet For Young People Who Self Harm And Those Who Care For Them*.

It:

- describes some signs and symptoms of self harm
- outlines some of the reasons why young people self harm
- explains what to do if you know someone who is self harming
- lists some support services to assist those who self harm and those who care for them.

The information booklet is available on the Scouts Australia NSW website in the "Resources & Policies" – "Fact Sheets and Leader Support Guides" section.

Scouts Australia NSW Members Support

You can also directly contact the Members Support Team, which comprises a number of State and Region Commissioners who are qualified and well-equipped to provide help to Scouts Australia NSW Members who are in need of support and guidance. Requests for Members Support should be made via your Region Commissioner or Region Office who will direct you to the appropriate person. The Team will talk to you about your concerns and direct you to the best local service to assist and support you.

The contents of this Fact Sheet have been compiled, in part, from the following source:

Self Harm: An Information Booklet For Young People Who Self Harm And Those Who Care For Them

Artwork © SpeakOut Limited 2006.

Text © The State of Queensland (Queensland Health) 2006.

This Fact Sheet is published, and the above Booklet reproduced, with the permission of The State of Queensland (Queensland Health).