

How can I talk to someone about my self-harm?

Talking to someone about your self-harm for the first time is an incredibly difficult and brave step – but it's well worth doing as it is the best way of ensuring you get the support and help you need to overcome the challenges you're facing. We've put together a few words of advice below to help you prepare.

Think about what you want to say

Whilst you may have made the brave decision to talk to someone, you still need to decide what you want to tell them. You might want to think about:

- Is there an underlying problem you need to talk about?
- How much about your self-harm are you happy to share?
- How do you feel each day?
- What are you finding hard to manage?
- What has prompted you to ask for help now?

Think about what you want to happen next

It's very brave to ask for help and it usually means that on some level you're ready for things to change. Do you have any idea of what you might like to happen as a result of the conversation you're planning? This might include:

- Support telling parents or a friend
- First-aid or medical help for injuries
- Support to help you talk through and overcome underlying issues
- Referral for specific treatment that you're already aware of
- You're not sure, you just can't carry on with how things are

Practice saying what you need to say

You're probably really nervous about the thought of talking to someone about your difficulties. You may not have ever spoken to anyone about it before, so it's a good idea to practice. It might sound a bit strange but you'll feel much more confident talking to a parent, teacher or friend if you've worked out what you want to say and tried saying it beforehand. You can start by practicing in the mirror. A good next step is to call an anonymous helpline like childline and practice talking to someone you don't know, that can be easier than talking to someone you know and care about and can help you whilst you get ready to take the next step. You can call Childline anytime on 0800 1111.

Find out who's best to talk to

You might already know who you want to talk to, perhaps a parent or a teacher you get on especially well with. If you're not sure who to talk to then it's worth asking amongst your friends to find out who's a good listener. Have any of your friends talked to someone at school/college and had a really helpful or unhelpful response before? Doing a bit of detective work will help you find someone really supportive you can trust to share your difficulties with.

Write a list or letter

It's worth writing a list of what you want to say to take with you so you don't forget anything if you get nervous. You could formulate your words into a letter, both to help you work out what to say and also as a back-up. That way if you find yourself unable to talk about your issues you could give the letter to the person you've chosen to talk to instead.

Find a quiet time

Make sure you start the conversation at a time when the person you're talking to won't be interrupted and has time to listen to you properly. This is a really important conversation and they'll want to pay it their full attention. If they say they can't talk now, it doesn't mean they don't care about you, ask them when would be a good time to talk and come back then.

Understand that to help you they'll need to share your secret

If you talk to someone at school/college, one of the first things they'll do is to tell you that they can't keep this a secret. That's because they'll need to ensure you get the support you need to help you to get on top of things. You can talk to them about who needs to know what – but don't be surprised if they want to tell your parents or another teacher. It's a good thing that people understand what's going on so they can help you – though it might seem a bit scary at first.

Take it slowly

Don't feel like you have to say everything all in one breath. Take it nice and slowly and don't be afraid to pause to think about what to say next.

Don't over-analyse their reaction

It's perfectly normal to try and second-guess what the person you're talking to is thinking. You might have all sorts of ideas about what is going through their mind, but don't try to second-guess. They might be surprised, or a little upset to hear you've been so unhappy, but ultimately they will want to support you to overcome the difficulties you're currently facing.

It's okay to cry

You might feel quite emotional, even if you don't expect to. The relief of finally telling someone what's going on can be a little bit overwhelming. Take some tissues with you and if you feel you need to cry, that's okay.

Let them help you

Even if you've gone looking for help, it can be hard to accept it – but try. Have faith in the person you've confided in to help you to take the first steps to make things better. They won't be able to fix everything all in one go, but they can work with you to start to make things change.

It really is worth talking to someone. It's the first step in a long journey, but from the moment you take that brave step you'll feel very much less alone.

Good luck!