

## WHERE CAN I GET FURTHER SUPPORT?

It might be helpful to seek further support if you:

- are still experiencing difficult thoughts despite trying the tips in this leaflet
- are having thoughts or urges to self-harm
- are having thoughts or feelings of wanting to end your life
- are finding day-to-day life is being affected
- need medical attention

Talking to a member of staff at school, or booking an appointment to see your GP can be a good first step.

### Papyrus / HOPELINE UK

If you're looking for advice around self-harm or suicide, would like tips on how to cope, or access to advice/someone to talk to, you'll find it all here.

[papyrus-uk.org/](http://papyrus-uk.org/)

### Young Minds

From information on difficult thoughts, thoughts of self-harm and suicide, resources, others' experiences, this website has all the helpful information to support and empower you to cope better.

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

If you need to talk to somebody right now, these organisations can help:

	NHS 111	ChildLine 0800 1111	Shout 85258	Samaritans 116 123	 In emergencies, call 999
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## USEFUL APPS



Calm Harm



DistrACT



Mee Too



Thought Diary

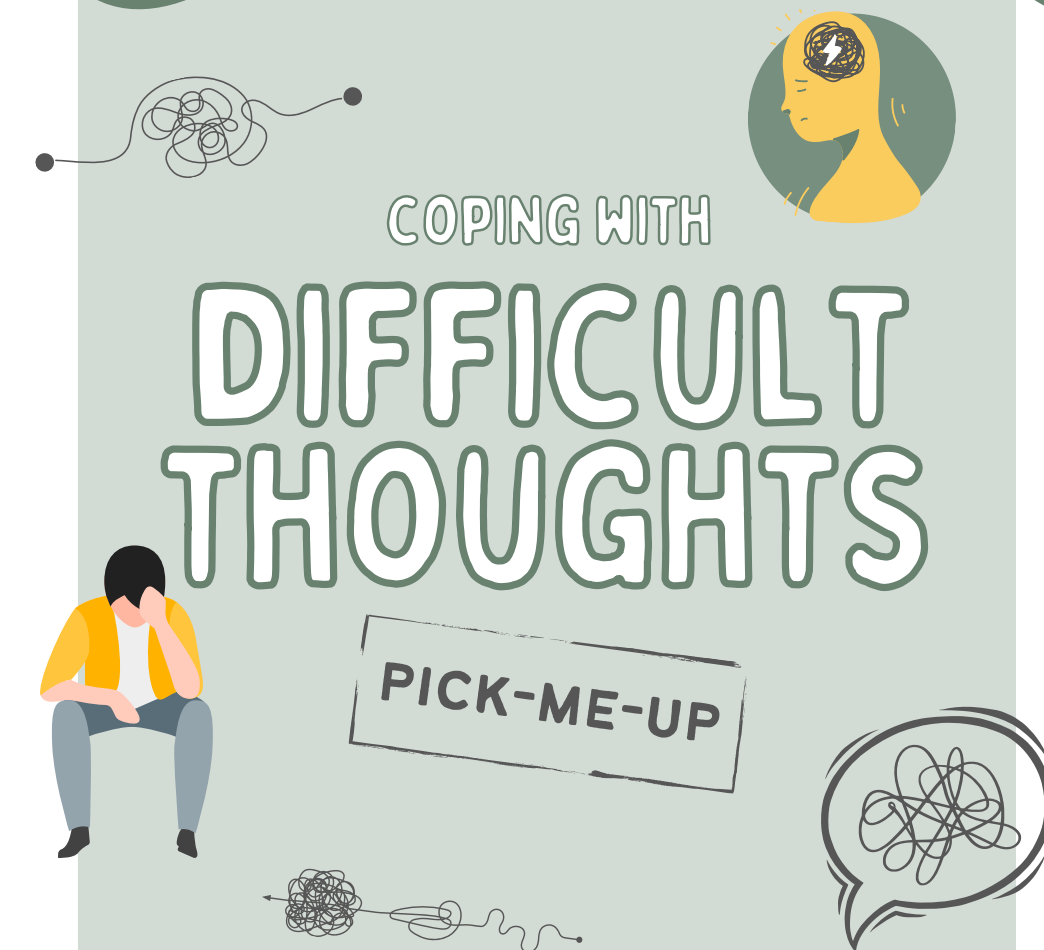


Portsmouth  
Mental Health Support Team



# COPING WITH DIFFICULT THOUGHTS

PICK-ME-UP

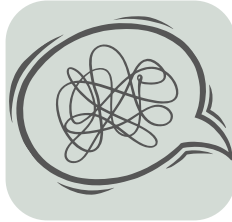


[pik-mee-uhp] *noun*

A pick-me-up is something that restores a person's energy, improves their mood, or generally lifts their spirits.

## WHAT ARE DIFFICULT THOUGHTS?

Thoughts can become difficult when they are unwanted and pop into our heads without warning, at any time. They can be repetitive, disturbing or even distressing. These thoughts are normal and we all experience them but they can be really difficult to manage.



## WHAT CAN I DO?

Understanding your own thoughts better can help you to feel more in control and less distressed. Some ways which can support you in managing these thoughts:

- Grounding techniques help us to focus on the present moment and distract from difficult thoughts. Focus on your body, your senses, observe, breathe and distract.
- Thought challenging (ask yourself if your thoughts are helpful, seek evidence for/against your thought, ask others' opinions, is your thought balanced?)
- Thought acceptance
- Gratitude journal
- Positive self-talk

## THE IMPACT OF DIFFICULT THOUGHTS

When our thoughts have an impact on our day-to-day life, or become obsessive, it can impact on our feelings/emotions. When we only have a few thoughts it can be easier to manage, but when there are lots or they become repetitive, it can become overwhelming. If we are unable to manage these thoughts, they can lead to further difficult thoughts and cause a 'spiral' of negative thinking. These thoughts can change the way you feel about yourself, the world around you, or the future.

## WHAT MIGHT THEY LOOK LIKE?

Difficult thoughts are ones which cause distress or are hard to manage. This may look like:

- negative self talk
- thoughts of death
- wanting to hurt yourself or others
- irrational thoughts
- thoughts that are scary/provoke a strong negative emotion
- thoughts of guilt or shame
- unbalanced thinking

## EXAMPLES OF GROUNDING TECHNIQUES

### FLOW ACTIVITIES

Flow activities take our full attention, we "lose ourselves" in them and don't notice the time passing. Some examples: drawing, colouring, reading, watching TV, playing music.

### COLOURS/SHAPES

Find 5 items in the room which are a certain colour or shape.

### 5, 4, 3, 2, 1

5 things you can see,  
4 things you can touch,  
3 things you can hear,  
2 things you can smell,  
1 thing you can taste.

### ABCD...

Think of a subject and name something to do with that subject for each letter of the alphabet (eg. name animals: ape, bear, cat...)

### CALM BOX

Create a calm box full of things which make you feel better which you can go to when you are feeling anxious. This is personal to everyone so create this with your child. It is useful to cover all 5 sense. Bigger things can be replaced by a photo/memo if they don't fit inside the box

### RELAXATION AND BREATHING

Follow some breathing and relaxation exercises which can be found online (square breathing, star breathing, progressive muscle relaxation, body scan.



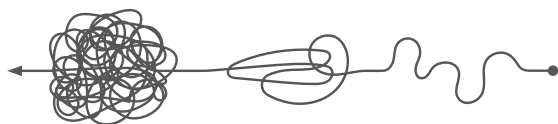
## WHAT IS SELF-HARM?

Self-harm is a behaviour that is done deliberately to harm oneself. Self-harming behaviours include, but are not limited to:

- self-cutting
- taking an overdose
- hitting or bruising
- intentionally taking too much or too little medication
- burning
- suffocation



Although some people who display self-harming behaviour may be suicidal, it is often used as a way of managing difficult emotions without being a suicide attempt. However, self-harming can result in accidental death.



## WHAT MIGHT IT LOOK LIKE?

As a parent/carer, you might suspect a young person is self-harming. If you are worried, here are some signs you might notice:

- unexplained cuts/bruises/burns
- keeping themselves covered up; avoiding changing clothes around others
- being withdrawn or isolated from friends and family
- low mood, lack of interest in life
- blaming themselves for problems or expressing feelings of failure, uselessness, hopelessness or anger

## MYTHS & FACTS

**Myth** - Young people who self-harm are just looking for attention

**Fact** - The phrase 'attention-seeking' dismisses the real reasons causing someone to injure themselves. Consider what is being communicated.

## REASONS FOR SELF-HARM

Self-harm can serve several functions, such as managing extreme emotions, reducing tension, providing physical pain to distract from emotional pain, expressing emotions, as a form of escape, an effort to regain control, punish oneself, elicit care from others, identify with peers, etc.

There are some things which might make a young person vulnerable to self-harm:

### Individual Factors

low mood, anxiety, low self-esteem, hopelessness, poor problem solving, impulsivity, eating disorders, drug or alcohol abuse

### Family Factors

poor parental relationships, drug/alcohol misuse in the family, unreasonable expectations, conflicts, excessive punishments/restrictions, family history of self-harm, abuse/neglect

### Social Factors

difficulties in peer relationships, bullying, peer rejection, friends who self-harm, media/ internet influences

## MANAGING INJURIES FROM SELF-HARM



If you are concerned about a wound or other serious injuries, you should seek emergency medical help through your local Accident and Emergency service.

### Cuts & Wounds

apply pressure to bleeding cuts using a bandage or towel, clean the wound under a running tap and apply sterile adhesive dressing. If the wound becomes infected, seek medical help.

### Overdoses

get to an emergency department as soon as possible, try to find out what has been taken to tell medical staff

### Burns

cool with cold water for 10-30 minutes and cover with cling film; don't use ice, any creams or greasy substances.

### Scars

if there are any scars which you want to cover up, this can be done using make-up or commercial products to help them fade. Remember most scars will eventually fade.

## MYTHS & FACTS

**Myth** - Only 'emos' self-harm, it's part of modern day youth culture.

**Fact** - There's no such thing as a typical person who self-harms. It can affect anyone of any age, background, race, or culture.

## ALTERNATIVES TO SELF-HARM

As self-harm is helping you to cope with difficult feelings, it is important to think of other ways you can manage these. These can include distraction, stress management techniques, and thinking of alternative methods of expressing extreme emotions. Here are a few examples:

- join a social/sports group for distraction and form a social support
- try to put off self-harming to decrease or get rid of the urge
- reduce accessibility of objects that might be used to self-harm

### SOOTHING/STRESS RELIEF/DISTRACTION:

going for a walk, looking at things, listening for sounds  
create something (drawing, writing, music, sculpture)

going to a public place, away from home

keeping a diary/weblog

stroking or caring for a pet

watching TV or a movie

getting in touch with a friend

listening to soothing music

having a relaxing bath

use breathing techniques

wrap a blanket around you tightly/use a weighted blanket

### RELEASING EMOTIONS:

clenching an ice cube in the hand until it melts

snapping an elastic band against the wrist

drawing on the skin with red pen or paint instead of cutting

sports/physical exercise

using a punchbag

hitting a pillow/other soft object

smell something strong

have a very cold shower

stretch your body and press your feet firmly to the ground



## WHAT CAN I DO?

Understanding why you self-harm may help you talk about it with others. Taking control of your self-harm can be really challenging, but you can try:

- **considering what self-harm does for you** and the role of it in your life
- **looking for patterns** in your self-harm and keeping a diary
- exploring possible **alternative coping mechanisms** and distractions techniques
- **caring for your injuries** by accessing medical attention when needed and keeping a first aid kit
- **reaching out** to someone you trust and talking things through
- getting **professional support** through your GP, helplines, school
- remembering **things can change** for you

## WHAT CAN I DO TO SUPPORT A YOUNG PERSON?

If you think someone is self-harming, it is important to reach out to them. It's not always an easy conversation to have but you can try:

- **asking** sensitively and directly if they have been hurting themselves
- **managing your reactions** and remaining calm
- **exploring their reasons** behind their self-harm
- **listening** to their explanation
- trying to **understand** what's happening from their point of view
- **avoiding taking control** of the situation
- **encouraging** them to seek further support
- organise the conversation around a walk/drive/use messaging/letters
- let them know you are **not judging them or putting them down**, that you love them and that will not change
- **support** problem solving

## MYTHS & FACTS

**Myth** - It's just a phase, they'll grow out of it.

**Fact** - Some harm regularly, while others once in a while. Some may stop when a problem is resolved, others may continue for years. It can become habitual.

## MYTHS & FACTS

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

**Fact** - Individuals who self-harm do not always intend to end their lives, some see it as a way of staying alive and coping with their difficulties.