

New guide for parents who are coping with their child's self-harm

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Young people's self-harm can leave families confused, anxious and feeling like there's nowhere to turn. Now, based on in-depth research with parents, a team from Oxford University's Centre for Suicide Research are launching a guide to help parents and carers who are trying to cope with this difficult situation.

Self-harm is very common in [young people](#), with 10 to 15 percent of young people in the UK reporting that they self-harm.

Keith Hawton, Professor of Psychiatry, explains: 'They often do it to deal with bad feelings, feelings of depression, anger, dislike of themselves. It may be done to show other people how bad the person is feeling or to get a sense of control over the person's life. It may be done for reducing tension. Sadly, it can be a suicidal act and the person actually wants to die.'

The team found that parents who discover their child has self-harmed felt alone and isolated. Often, they did not know where to turn for help and support. It was that discovery that prompted the team to develop a [free downloadable guide](#) to provide advice and information for parents in this situation. The guide has information on topics including understanding self-harm, managing injuries, sources of help and looking after parents' own needs.

Research coordinator Dr Anne Ferrey said: 'We developed the guide based on current research on self-harm and on the interviews with

parents. It contains quotes from them with advice for other parents as well as evidence-based information and links to sources of help.'

Videos of some of the interviews with parents are also available online: www.healthtalk.org/self-harm.

As well as information, the new resource intends to provide a source of hope. Many of the parents interviewed had hope for the future and the team's aspiration is that this will enable other parents to feel some optimism.

One parent said of their daughter: 'I see the future as like a contour map - she will continue to get better and she will have long periods where life is good.'

Professor Keith Hawton said: 'We know that most young people will stop self-harming, perhaps in a few weeks, a few months and sometimes a few years. In a minority it will become part of a longer-term pattern of behaviour, and for some it may indicate longer-term emotional problems, but for the vast majority, self-harm will stop.'

The Guide can be downloaded from www.psych.ox.ac.uk/news/you-are-not-alone

Responding to the launch of the guide for [parents](#) and carers, Dr Max Davie of the Royal College of Paediatrics and Child Health, said: 'The UK has one of the highest rates of [self-harm](#) in Europe. There has been a staggering [68 percent increase](#) in children and young people being admitted to hospital over the last ten years because of it. So the launch of today's guide has come at an important time.'

Provided by Oxford University

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