

TALKING ABOUT SELF HARM: A CONVERSATION GUIDE

It takes a lot of courage for someone to disclose this kind of information. Take it slowly, offer praise and encouragement and err on the side of silence if you are unsure what to say. Remember not to confuse the risk of self-harm with suicide, and don't break confidentiality if there is no risk to the young person's life, and not without talking about it with them first.

1. OPENING UP

Start here if you are concerned about a young person and are initiating the chat

- ☞ You look upset/sad/angry
- ☞ It looks like something has been bothering /upsetting you and I was wondering if you can tell me what's been happening for you?
- ☞ Sometimes when people feel overwhelmed they don't know how to cope. Is this something that has ever happened to you?
- ☞ I know that some young people self-harm as a way of coping, is this something that you have thought about?

If young person doesn't disclose self-harm at this point, thank them for talking to you and reassure them that you are there if they need someone to talk to in the future. Refer to stage 5 if it feels appropriate.

2. ACKNOWLEDGING

Start here if a young person discloses their self harm to you

- ☞ Thank you for telling me that
- ☞ I believe you (young person may feel they will not be believed)
- ☞ I care about you and I'm here for you
- ☞ I can't imagine how you're feeling
- ☞ I know that some young people self-harm as a way of coping
- ☞ It takes a lot of courage to tell me that, you've done really well
- ☞ It sounds like things are hard for you
- ☞ I'd really like to support and understand you more

3. CONFIDENTIALITY

Bring this up when it feels right

- ☞ I'm not going to share what you tell me with anyone else unless you want me to, or you tell me something that makes me think you are at risk or another person is at risk.
- ☞ I would want to get you some help but we can talk about how best we can do that in a way that will make you feel safe.

4. EXPLORING

- ☞ What was it that made you want to tell me this today?
- ☞ What are your hopes for telling me this?
- ☞ What else do you do that helps you get through the day?
- ☞ That's great you're able to do those things too.
- ☞ It looks like self-harming is your main way of coping right now.
- ☞ Talking to me about this tells me you want some help and that's really good
- ☞ This is your first step towards getting the support you need.

5. CLOSING

- ☞ I'm here for you and I want to get you the right help.
- ☞ What would you like to happen now that you've told me this?
- ☞ How would you feel about me getting you some help?
- ☞ I want you to know there is support out there for you
- ☞ Is there anything you can think of that might help you?

You may find it appropriate to schedule another chat there and then but ideally it will be to lead them to the next level of appropriate support.