



FACTSHEETS

The difference between self harm and suicide

By [ReachOut](#) | Updated: 17th May, 2017 | 4 min read

Struggling with self-harm or thinking about suicide can be tough and lonely. Read on to understand what self-harm and suicidal behaviour is, how they are different and the kinds of help available.

This can help if:

- You feel overwhelmed with negative thoughts
- You just can't see a way out and feel hopeless about the future
- You are worried about a friend who is self-harming
- You're not sure of the difference between self-harm and suicide

What is self-harm?

Self-harm is the act of deliberately causing physical damage to your body. The most common and well-known form of self-harm is cutting into the skin with a sharp object. However, there are lots of lesser-known examples of self-harm such as burning, scratching and pinching the skin, or even hitting your head against a wall. People tend to self-harm because they are feeling extreme emotional pain that they want a sense of relief or a distraction. It's because of this that self-harming can feel soothing and



become addictive. It might be hard to spot if someone you know is self-harming because it's normally done in secret. However, there are some warning signs you can look out for:



Constant scratches or scars on the arms or legs, often in a deliberate pattern

Difficulty explaining where marks on their body have come from

Always wearing long sleeved shirts, even when it is very warm

What is suicide?

Suicide is the act of deliberately killing oneself. Suicidal behaviour is any action that can result in death, such as deliberately crashing a car, intentionally overdosing on alcohol/medication or attempting to cut the wrist or neck in a particular way that is intended to result in death. People who try to end their lives normally feel that they need an escape because life is impossible to tolerate. This might be because of a mental illness such as depression or bipolar disorder, extremely stressful life circumstances or a combination of both.

There aren't always signs that someone is considering suicide. However, here are some things that might indicate that someone is thinking about ending their life:

Withdrawing from family and friends

Mentioning death or suicide often, even in a joking way

Being suddenly upbeat and cheerful after a long period of low mood

Giving away possessions or spending unusually large amounts of money

Having trouble concentrating on anything and spending excessive amounts of time day dreaming



How are they different?



While both self-harm and suicidal behaviour involve deliberately hurting oneself, it is done for different reasons. Sadly, people who exhibit suicidal behaviour are doing so with the intention of ending their life. On the other hand, people who self-harm don't normally want to die, but are in extreme psychological distress and find that hurting themselves provides relief, provides something else to focus on, and in some cases, is a way of communicating to other people that they need help. Both behaviours indicate that a person is having a really tough time and needs help and support to feel better.

Getting help for self-harm and suicidal behaviour

It's important to know that help is available if you or someone you know is self-harming or considering suicide. It can be really difficult to ask for help, but it will be worth it. You can try:

Talking to someone close to you (friend, family member or even trusted teacher)

Call Lifeline on 13 11 14 or visit www.lifeline.org.au

Seek professional help at your GP. They may refer you to a psychologist who can teach you ways to cope with your distress

Never dismiss a friend's self-harm or suicidal behaviour as attention seeking. Always listen to them and let them know you want to help.

What can I do now?

Read more about self-harm.

Learn how to make a safe plan if you or a friend is having suicidal thoughts.

Book an appointment with your GP to discuss how you are feeling and what help is available.



Also check the related topics:

[SUICIDE](#)

[SELF HARM](#)

[SUPPORTING A FRIEND WITH A MENTAL ILLNESS](#)



Factsheet provided by ReachOut

[WEBSITE](#)

[SHARE](#)



Have we missed something?

Need help now?

Speaking to someone about your problems can be the first steps to a solution.

 **1800 55 1800**


 **13 11 14**

 [VISIT THE WEBSITE](#)

 [VISIT THE WEBSITE](#)

Feeling unwell? Need trusted advice?

Healthdirect Symptom Checker guides you to the right healthcare.

 [START YOUR SYMPTOM CHECK](#)