

# Supporting your teenager with emotional difficulties / self-harm

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# Objectives

- To understand what is meant by emotion regulation and how to support your teen to self-regulate.
- To gain an overview of self-harm including: What we mean by self-harm, the ways in which somebody may self-harm and the reasons behind it.
- To give you some strategies to manage your teen who is self-harming including: What to do in the moment, shortly after, and longer term safety.
- To signpost to helpful resources and services as appropriate.



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# Part 1: Emotion regulation



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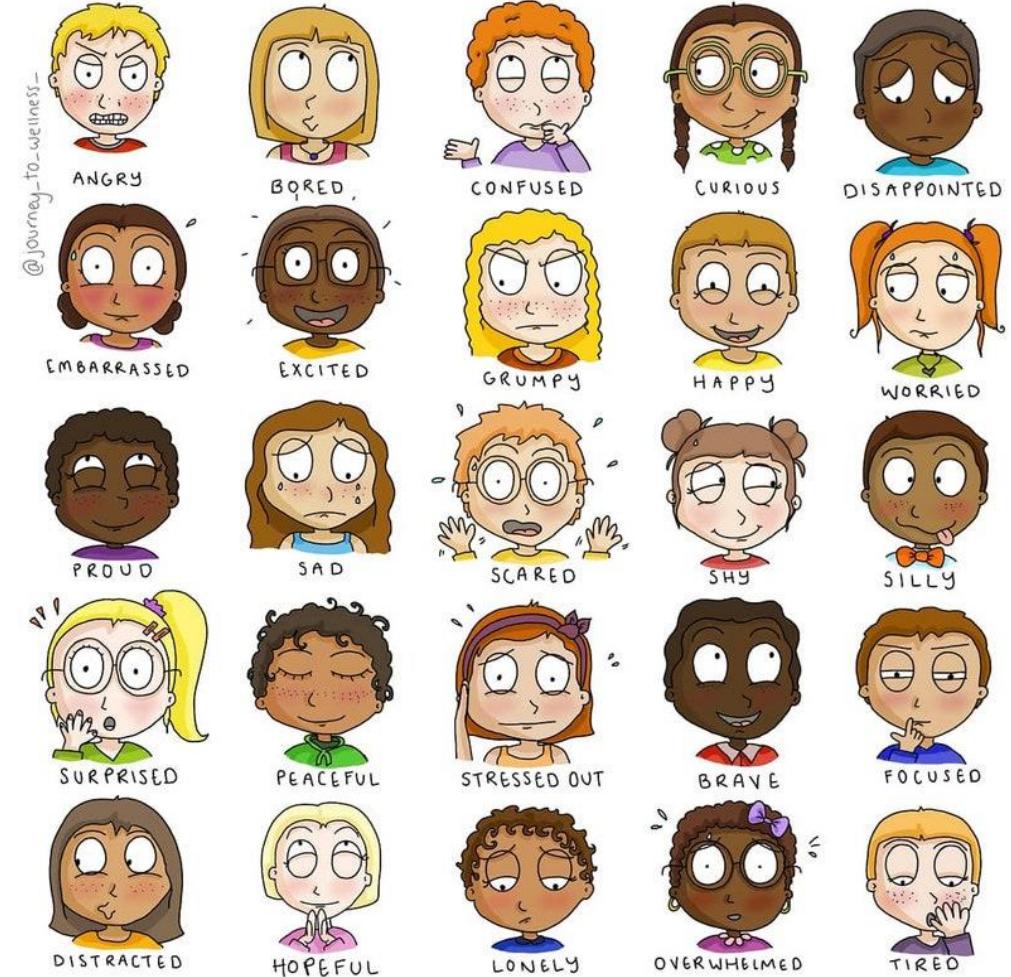
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# Emotion regulation, what does it mean?

- Emotional regulation refers to an individual's ability to process and express their feelings in a constructive way.
- In adolescents this can be tricky as often you may not know what they're feeling, or their behavior may be confusing.



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# Self-harm links to emotion regulation

- The link between emotional regulation and self harm is well established.
- Individuals who find it hard to regulate their emotions will try and find a way to release these overwhelming feelings. Some resort to unhelpful behaviours such as self harm.
- Often the emotional pain they are experiencing is far worse than any physical pain they feel through self-harm.



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# Concerning statements

*"It's all  
rubbish"*

*"I give up"*

*"I want to  
die"*

*"I hate my  
life"*

*"I can't do  
it"*

*"You don't  
love me"*



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# Responding to concerning statements



Adults tend to...

- **Refute** “*You know that’s not right*”
- **Question** “*What do you mean?*”
- **Persuade** “*Last week you wrote a great essay...*”
- **Give advice** “*Why don’t you just....*”



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# Instead try...

**Validating your teen:** This communicates that their feelings, thoughts and actions make sense and are understandable to you. It's not the same as agreeing with them, rather that you understand where they are coming from.

- *That sounds very hard”*
- *“Those are difficult feelings to have”*
- *“No wonder you are frustrated”*
- *“What do you need?”*

***Try not to give advice but rather help your teen make sense of the situation***



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# How to validate

- Actively **listen**, make eye contact
- Be mindful of both **non-verbal and verbal reactions** which may invalidate (eye rolling, walking away, saying ‘what’s wrong this time?’)
- Observe what your teen might be feeling – **try and describe it**
- Reflect the feeling back **without judgement** ‘this is a really tough situation for you’  
‘it makes sense you feel angry’
- Be **tolerant** – look for their reasoning, even if you don’t agree or approve
- Respond in ways that **show** you are taking them seriously eg. crying with a hug



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# Supporting your teen to regulate their emotions



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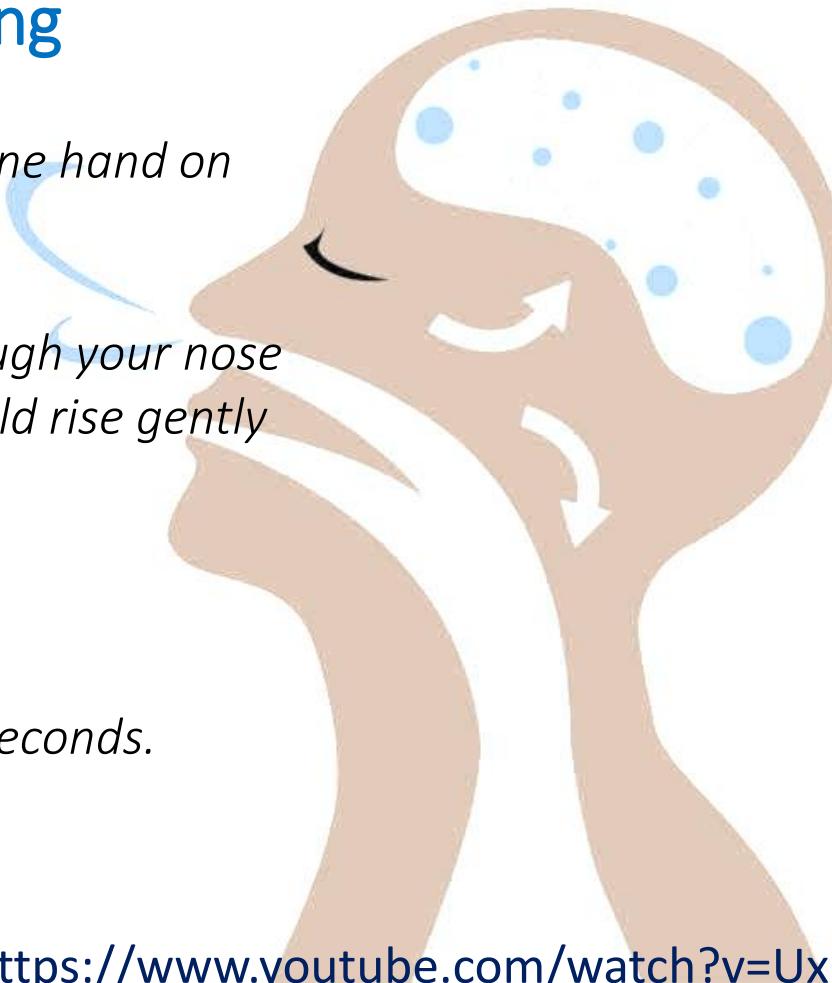


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# Using relaxation – Breathing

## Controlled Breathing

1. Put one hand on your chest and one hand on your stomach.
2. Take a deep breath in slowly through your nose for 7 seconds; both your hands should rise gently as you breathe.
3. Hold the breath for 2 seconds.
4. Release the breath slowly for 11 seconds.
5. Repeat



## The Mammalian Dive Reflex

Splashing water on your face activates the Mammalian Dive Reflex.

Research shows that this process activates your vagus nerve, slows down your breathing and your heart rate.

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Uxbdx-SeOo>



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# Using relaxation - Progressive muscle relaxation

Tense each muscle for 5 seconds then release. Associating with a word such as 'relax', to use when feeling stressed or anxious. [https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=wXUxiR6yQ\\_Q](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=wXUxiR6yQ_Q)

- **Hands** – clench your left fist 5 secs, and then relax. Do the same with your right.
- **Arms** – bend your elbows and tense your arm and bicep 5 secs, then relax.
- **Neck** – Turn your neck slowly from side to side 5secs. Feel the tension moving then bring your head forward into a comfortable position.
- **Face** – focus on your jaw and forehead. Lower your eyebrows into a frown and then raise them. After 5 seconds relax them and clench your jaw for 5 seconds. Notice the difference between tensing and relaxing.
- **Chest** – take a deep breath and notice your chest rising. Hold it for a few seconds then relax.
- **Stomach** – tense your stomach muscles as tight as you can for 5 secs and then relax.
- **Legs** – straighten your legs and stretch out as far as possible with pointed toes. Then flex your feet up towards your face. After 5 seconds of stretching, wiggle your toes and relax.



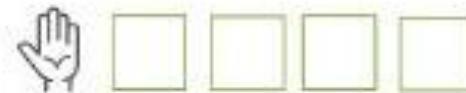
# Grounding techniques

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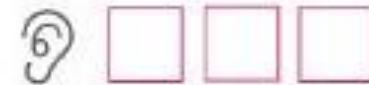
Five things you can see



Four things you can touch



Three things you can hear



Two things you can smell



One thing you can taste



Colours

Find five things in the room that are yellow/blue/ green etc.



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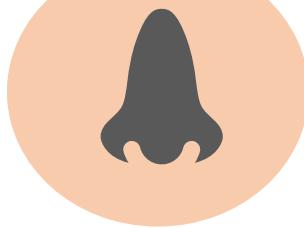
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# Self-soothing with the 5 senses

## Smell



- Light a scented candle
- Smell essential oils e.g. lavender
- Bake cakes or cookies
- Go to the park/woods and smell nature

## Taste



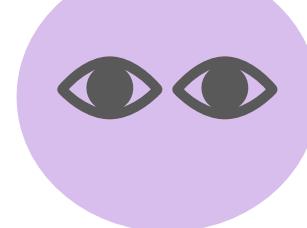
- Eat favourite meal or something enjoyable such as chocolate
- Eat something sour tasting

## Touch



- Stroke a pet
- Cuddle a cushion
- Have a warm bath/shower
- Hug somebody
- Brush hair for a while

## Sight



- Watch the stars
- People watch
- Look at pictures online
- Look at photos that evoke happy memories
- Do mindful colouring
- Watch a tv show

## Sound



- Listen to loud or relaxing music
- Play Favourite song or album
- Listen to the sounds in a park e.g. birds, trees etc
- Play an instrument

# Part 2: Self-harm



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# Self-harm facts

*“Self-harm is when you hurt yourself as a way of dealing with very difficult feelings, painful memories or overwhelming situations and experiences”.*

Mind 2021

“Self-harming behaviours can begin at any age, but commonly start between ages 13 and 15”

“The UK has one of the highest self-harm rates in Europe”

“In 2018/19, ChildLine provided 13,406 counselling sessions about self-harm across the UK”

“About 18% of students aged 12-17 report self-harming at some point in their life”

“Self-harming is 2-3 times more common in females than males”

Mental Health First Aid England, 2020



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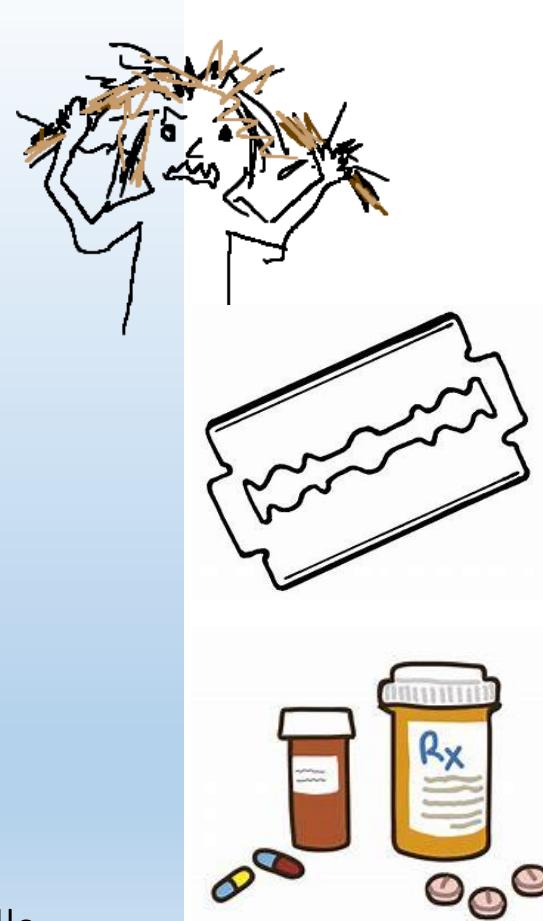
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# Forms of self-harm

- Scratching or picking at skin
- Cutting or burning oneself
- Tying ligatures
- Swallowing harmful objects
- Head banging
- Biting oneself
- Taking overdoses
- Pulling hair
- Hitting/punching/kicking walls



- Misusing drugs including alcohol
- Unhealthy eating : Under/Over eating or inducing vomiting
- Spending lot's of time on addictive behaviours such as gaming or social media
- Over-exercising
- Getting into fights
- Engaging in risky or self-destructive behaviour such as unsafe sex



# Reasons for self-harm

## Individual factors

- Psychological – depression or low mood, anxiety, low self-esteem, trauma response
- To express or manage their feelings
- Poor problem-solving skills
- Drug or alcohol abuse
- Relationship breakdowns
- To feel in control



## Family

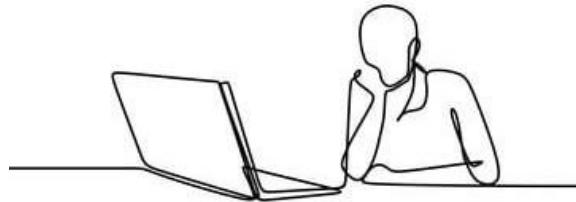
- Mental health difficulties in the family or a family history of self-harm
- Problems at home which may include parental separation or arguments
- Difficult relationships within family, conflict with teen and parents
- Abuse or neglect



# Reasons for self-harm

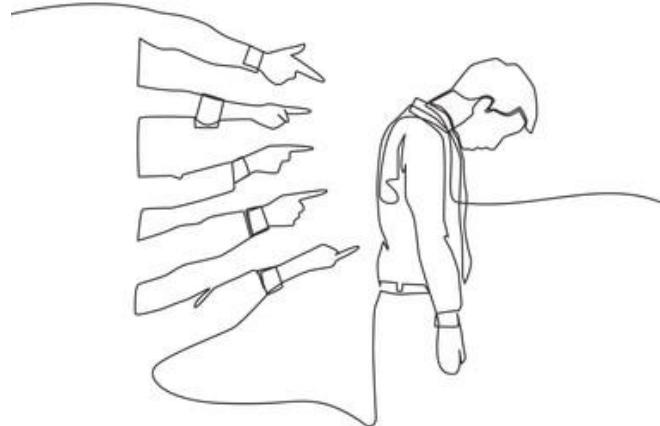
## Social

- To feel a sense of belonging with peers/friends who self-harm
- Because it's popular or trendy
- Difficulties in peer relationships
- Being bullied or peer rejection
- Pressure at school/exam stress
- Media and internet influences



## Physical

- A need to damage self to feel physical pain
- A need to damage self to feel less attractive
- To punish oneself



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# How do I know if my teen is self-harming?



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# Common signs of self-harm

- Unexplained cuts, burns or bruises
- Bloodstained clothing or bedding
- Wearing heavy clothes even in warm weather including reluctance to participate in sports
- Increased isolation from friends and family
- Expressing feelings of hopelessness or blaming themselves for problems
- Lack of motivation or energy to do things and angry outbursts
- Changes in eating and/or sleeping habits or normal routines such as seeing friends
- Greater levels of distress expressed or observed
- Changes in school attendance and academic grades
- Risk taking behaviour, criminal activity or antisocial behaviour
- Increased physical fights



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# How do I respond to my teen who is self-harming?



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# Responding

- **STOP**, take a minute for yourself before you react. Breathe and compose yourself. Try to put your own feelings and emotions to one side.
- **Make a plan** in your head as to how you will address the situation.
- **Don't judge** or show disappointment.
- Remember to **validate the emotion** behind the self-harm rather than the act itself.
- Show your teen you are there for them but give them **space** if they need it and it is safe to do so. Try to offer coping skills/self-soothe box to support emotion regulation.

**Respond to signs and behaviours before your teen self-harms. You know your teen best and will likely be able to gauge when they are struggling.**



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# How to keep my teen safe

## In the moment/shortly after

Don't focus on the wound if it doesn't require immediate attention, instead explore the reasons or emotion

Encourage young person to clean wound to prevent infection

Remove any obvious things nearby they could use to hurt themselves such as knives, razorblades etc

Be vigilant and keep close supervision especially when young person is in a state of high emotion

Try relaxation / self-sooth strategies if able to engage

## Significant wound / Overdose

If life-threatening or significantly bleeding, or if your teen reports to have taken an overdose: attend nearest A&E or call 999

Crisis line: **0203 228 5980** - Mon-Fri 5pm-11pm, Weekends/BH 9am-11pm

Trust Mental Health Support line: **0800 028 8000** - Mon-Fri 10pm-9am. Weekends/BH 9pm-9am

Samaritans: **116 123** or Childline: **0800 1111** - 24/7



# Supporting

- Open up **lines of communication**. Perhaps do an activity such as go for a walk, gently bring up the self-harm after your teen feels they are in a safe space to talk.
- Ask **how they're feeling** and if there is anything that is worrying them.
- Communicate that you **aren't judging them** and are there for them.
- Show them you are **listening** to them using your validation skills.
- If your teen can't or wont talk try **alternative methods**: Text, email, writing notes.
- Ask if they would rather **speak to somebody else**: Doctor, helpline, school counsellor etc.
- If your teen is able to talk then support them with **alternatives to self-harm** or to problem-solve any issues that may be contributing.



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# How to keep my teen safe

## Prevention plans: When teen is calm

- **Limit their access** to things they could use to hurt themselves. E.g. don't keep razorblades in the bathroom, keep medicines locked away.
- **Make a plan** with your teen about how they would like support when they are feeling unsafe or distressed. Try to let them lead but also guide them if necessary. Make sure it's achievable and realistic. Use traffic light system to help them communicate their needs.
- **Create a self-soothe box** filled with things that helps your teen to calm themselves such as: essential oils, a comforting teddy, sensory toys, distracting puzzles. Model this on the 5 senses that we discussed earlier.

(Example ideas) <https://papyrus-uk.org/wp-content/uploads/2018/09/Hope-box.pdf>



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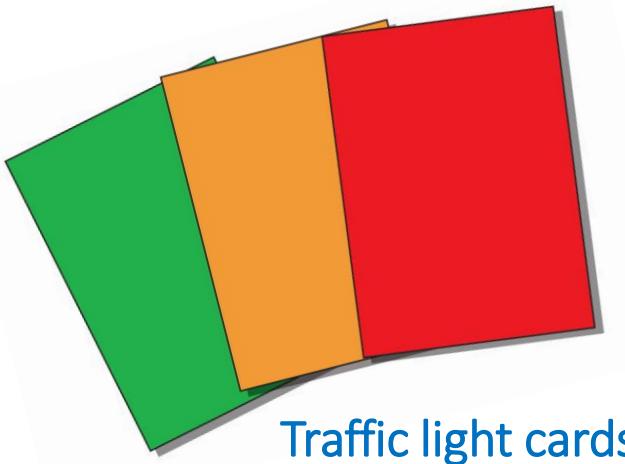
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# How to keep my teen safe

## Prevention plans: When able to engage



Traffic light cards



- |  |  |   |
|--|--|---|
| <b>Taste:</b>  | <b>Deep Breathing:</b>   | <b>Sight:</b>   |
| • hard candy<br>• Gum<br>• Chocolates  | • Bubbles<br>• Party horns<br>• Pin-wheel                      | • Pictures<br>• Calm down jars<br>• I-spy jars  |
| <b>Fidgets:</b>  | <b>Smell:</b>  | <b>Distractions:</b>  |
| • balloons with play-dough in them<br>• Worry stone<br>• Bungee bracelets<br>• Textured fabric<br>• Bubble wrap<br>• Silly putty | • Lotions<br>• Candles<br>• Essential oils<br>• Smelly markers | • word finds<br>• Small puzzles<br>• Coloring pages<br>• List of things that don't fit in the bag (music, hugs, etc.) |



Virtual Hope Box app



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# Recommendations & other support options



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# Apps



CALM HARM

Helps people resist or manage the urge to self-harm.  
Developed by a clinician in collaboration with young people.



Teaches how to look at problems in a different way, turn negative thoughts into positive ones and improve mental wellbeing.



CLEAR FEAR

Provides a range of ways to manage anxiety. Developed by a clinician in collaboration with young people.



headspace®

Uses evidence based meditation and mindfulness methods to support mental health and encourage happiness.



SilverCloud

A course to help manage stress, anxiety and depression.



Thrive

Helps prevent and manage stress and anxiety. The game based app can be used to relax before a stressful situation or on a more regular basis.



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# Websites



[www.mind.org.uk](http://www.mind.org.uk)

Provides information on mental health problems and treatments): Helpline 0300 123 3393 (Mon-Fri 9am – 5pm)



<http://www.papyrus-uk.org/support/for-you>

<http://www.papyrus-uk.org/support/for-parents>

Advice and support for young people dealing with self-harm  
And emotional distress  
and for carers



living  
life to  
the full  
[www.lltf.com](http://www.lltf.com)

[www.livinglifetothefull.com](http://www.livinglifetothefull.com)

Includes a range of booklets, worksheets and computer based self-help modules



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

Support for those worried about a young person's behaviour or mental health. Provides information leaflets.



[www.harmless.org.uk](http://www.harmless.org.uk)

User-led organisation that includes a range of information And support for people who self-harm



MoodGYM  
TRAINING PROGRAM

<https://moodgym.anu.edu.au>

Free web-based CBT programme, including modules on assertiveness and inter-personal skills



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# Talking services & Helplines

"It's alright to ask for help"



116 123

Free confidential 24-hour helpline for those

**shout**

**85258**

**Text SHOUT to 85258**

Free, confidential, 24/7 text support service for those struggling to cope and need mental health support

TALK TO US



[www.talkofftherecord.org](http://www.talkofftherecord.org)

A website where young people can self-refer for online or in person counselling

PAPYRUS

[\*\*0800 068 41 41\*\*](tel:08000684141)

Confidential helpline for anyone concerned about a young person at risk of harming themselves.

10:00-17:00 & 19:00-22:00 – Mon-Fri,  
14:00-17:00 – Sat & Sun

**ChildLine**  
[\*\*0800 1111\*\*](tel:08001111)

[\*\*0800 1111\*\*](tel:08001111)

For under 19 year olds struggling with their mental health.

07:30-15:30 – Mon-Fri,  
09:00-15.30 – Sat-Sun

**kooth**

[www.kooth.com](http://www.kooth.com)

A website offering free, anonymous, online counselling and peer support 24/7, 365 days a year



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# Guided self-help for self-harm / emotion regulation program in school

## What we do

- Work with the schools to provide a program of up to 10 individual sessions with young people you are struggling to regulate their emotions to the point it's significantly affecting their lives.
- The sessions will equip the pupils with practical skills and tools to use when they are struggling to cope with their feelings and emotions.
- Supporting parents and carers through these online workshops and Q&A sessions to help understand and manage their teens difficult emotions/expressions.



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# Guided self-help for self-harm / emotion regulation program in school

## How it works

- Pupil can self-refer using a form obtained at school, staff can also refer.
- Will need to agree to carer consent if under the age of 16, otherwise family wouldn't need to be informed. Any concerning risk issues would be shared however.
- Team will then review referral and if appropriate offer assessment.
- If it felt the service could support young person then sessions will start immediately.

## What if this program isn't right for my teen?

- Pupil may be offered a session offering some skills to support with immediate need.
- Signpost to other appropriate services such as counselling or other talking therapies.



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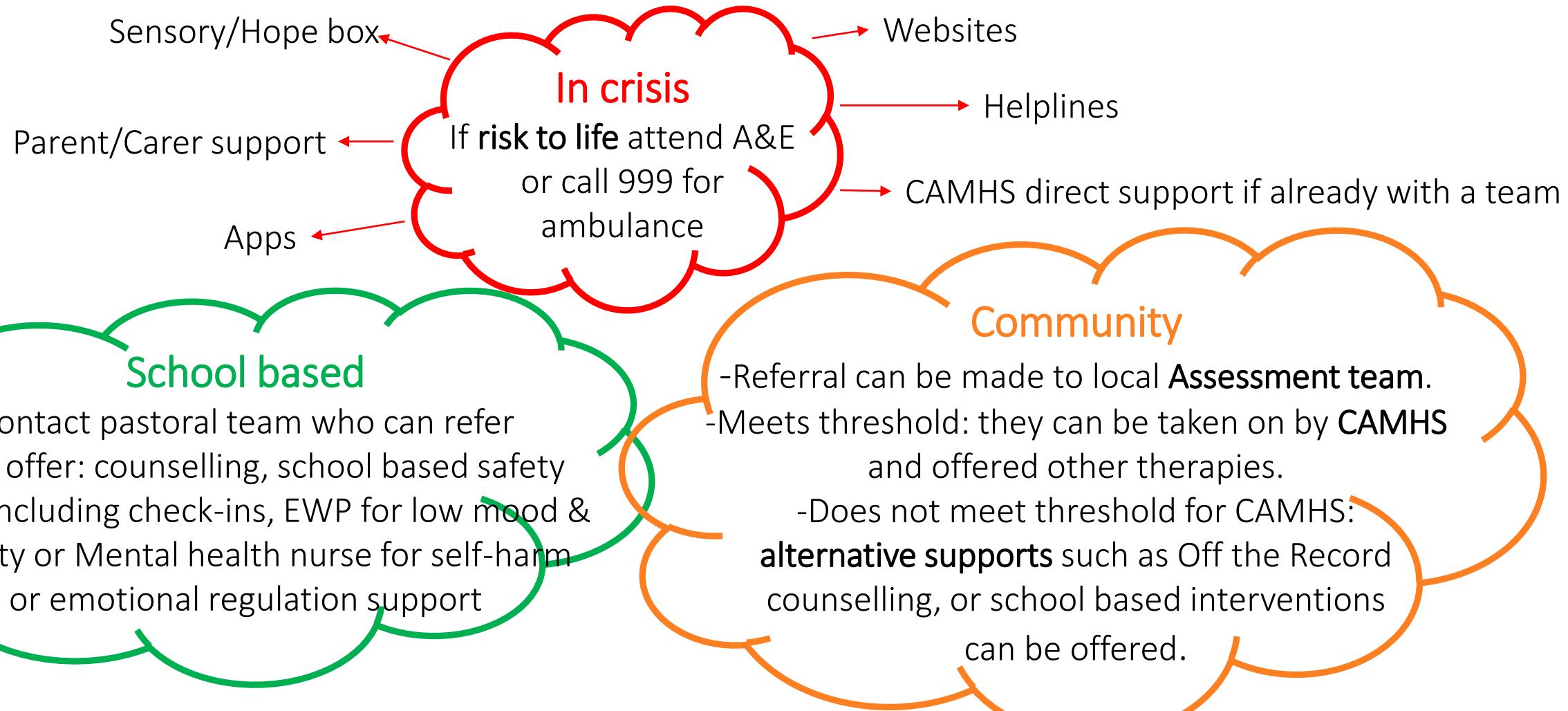


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# Levels of support for your teen



# Many thanks for listening

Please leave any feedback to determine what has been helpful and what you may like me to address in the next session

<https://forms.office.com/r/GvqsFrKhbd>



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