

**The BHS have produced this guidance to support coaches/clubs/centres working with young people and adults 'at risk' to better understand self-harm and to enable them to be more aware of and respond appropriately to the issue.**

More advice is available [www.bhs.org.uk/safeguardingchildren](http://www.bhs.org.uk/safeguardingchildren)

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Self-harming covers a wide range of things that people do to themselves in a deliberate and often hidden way. It often occurs as a way of expressing overwhelming feelings and emotions. Some examples of how self-harm may be expressed by individuals include:

- Cutting
- Burning
- Scalding
- Banging heads and other body parts against walls
- Biting
- Hair pulling
- Ingesting objects and toxins

There has been no single factor shown to predict who will self-harm and it can affect people of all ages, races, genders and backgrounds. Pressures resulting in self-harm could come from home or externally in schools or sports clubs. There has also been no difference in the amount of reported self-harm between different sexes, it has however been shown that young men were more likely to hit and punch themselves, whereas young women were more likely to scratch, tear at their skin or cut themselves.

There are some common characteristics of those who may self-harm, these include:

- Often feels depressed, powerless and anxious
- Experiences low self-esteem/negative body image
- Has difficulty expressing their emotions verbally
- Experiences difficulty with relationships
- Strives for perfection
- Lacks impulse control
- Suppresses their anger
- Experienced possible trauma

This is not an exhaustive list but a good starting point as to what to look for.

## Understanding Self-harm

It is important to understand that everyone's experience of self-harm is unique and that it is deeply personal to that person. People who self-harm will keep it well hidden from friends and family and may go to great lengths to avoid showing the area of their body that they harm.

Due to the close bond and trust that Coaches often develop with their athletes they may become aware of some of the signs of self-harm. But it is important for coaches to understand the level of distress that can lead to self-harm as by taking aware of the means of self-harm without supporting the athlete to address the underlying issues can cause further distress and could make the situation worse.

## What can you do

Many young athletes would prefer to turn to other young people for support but it is important that no young person should feel they have to carry this burden alone. Young people should know they can turn to their Coach/Club Safeguarding officer for support and advice. Often young people just want to be able to talk to someone who will listen in a non-judgemental way and respect them, not necessarily about self-harm but about issues in their daily lives. It is important for coaches/clubs/centres to encourage this culture of respect and providing a safe environment to listen, as it could help to prevent cases of self-harm.

If someone discloses self-harm to you it is important to deal with this in a calm supportive manner, as often the reaction a person receives can affect whether they go on to access support services. Your Club/centre safeguarding officer is there to offer advice and support to you, as is the Safeguarding team at the BHS.

Other useful contacts and links for young people/coaches/clubs/centres:

- Childline [www.childline.org.uk](http://www.childline.org.uk) 0800 1111
- NSPCC [www.nspcc.org.uk](http://www.nspcc.org.uk) 0808 800 5000
- Samaritans UK [www.samaritans.org](http://www.samaritans.org)  
08457 90 90 90

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