

Managing self-harm

Guidance manual for staff and professionals



Preface

This guidance manual gives some suggestions and advice around introducing each session of the young person's 'Managing Self-Harm' workbook. Please adapt the content of your sessions to best fit the needs of your young person and do not feel you have to adhere to each plan prescriptively. It's important that you familiarise yourself with the workbook and exercises before introducing them in session so that there is more space for discussion and reflection.

Introduction

Introduce the workbook normalising that lots of young people struggle with difficult thoughts and feelings. Although self-harm is a way of coping with this the workbook aims to support the young person to understand and learn new skills and strategies to manage distress. Set the expectation that due to the nature of self-harm (and the risk to self this may cause) risk will be assessed and discussed weekly.

Practical components: Emphasise the importance of following each session in order. Introduce the idea of take-home tasks and discuss the support you will be providing. When introducing the take-home tasks it can be helpful to ask the young person to think back on a skill that they have learnt (e.g. a sport or musical instrument) and prompt them to think about what helped them to become proficient in this (often practice, time and guidance from others). Draw parallels between learning that skill and mastering the skills in the workbook. Ensure that you emphasise that the workbook alone is not a 'magic cure' but that with practice they have been shown to be helpful for lots of young people.

Support team: Normalise asking for support if needed. Raise the possibility that talking about self-harm and the reasons for this can make us more aware of the difficult thoughts and feelings we are experiencing. Building awareness is an important first step towards making changes and feeling better. However remind them that if they notice feeling upset, they can seek support from a parent, tutor or yourself. Show them the notes section at the back of the workbook which they can use to write down any worries or questions so that you can discuss them together in your session.



Exercise one: My workbook plan

To support engagement and motivation encourage the young person to make a plan of when they are going to complete the take home tasks.

Session one: First aid kit

Aims of session:

- Education about how to support physical and emotional wellbeing when self-harming.
- Education about treating self-harm injuries, when to seek medical attention and how self-harm is managed at A&E.
- Develop understanding of self-harming behaviour and create a safety plan.

Check in: Outcome measures, review risk and how week has been. Check if young person has anything to add to the session agenda.

Introducing the session: Normalise that for many young people self-harm can feel like the only way of coping with distressing thoughts and feelings. The hope is that by completing this workbook the young person will learn new strategies and skills to manage their distress without harming themselves. In the meantime, whilst self-harm is a current coping strategy, we need to ensure this is done as safely as possible. Emphasise that the purpose of this session is not to condone or encourage the young person to self-harm but to help reduce the risk if stopping self-harm isn't immediately possible.



Exercise two: My first aid kit plan

Review the recommended first aid kit together and complete the plan, outlining what the young person has access to and problem solve how they can purchase any missing items.



Exercise three: Emotional first aid kit

Discuss other strategies the young person might have access to, to help them manage the urge to self-harm. Ask the young person to recall a time where they wanted to self-harm but managed to refrain from doing so. Ask what helped them with this? What did they do instead? Did anyone support them at the time? List any suggestions around the first aid box. Review some of the suggestions listed and discuss whether any of these have been helpful to the young person in the past. Reiterate that the workbook will help provide more strategies to add to the young person's 'emotional first aid kit'.

Treating self-harm injuries: Elicit what information is already known about treating different self-harm injuries from the young person and add to this by reviewing the spider diagram together. Emphasise the key information around when to seek medical attention. Ask the young person if they have sought medical attention in the past and how they knew that this was needed? Link this back to the information sheet. Make sure that you discuss how shock can present physically and the importance of getting medical attention for this too.

Attending A&E: Support the young person to identify where their nearest A & E department is and how they might attend there if needed.

Ask the young person if they have had to attend A & E due to self-harm in the past. Ask them to discuss the process and what they recall about what happened. Support their knowledge about the process by reviewing the 'What happens when I Attend A & E' flow chart together.



Exercise four: Body map

We know that some young people can experience shame and secrecy around self-harming behaviours. This workbook aims to support young people to begin openly discussing their self-harm behaviour so they can access appropriate support when needed. Through conversation, support the young person to indicate on the body map where they most self-harm. If they haven't self-harmed for some time, ask them to identify where they used to self-harm. Ask where the young person most frequently self-harms and make sure this is outlined on the body map.



Exercise five: Safety plan

Bringing together what has been discussed in the session collaboratively create a safety plan with the young person outlining the triggers to self-harm, what helps and how others can support them. Make sure you review the support services available inside/outside of working hours. Assess the young person's confidence in accessing this support and appropriately reassure, challenge or problem solve any worries or obstacles to utilising this.



Take home task

Think with the young person about how they can make sure their safety plan is accessible. Would it be helpful to print it out? Where would they put it so they could see it when needed? Would taking a photo be useful? Who would they like to share the safety plan with? (e.g. parents/teachers etc.).

Review and feedback: Review how the young person is currently feeling. Elicit a rating of distress from 0-10, where 10 is very distressed and 0 is not distressed at all. If the young person is feeling distressed, support them to think of ways they can feel calmer and supported after the session. Would it be helpful to talk to a family member? Is there an activity from their emotional first aid kit that they could engage in to help them manage?

Elicit feedback about what was helpful, unhelpful and what could be done differently next time. Encourage young person to articulate what their take home message is from the session.

Session two: Understanding self-harm

Aims of session:

- Increase understanding of the factors contributing to self-harming and the reasons why someone may self-harm.
- Education about the prevalence of self-harm and the short-term/long-term effects of self-harm.
- Begin building motivation to change self-harming behaviours.
- Understand triggers to self-harm.

Check in: Outcome measures, review risk and how the young person's week has been. Check if young person has anything to add to the session agenda.

Take home task review: Discuss whether the young person had to use their safety plan at all over the last week. Explore whether this helped them to manage their distress? If not, what would need to change? Problem solve any obstacles together.

Introducing the session: Today's session will help the young person to understand their self-harming including how self-harm developed, what triggers self-harm and what are the effects of self-harming.



Exercise six: Methods of self-harm

Building on challenging stigma and encouraging an open conversation about self-harm, normalise that the young person is not on their own in using self-harm as a coping strategy. Ask them to indicate on the spider diagram which methods of self-harm they have used in the last month. Explore the frequency and severity of this. Re-establish risk management plan if indicated.



Exercise seven: What makes someone self-harm?

The table outlines some of the factors that might contribute to a young person self-harming. Review and discuss these together and support the young person to circle any that are relevant to them. There is space for the young person to add any factors that might not have been included. Validate any emotion that might arise when discussing this and normalise that it is understandable how experiencing some of these events or factors would be distressing and lead to self-harm.

Who self-harms: Review the statistics together. Ask the young person whether any of the statistics are surprising.



Exercise seven: Effects of self-harm

Explain that although it can feel like self-harming relieves distress in the short-term it can lead to more difficulties in the long-term. Support the young person to highlight or circle any of the effects that apply to them and to add any that might be missing.

Why people want to stop self-harming: Review some of the quotes given by others who self-harm. Ask for the young person's feedback when reviewing these together. Can they relate to any of the quotes? Ask them their reasons for wanting to stop or manage self-harm, what led them to agree to work through the workbook in the first instance? List these in the box and encourage the young person to review these if they are feeling the urge to self-harm or feel they are losing motivation.



Take home task: Self-harm triggers diary

Introduce the diary as a good way of identifying and understanding what situations, feelings, thoughts or experiences might lead to self-harm. The diary also helps to consolidate some of the ideas introduced in the session including the short-term/long-term effects of self-harm as well as positive coping strategies. Ask the young person to record 'urges' to self-harm as well as incidences of self-harm.

Review and feedback: Review how the young person is currently feeling. Elicit a rating of distress from 0-10, where 10 is very distressed and 0 is not distressed at all. If the young person is feeling distressed, support them to think of ways they can feel calmer and supported after the session. Would it be helpful to talk to a family member? Is there an activity from their emotional first aid kit that they could engage in to help them manage?

Elicit feedback about what was helpful, unhelpful and what could be done differently next time. Encourage young person to articulate what their take home message is from the session.

Session three: What keeps my self-harm going?

Aims of session:

- Identify what 'vicious cycles' of thoughts, feelings and behaviours might maintain self-harming behaviours.
- Support the young person to identify helpful/unhelpful cycles and to think of things they could do differently to manage distress.

Check in: Outcome measures, review risk and how week has been. Check if young person has anything to add to the session agenda.

Take home task review: Review the **self-harm triggers diary**. Support the young person to identify patterns or links between specific situations and self-harm urges/incidences. Add any newly identified triggers to the safety plan created in session one. Praise any efforts made by the young person to try other ways of coping with self-harm (as identified in the 'did anything help?' column). Add any new helpful strategies to the emotional first aid kit/my first aid kit in session one. Explore the links between short-term and long-term effects in maintaining self-harm behaviours.

Introducing the session: Today's session builds on session two by furthering the young person's understanding of what might contribute to self-harming behaviours. We will specifically look at the role our thoughts play in affecting our feelings, physical sensations and behaviours so we can identify what might need to change in order to feel better.

Bio-psycho-social factors: Review the self-harm cycle together. Link this back to the discussions around the self-harm triggers diary and the short-term/long-term effects identified in this. Discuss whether the long-term effects identified in the diary might maintain self-harming behaviours as identified in the cycle. **Note:** it is important to not direct the young person to make these conclusions but to curiously wonder about this with them. Support the young person to write any notes or reflections in the box below the cycle.

Making sense of self-harm: This part of the session aims to introduce the ideas from cognitive-behaviour therapy (CBT) and the role thoughts play in maintaining difficult feelings and behaviours. Review and discuss the cycle together and how this can become a 'negative' cycle if our thoughts are unhelpful and negative.



Exercise nine: Mapping out Sam's cycle

Read through the example of Sam and support the young person to plot Sam's thoughts, feelings, physical sensations and behaviours. Use the questions in the table below the cycle to prompt discussion around whether the cycle is helpful or not and what the young person thinks Sam could do differently. Wonder with the young person whether this cycle could be similar to their own? If not, what would be different?



Take home task: Mapping your own cycle

Ask the young person to reflect on the last time they self-harmed and to map their thoughts, feelings, physical sensations and behaviours around this situation. Advise them to refer to the self-harm triggers diary if they are struggling to think of a specific situation. There are a series of questions that the young person can then review to think about what they might be able to do differently to break a negative or unhelpful cycle.

Review and feedback: Review how the young person is currently feeling. Elicit a rating of distress from 0-10, where 10 is very distressed and 0 is not distressed at all. If the young person is feeling distressed, support them to think of ways they can feel calmer and supported after the session. Would it be helpful to talk to a family member? Is there an activity from their emotional first aid kit that they could engage in to help them manage?

Elicit feedback about what was helpful, unhelpful and what could be done differently next time. Encourage young person to articulate what their take home message is from the session.

Session four: Coping with self-harm

Aims of session:

- Introduce different coping strategies and techniques to manage distressing thoughts and feelings.

Check in: Outcome measures, review risk and how week has been. Check if young person has anything to add to the session agenda.

Take home task review - Mapping my cycle: Ask young person to discuss the cycle they completed between sessions. How easy did they find this task? Was there anything challenging about it? Problem solve any obstacles that might have prevented the young person from completing the task. Go through the questions listed along with the take home task (on page 17) to support the young person to feel empowered to change this cycle should the situation occur again.

Introducing the session: It can be difficult to stop self-harming if a young person feels like it is the only thing that eases their distress. This session aims to equip the young person with a variety of different skills and strategies they can use to manage difficult emotions instead of self-harming.

Mindfulness and relaxation exercises: Provide the rationale that when we are feeling distressed or overwhelmed we often experience this physically. Refer back to the take home task to emphasise these links if present. Explain that learning to relax our body can lead to our mind feeling calmer too. Similarly when we are caught up in distressing thoughts, images or memories it can be helpful to come back to the present moment and back to our bodies.

Review the different strategies and practice them together in session.

- **Grounding techniques** refer to using your senses to 'ground' yourself back in the present moment as opposed to being caught up in difficult thoughts and feelings. This asks the young person to note five things they can see, four things they can touch, three things they can hear, two things they can smell and one thing they can taste.
- **Deep breathing** encourages our parasympathetic nervous system (the rest/digest) which helps to calm any adrenaline released when we are feeling overwhelmed or anxious. Demonstrate breathing in for the count of four, holding until the count of seven and slowly releasing on the count of eight. If the young person prefers a visual aid, they can trace the outline of their hand, breathing in as they trace up a finger and breathing out as they trace down it.
- **Diaphragmatic breathing** encourages the young person to take a slow deep breath engaging their abdomen/diaphragm rather than their chest. When we are overwhelmed or anxious it is common to have shallow breaths which can escalate feelings of distress and tension.

Self-soothing exercises: Explain that it can be helpful to learn to soothe ourselves when we feel distressed.

- **Mindful glitter jar:** Rather than being caught up in distressing thoughts or feelings, making a mindful glitter jar is one way of keeping your focus on the present by breathing slowly and watching the glitter settle.
- **Calm kit/relax box:** Having a box with soothing and calming items in can be helpful to have at hand when the young person is feeling distressed. Filling the box with sensory items can help ground the young person back into their body and the present moment.

It could be a good idea to bring in an example box you have created yourself and explore what is inside and why you have put those items in the box. Discuss with the young person what they might include in their box. Why have they chosen their objects? This can be a fun activity embracing young people's creative skills.

Encourage the young person to write/ draw ideas for what to include in the box and if possible begin to put one together. It might be that they want to bring in what they have done in the following session to share. Encourage the young person to think about letting someone else know about the box, so they can be on board with the activity and know where the box can be found and possibly brought to them.

Explore with the young person if they might consider a scaled down version of the box that might be transportable. What could they include in their college bag or pencil case that might help when in class or out and about.

Visualisation exercise - Safe place imagery: Just as thoughts can affect our feelings, physical sensations and behaviours, we know that imagery can be just as powerful. To demonstrate this ask the young person if they would be willing to close their eyes and bring to mind their favourite meal. Ask them to describe the meal in lots of details drawing on sensory aspects such as what they can see, smell, taste etc. Ask the young person to open their eyes and note if there are any changes in their body. Most young people will report salivating and this can be a helpful way of reinforcing the links between imagery and our body. On a similar vein if we can bring to mind a safe, calm, relaxing image this can help our body to feel calmer too.

Instructions for introducing the safe place imagery exercise: Make sure you check out if the young person is comfortable with completing the imagery exercise.

Reiterate that they are in control and can stop the exercise at any point if they want to.

Read the following:

"If you notice any negative links or images entering your positive imagery, then discard that image and think of something else. Avoid using your home (or bed) as a 'safe place'. You can create a new 'safe place' in your imagination.

Start by getting comfortable in a quiet place where you won't be disturbed, and take a couple of minutes to focus on your breathing, close your eyes, become aware of any tension in your body, and let that tension go with each out-breath.

Read through the bullet points for the imagery exercise on page 21.



Exercise ten: Capturing my safe place

On completion encourage the young person to capture this safe place in picture or written form in the worksheet on page 22.



Exercise eleven: Adding to your emotional first aid kit

Support the young person to add any of the strategies/skills to their emotional first aid kit initially started in session one. They can either write these afresh around the first aid box or add to the worksheet from session one.



Take home task: Putting it into practice

Ask the young person to try out some of the strategies from the session over the next week. Explain that they don't need to use the strategies when they are distressed but can use them at any point-emphasise that the more they practice the strategies when they are feeling less distressed the easier it will be to use them when feeling overwhelmed. Introduce the 'managing self-harm urges' record sheet and ask the young person to indicate whether any of the strategies are helpful or not. The aim of doing this is to broaden the coping skills available to the young person at times when the urge to self-harm rises.

Review and feedback: Review how the young person is currently feeling. Elicit a rating of distress from 0-10, where 10 is very distressed and 0 is not distressed at all. If the young person is feeling distressed, support them to think of ways they can feel calmer and supported after the session. Would it be helpful to talk to a family member? Is there an activity from their emotional first aid kit that they could engage in to help them manage?

Elicit feedback about what was helpful, unhelpful and what could be done differently next time. Encourage young person to articulate what their take home message is from the session.

Session five: Moving on from self-harm

Aims of session:

- Consolidate learning from the workbook.
- Develop a **staying well plan**.

Check in: Outcome measures, review risk and how week has been. Check if young person has anything to add to the session agenda.

Take home task review - Putting it into practice

Introducing the session: Today's session aims to bring together all of the work that you have completed over the last several weeks. We will start thinking about the future and how you can continue making improvements now we have come to the end of our work together.

Outcome measures: Review scores on outcome measures across the weeks and discuss any changes. Have things improved? If so what has helped with this? If things have not improved, what does the young person need to do to make a change? And what further support do they need to achieve this?



Exercise twelve: My life without self-harm

Support the young person to list all of the benefits to moving on from self-harm. Explain that they can refer back to this in the future so help them stay connected to their reasons for wanting to change and learn other strategies to manage their self-harm.

Review: Discuss recovery expectations-not a linear path but one that is up and down. Normalise that all of us have set backs but that doesn't take away the skills and knowledge acquired by completing this workbook.

Think with young person about what strengths and values they have demonstrated by being able to complete this workbook. Consider how they can harness these to continue the hard work and keep the momentum going.

Review the sessions including the main conversations, individual themes that came up for this young person and the strategies they have found most helpful.

Support young person to set Specific Measurable Achievable Relevant Time bound (SMART) goals for the future and plan how they will achieve these. Complete the wellbeing plan together.



Exercise thirteen: My keeping well plan

Explore young person's concerns about sessions ending-do they anticipate any obstacles or difficulties in the near future? Think with them about how they can manage these by completing the table outlining the situation and actions.

Drawing on your social network: Explain the importance of having social support in order to keep making improvements and managing difficult days in the future. Introduce the circle diagram and review the example together.



Exercise fourteen: Mapping my social network

Support the young person to position all the important relationships, people and support they have in their lives on the circle diagram.

A letter to yourself: The purpose of this task is for the young person to continue consolidating their learning from the workbook, reframing negative thoughts and demonstrating self-compassion by being kind and caring towards themselves.

Tips: Support the young person to consider the type of language they may use, avoiding self-critical statements, focus on showing empathy and warmth towards themselves.

Feedback: Elicit feedback about what was helpful, unhelpful and what could be done differently. Encourage young person to articulate what their take home message is from the session and overall learning.

Closing session: Discuss taking period of time to consolidate learning and apply skills. Explain re-referral route to MindMate Support Team if additional support is needed in future.