

Mental Health & Wellbeing at the Bar

Self Harm



Wellbeing
at the Bar

Self Harm

Self-harm is defined as 'when somebody intentionally damages or injures their body. It's usually a way of coping with or expressing overwhelming emotional distress' (see <http://www.nhs.uk/conditions/Self-injury/Pages/Introduction.aspx>)

This is a mental health issue that can be successfully treated.

Self-harm

Self-harm can be psychological e.g. [alcohol/drug abuse](#) and [eating problems](#), or it can take the form of physical injury such as cutting, burning or pinching. The urge to self-harm can be very strong and become addictive.

As a student or pupil it can be difficult to balance competing demands from members of chambers, clerks, other colleagues, solicitors and family. Self-harm can become a coping mechanism for those who struggle with managing stress at work. There are other alternatives discussed below.

How to talk to someone about your self-harming?

1. Find your confidant – choose the person you feel most comfortable opening up to. It does not have to be someone within Chambers or your place of work. Some people might prefer to talk to someone that does not know them or their situation.
2. Good timing - try to find a time that suits you both, and when you can discuss it privately. Also take into account any looming deadlines, or potential conflicts in your schedules.
3. Prepare for others' reactions – This is a difficult conversation to have. People may be pleased that you feel comfortable enough to open up, but they may also be shocked, upset or dismissive. Try and give people the time to process it, as they may be worried about the impact of their words and actions on you going forward.

So, I know I may have a problem. Now what?

It is quite difficult to overcome your feelings and manifestation of self-harm on your own. As well as speaking to someone you trust about this issue, it is important that you also seek professional support and help as soon as possible.

Some avenues to consider are:

- Your GP
- Self-Help Courses – your GP may refer you to self-help courses. Public peer to peer support forums available to discuss your issues and meet others who have experienced the same challenges.

- Online support - You may like to approach some of the Peer support groups online. This can be a good way to maintain your anonymity, while still getting the help you need.
- Books – there are a number of books on this issue. It may be useful to read up on self-harm, and also explore other ways of coping.

How to start a conversation with a colleague you suspect is self-harming?

1. Think – before you approach someone. Do not assume, but think of kind things you will say so that you are not caught off-guard if your colleague is defensive. Remember that your colleague may be dealing with a number of stressful factors, and the last thing you want to do is add to their burden with any judgment. Consider, is it your place to speak to them or is there someone more appropriate who knows them better or can relate in a more effective way?
2. Good timing – try to find a time that suits you both, and when you can discuss it privately. Also take into account their schedule, and any looming deadlines.
3. Be patient – they may not feel comfortable opening up from the outset. Do bear in mind that this might be the first time they have to confront their issue, so be patient.

Where can I find out more about self-harm?

- <https://www.selfharm.co.uk/>
- <http://www.lifesigns.org.uk/>
- <http://www.mind.org.uk/information-support/types-of-mental-health-problems/self-harm/how-can-i-help-myself/>
- <http://www.nhs.uk/conditions/Self-injury/Pages/Introduction.aspx>