

Having the first conversation

The sooner we encourage a young person to disclose their self-harm, the sooner we are able to provide or seek appropriate support to help them break the cycle. We can do so by passing our concerns on to a safeguarding officer or by providing a safe space for the young person to talk to us.

The most supportive first conversation is one where:

- you are realistic and upfront about confidentiality
- the young person is the sole focus of your attention
- you spend most of your time listening, not talking
- the young person tells their story, you never guess or assume
- there is a feeling of acceptance and support, not judgement
- self-harm is not dismissed as attention seeking
- this is recognised as the first step of a difficult journey
- clear next steps are identified and followed up promptly
- you recognise how hard this conversation must be for the young person
- you respond calmly – even if you don't feel calm

See below for tips on what can help when having a conversation with a young person and what to try and avoid.

What can you do to help?

Listen non judgementally

Talk to any others involved

Recognise your limitations and refer to appropriate service for clinical assessment

Explain what is going to happen next

Encourage young person to identify their own support network and encourage them to access other support

Acknowledge emotional distress

Show care and respect

Ensure that you have time and space to reflect

Try to avoid..

Engaging in power struggles; demanding 'just stop'

Reacting with horror or discomfort

Asking abrupt or rapid questions

Accusing them of attention seeking

Threats or getting angry

Promising to keep things secret

Getting frustrated

Ignoring other warning signs