

Eating disorders & self-harm

On the rise among under 10's

The emotional well-being of children and young people is just as important as their physical health. Children can feel isolated, unhappy, have eating disorders and self-harm; some tragically take their own lives.

Mental health problems affect about 1 in 10 children and young people. They include depression, anxiety and conduct disorder, and are often a direct response to what is happening in their lives.

Self-harm is generally a way of coping with overwhelming emotional distress. Children who hurt themselves often feel that physical pain is easier to deal with than the emotional pain they are experiencing. This only provides temporary relief and fails to deal with the underlying issues.

If you think your child may be hurting themselves talk to them, do not be cross or judge them. Offer them your time and attention to talk to you. You may find they are being bullied or are worried about school, or about becoming an adult. With your help you can overcome their problems together. Speak to the school nurse who may suggest you see your GP who may make an appointment with a healthcare professional who can help.

Eating disorders

Eating disorders can be seen as a form of self-harm. The two most common eating problems are anorexia nervosa and bulimia nervosa. It is believed that eating problems are seven to 10 times more common in girls than boys. Binge eating disorder (sometimes described as compulsive eating), is when an individual feels they cannot stop themselves from eating, and rely on food for emotional support or to mask difficult feelings.

Which child is most at risk?

There are some risk factors that can make some children more likely to experience problems than others. Some of the risk factors include:

- Having a long-term physical illness.
- Having a parent who has problems with alcohol or drugs.
- Being exposed to others who self-harm.
- Having a parent who has had mental health problems.
- Experiencing the death of a loved one.
- Having parents who are separated.
- Being severely bullied or abused.
- Living in poverty.
- Experiencing discrimination.
- Living in care.

- Taking on adult responsibilities at a young age.

Things that can help keep children and young people mentally well include:

- Being in good physical health, eating a balanced diet and getting regular exercise.
- Having time and the freedom to play, indoors and outdoors.
- Being part of a family that gets along well most of the time.
- Going to a school that looks after the well-being of all its pupils.
- Taking part in activities.

1

My daughter is cutting her arms and hiding it from me.

2

It's normal to be worried, afraid or even angry.

3

Do not make her feel worse by making her ashamed. Tell her you are there to listen and to get her help.