

Self-Harm - myths and misconceptions

KS4

25mins

A quiz which challenges some of the myths that exist around self-harm.

What you need:

- A set of true and false cards for each group of students
- An answer/ tally sheet for teams to record their scores

Method

- The students are divided into teams of 6/7
- Explain that there are a lot of myths and misconceptions about self-harm and they are going to see how much they know
- A series of statements are read out and the students must decide as a team if they are true or false recording their answer on an answer sheet.
- When all the questions have been asked the answers are given along with an explanation and further information.
- The winning team is the one with the highest score at the end of the quiz

Statements

1. Self-harm is about 'attention seeking'.

TRUE or FALSE

- Self-harm is often seen as a cry for help, a ploy to gain attention or as a form of manipulation. However more often than not self-harm is a very private and hidden behaviour that does not involve anyone else.
- It may have been going on for a long period of time and it can be very hard for young people to find enough courage to ask for help.
- Some people will take great care to hide their injuries and scars through shame, embarrassment or fear. They may conceal injuries under clothing and jewelry or make up excuses and explanations.
- A large number of people who self-harm treat their wounds themselves at home rather than seeking medical help.
- Other individuals who do let people know about their self-harm may do this as they have no other way to communicate how they are feeling. Self-harm for these individuals may be a cry for help. If someone goes to these extremes it is clear that they are in distress. They shouldn't be ignored. There are plenty of others ways to gain attention which don't involve causing yourself pain? And if someone's asking for help, we should give it to them, not judge the way they're asking for it.

2. Self-harm is often a group activity

TRUE or FALSE

- It's very rarely a group activity. Young people told the National Self-Harm Inquiry, which took evidence from many hundreds of people, that they couldn't say how many people they knew who self-harmed, because no one wants to talk about it. The Inquiry could find no evidence to support the belief that this behaviour may be part of a particular youth sub-culture.

3. Self-harm is closely linked to suicide

TRUE or FALSE

- The belief that self-harm is closely linked to suicide frightens people. But the vast majority of young people who self-harm are not trying to kill themselves – they are trying to cope with difficult feelings and circumstances – for many it is a way of staying alive.
- However it is also true to say that many people who take their own life have self-harmed in the past, and this is one of the many reasons that self-harm must be taken very seriously.
- It is unlikely however that self-harm is the cause of such suicidal feelings. It is far more likely to be due to the reasons which are also triggering the self-harm, such as abuse, bullying, financial worries etc. rather than an extension of the self-harm itself.
- A survey of 758 respondents carried out by NSHN in 2009 showed that only 4% of these individuals stated that it was suicidal feelings that led to any of their individual incidents of self-harm. The feelings most often reported were self-hatred, anger, frustration and worthlessness.

4. The most common form of self-harm is cutting

TRUE or FALSE

- Cutting the arms or the back of the legs is the most common form of self-harming, but it can take many forms, including burning, biting, hitting and taking overdoses.

5. One in twelve children and young people are said to self-harm

TRUE or FALSE

- Over the last ten years inpatient admissions for young people who have self-harmed have increased by 68%.
- In the last year alone these hospital admissions for under 25s increased by 10%.
- And, among females under 25, there has been a 77% increase in the last ten years.

6. The more serious the injury, the more serious the problem

TRUE or FALSE

- It is important to take all injuries seriously as the nature of the wound does not represent the extent of the anguish being experienced.
- As one young person put it, "I feel it is inappropriate to 'measure' self-harm in such a way. Yes, it may be useful to have some idea of the frequency and intensity and perhaps gain some understanding from that but I do not believe a) the amount of blood, b) number of scars/cuts is going to give you anywhere near the full story of what is going on."
- "If you meet someone who self-harms it is fundamental to treat them as an individual with respect and care, do not bother trying to gauge what is going on in their head by the number of stitches they need." (Gerard, 24.)

7. They must like the pain

TRUE or FALSE

- Self-harm is not about liking pain. It is a way to cope with thoughts and feelings that are depressing or distressing and to regain some control over how you feel. A lot of the time, individuals who self-harm do not actually feel any pain due to adrenaline, instead they feel a release.
- Self-harm can also be a mechanism that allows individuals to 'feel' something as the feeling of being emotionally numb and empty are common symptoms of depression. Such feelings of pain can also be used to 'ground' oneself in reality when feeling disassociated such as during flashbacks, common with Post Traumatic Stress

Disorder or in manic episodes, experienced by people with Bi-polar Disorder.

8. 50% of cases of self-harm are among 17-24 year olds. TRUE or FALSE

- Results from an NSHN survey (390 respondents) would suggest this is true.

What age are you?

9.5%	Under 16
50.3%	17 - 25
21.7%	26 - 34
12.1%	35 - 44
5.9%	45 - 54
0.5%	55 - 64
0%	65 plus

- But it is not only the young that self-harm, people of all ages self-harm.

9. People who self-harm can stop easily if they want to. TRUE or FALSE

- Self-harm is very often a coping mechanism; therefore it is very difficult for someone to stop without learning new ways of coping. Triggers for self-harm such as abuse, bullying etc. are unlikely to be resolved overnight. Recovery can be a slow process. It is possible that self-harm can also turn into a habit that is difficult to resist. Therefore it can be a great struggle to stop even if you want to, the same way it would be for somebody trying to give up smoking or drinking to excess. Individuals may need a great deal of support to move away from using self-harm as a method of coping.

10. Self-harm is not the problem. If we stop the self-harm it doesn't mean that the person will then be fine. TRUE or FALSE

- Self-harm is rarely the problem, but a coping mechanism until other issues are resolved. The reasons behind an individual's self-harm need to be addressed in order to aid a recovery from self-harm.



