



Self-Harm

AN INFORMATION BOOKLET FOR YOUNG PEOPLE WHO SELF HARM
& THOSE WHO CARE FOR THEM

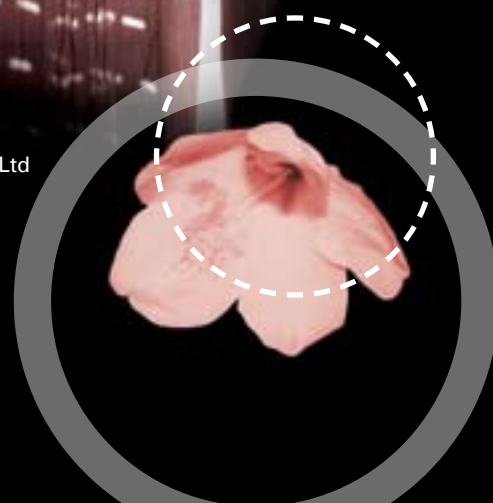


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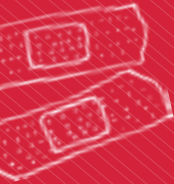
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SELF HARM

– An Information Booklet For Young People Who Self Harm And Those Who Care For Them

This booklet was put together in recognition that self harm can be one of the most challenging problems a young person or the people who care for them have to face. We hope this booklet will give you some understanding of why you or someone you know hurts themselves. We also hope this booklet gives you ideas about ways to help someone who self harms, or ways you might stop if you want to. Whether you are someone who self harms or are caring for someone who does, always seek the assistance of a health professional where possible.



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1. GENERAL INFORMATION

Being someone who self harms or being close to someone who self harms is tough. Understanding why someone close to you hurts themselves can be very difficult, even scary. People have all sorts of feelings about self harm including fear, anger, frustration, helplessness and worry.

Self harm is a common health problem for young people. About 25,000 Australians are admitted to hospital each year because of self harm. Two out of three emergency appointments to child and youth health services are because of self harm. For every teenager who goes to one of these services, there are nine others in the community who have self harmed. Adults who self harm are 100 times more likely to suicide.

"SELF HARM IS A COMMON HEALTH PROBLEM FOR YOUNG PEOPLE."

Between 1 to 4% of young males and 1 to 10% of young females will self harm. The most frequent types of self harm in teenagers include cutting, overdosing and poisoning and to a lesser degree, head banging, burning, strangling themselves and jumping from heights. Poisoning and overdosing are the behaviours most likely to attract medical attention, although cutting is the most common form of self harm in young people.



People self harm for different reasons although it is usually linked to anxiety, depression and anger. Self harming does not always mean that you want to commit suicide, that you are “looking for attention” or you are being manipulative.

Young people who self harm do so as a way to cope with emotions and situations they feel are too hard to deal with. Some young people don't know how to put this pain into words and self harm is the only way to show others the hurt inside. For someone to hurt themselves by cutting or burning their body, they must be suffering a lot.

FOR SOMEONE TO HURT THEMSELF BY CUTTING OR BURNING THEIR BODY, THEY MUST BE SUFFERING A LOT.



2. WHAT IS SELF HARMING?


Self harming has different names. Some of these are:

**CUTTING
SELF-MUTILATION
SELF-INFLICTED VIOLENCE
PARASUICIDE
SELF-ABUSE**

Just as self harming has lots of different names it also has lots of definitions. One way of defining self harm is:

**WHEN SOMEONE DELIBERATELY HURTS
THEMSELVES WITHOUT WANTING TO KILL
THEMSELVES.**





Most people would think of cutting when they think of self harming. The reality is that there are lots of behaviours that are self harm. Some of these are:

CUTTING WITH RAZORS, KNIVES OR SHARP OBJECTS

TAKING AN OVERDOSE OF MEDICATION OR DRINKING POISON

BURNING YOURSELF

SCRATCHING WHICH RESULTS IN BLEEDING OR WELTS

PICKING AT SKIN

PULLING HAIR

HITTING YOURSELF WITH YOUR FISTS OR SOMETHING ELSE

PUNCHING WALLS OR OBJECTS TO HURT YOURSELF


If you are not sure whether you are self harming or if you are worried about someone else's behaviour, here are some questions you might want to ask:

DO YOU deliberately hurt yourself in a way which breaks the skin, leaves marks that last for a while or scars you?

DO YOU deliberately do things to yourself which you should go to the doctor for?

DO YOU hurt yourself as a way of getting rid of horrible feelings, dealing with difficult situations or because you feel numb?

These are questions you might like to think about. If you want some real answers, the best thing to do is talk to a health professional or someone you trust.



3. WH[?] DO PEOPLE SELF HARM?

People hurt themselves because it is the only thing they can think of doing to cope. Self harming can be a way of dealing with feelings of sadness, depression, guilt, anger, hate, fear, anxiousness, low self esteem, loneliness, shame, and numbness.



Some reasons people self harm include:

FEELING UPSET, ANGRY OR SCARED and the only way to stop these feelings is by hurting themselves

HAVING A HORRIBLE FEELING building up inside and cutting is the only way to let it out

FEELING ALONE AND ISOLATED from everybody and hurting themselves is the only way they feel 'real' or 'connected'

FEELING OUT OF CONTROL and cutting or hurting themselves is the only way they feel in control

FEELING RESPONSIBLE for everything and everyone

FEELING NUMB and the only way they feel is by causing pain

IT CAN MAKE THE PAIN YOU FEEL INSIDE visible and when it is visible, it's easier to understand

FEELING LIKE others only care about them if something bad happens

FEELING LIKE everything is hopeless

SELF HARMING can be a way of punishing them – selves or others for something

FEELING BAD about themselves and

FEELING LIKE they have no one to talk to.





PEOPLE HURT THEMSELVES BECAUSE IT IS THE ONLY THING THEY CAN THINK OF DOING TO COPE.

Some people who self harm have experienced physical abuse or suffer from anxiety. Other people have experienced sexual or emotional abuse, lost a family member or were not treated well as a child. This can create stress and pain in people's lives. Sometimes this leads people to stop the pain by hurting themselves. However, not all people that self harm have been abused or experienced big losses.

People who self harm have difficulty coping with and talking about their emotions. Because of this, these emotions can build up and feel too much. Self harm can seem like the only thing that will make these emotions go away or to feel something different.

People who self harm may not like themselves or their bodies. They may have difficulties with relationships, not be able to talk about what is going on or be depressed, anxious or stressed. It is important to understand that whatever the reason you self harm, there are other ways of dealing with the way you feel.





4. WHY DO PEOPLE KEEP DOING IT?

Some people say that self harm helps take away the emotional pain and that this seems like the only way.

If something makes us feel better, then we tend to keep doing it. In this way, self harming is like an **ADDICTIVE BEHAVIOUR**. Like a drug, self harming when you feel like you are not coping can make you feel better. Because you feel better, you keep doing it.

Something that is addictive is really hard to give up. When people find hurting themselves brings relief, it can become their main way of dealing with problems – this can start to affect their life in a negative way. What is important to understand is that **SELF HARMING IS JUST ONE WAY OF DEALING WITH THINGS** and that **THERE ARE OTHER WAYS!**

Some other reasons why people find it difficult to stop self harming include:

WONDERING WHAT THEY WILL DO to cope instead of self harming

WONDERING WHETHER PEOPLE will still show they care if they don't see the cuts and scars

WONDERING WHETHER PEOPLE will still know that they are hurting if they don't see any injuries

LETTING GO OF SELF HARMING is like letting go of a familiar part of yourself "Who will I be if I don't self harm?"

WORRYING THAT THEY MIGHT get swallowed up by their feelings if they don't self harm

CONCERNED that they might stay numb.

5. SOME STUFF TO THINK ABOUT

You may be self harming and not be able to see the negative effects. Here are some consequences of self harming:

YOU MAY ACCIDENTALLY OR DELIBERATELY GO TOO FAR ONE DAY AND CAUSE YOURSELF A SEVERE INJURY OR SUICIDE.

CUTS SOMETIMES TURN INTO SCARS: Most people don't understand self harm and may treat you differently when they see your scars. This can make it difficult to make friends, get a job, have a boyfriend/girlfriend or wear t-shirts without people seeing your injuries. Having said this, those people who only judge you by your scars don't know the real you.

PEOPLE WHO SELF HARM USUALLY KEEP IT A SECRET: This can be a really lonely experience. Dealing with your feelings in this way means you are probably not sharing your pain or getting the support you need.

YOU MAY BE AVOIDING THE ISSUES THAT LEAD TO YOU SELF HARMING: Expressing yourself in this way might not allow you to see the causes of your pain.

YOU MAY HAVE TO LIE: You may have to lie to friends and others about your injuries. Most young people find this difficult and stressful. As a result of the lie, you may think, "Do they believe me?", "Do they think I'm a freak?"

YOU MAY FEEL GUILTY: Young people who self harm often feel guilty about it. This means that they hide their behaviour and get down on themselves. This creates more stress and hurt which leads to more self harm to cope.

6. HOW CAN I STOP SELF HARMING?

Self harm is a way of trying to cope with inner pain. It is very difficult to stop self harming without having other ways to cope. Changing any behaviour is difficult and it is a decision **ONLY YOU** can make. Here are some different ways you can react when you feel like self harming. These won't always be easy and will take lots of effort.





DECIDE that you want to stop self harming – making this decision is the first step.

TAKE YOURSELF AWAY from the situation – something as simple as removing yourself from the presence of knives, razors or whatever it is you use to self harm works for some people.

15 MINUTE DELAY – try not to self harm for 15 minutes. If this works, try another 15 minutes and so on.

HAVE SOMETHING TO DO – keeping yourself occupied can keep your mind off stress and not leave you time to think about self harming. Plan things to do to occupy your free time. You could paint, listen to music, draw, play guitar, dance, write, sing or anything creative.

TRY TO FOCUS on something else rather than the pain you may be feeling. You could go outside and look at the clouds, take a shower, watch some TV, read a book, go for a run, get on the internet, eat some food, drink a hot drink etc. Anything that distracts you from how you might be feeling can stop you feeling worse.



MAKE A LIST OF FRIENDS/SUPPORTS you can talk to or call when you feel you need to. These people should understand your situation and what you're going through. Not all friends will be able to do this – most people find it difficult to understand why someone self harms. If your friends are having trouble understanding you may need to talk to a professional (see details on page 30 & 31 of this booklet).

TRY DEEP BREATHING and relaxation exercises. Deep breathing provides your body with oxygen which can help you feel relaxed. Deep breathing and relaxation exercises can also be good ways to stop you focussing on your emotions.

WRITE A DIARY – write down how you feel and what might have made you feel like you wanted to self harm. In this way you can be aware of what leads to you self harming and what you might be able to do before things gets too bad.





MAKE A LIST OF REASONS why you are going to stop hurting yourself and set some realistic goals to help stop self harming e.g. "Next time I feel like cutting, I will scream into my pillow".

CALL A CRISIS LINE if you feel that your self harm is becoming dangerous. See the list of helpful numbers on pages 30 & 31.

If you're trying to stop, it's important to understand that you may do it again. Don't get down on yourself about this. What's important is that you don't give up trying to stop and you get the support you need to help you through.

"TRY TO FOCUS ON SOMETHING ELSE RATHER THAN THE PAIN YOU MAY BE FEELING."



7. WHY IS IT SO HARD TO TALK ABOUT?

Talking to people that you are close to about self harm can be really hard. A lot of young people who self harm worry about how their family and friends will react. Some likely reactions are:

- BEING VERY WORRIED ABOUT YOU AND BECOMING UPSET
- NOT KNOWING WHAT TO DO OR SAY
- GETTING ANGRY BECAUSE THEY DON'T UNDERSTAND
- FEELING LIKE IT MIGHT BE THEIR FAULT
- TELLING YOU NOT TO DO IT AGAIN OR TELLING YOU TO STOP BEING SILLY
- TRYING TO IGNORE IT IN THE HOPE IT WILL STOP
- THINKING THAT YOU ARE DOING IT FOR ATTENTION

Whatever you think the reaction might be, it is important you talk to someone about your self harming. Keeping it a secret will only keep the behaviour going and you will be at risk of seriously injuring yourself or worse.

Here are some ways of getting support from others:

BE SENSITIVE to those around you. Self harming may seem like a normal behaviour to you but to the people around you it may seem frightening.



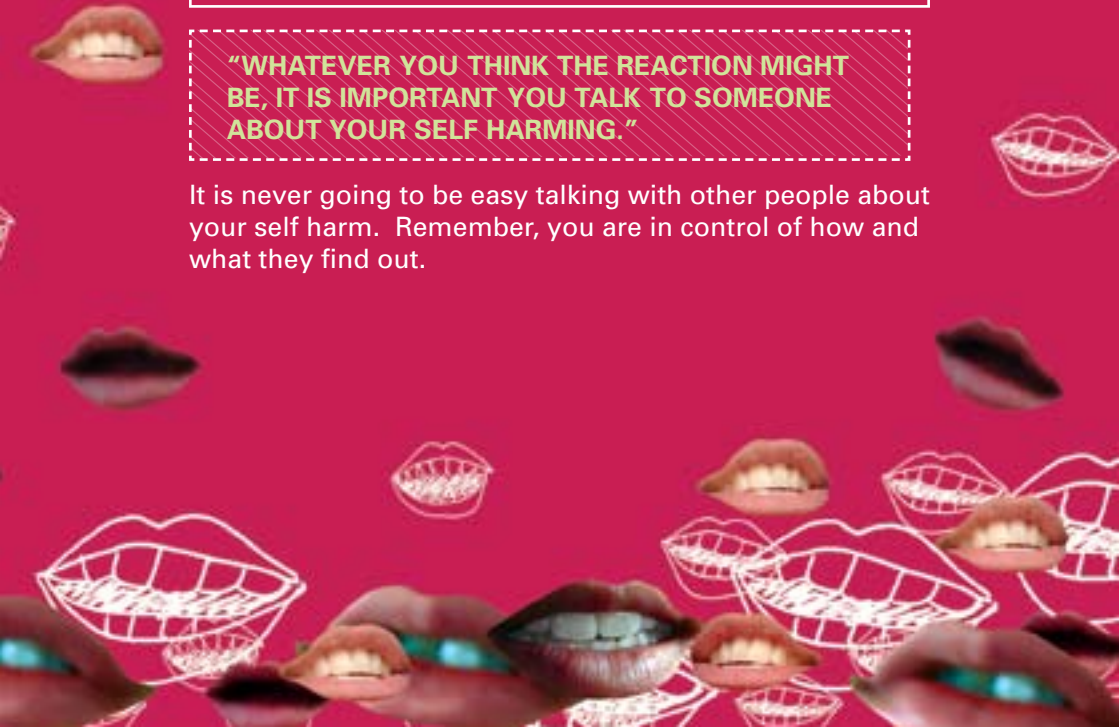
When you talk to people about it, try to **PICK A PLACE THAT IS PRIVATE** where you can talk about it without pressure.

Make sure you and the other person have **TIME TO TALK ABOUT IT** – try not to mention it on your way out the door.

Tell the person **THE THINGS YOU ARE DOING TO TRY AND STOP HARMING YOURSELF.**

“WHATEVER YOU THINK THE REACTION MIGHT BE, IT IS IMPORTANT YOU TALK TO SOMEONE ABOUT YOUR SELF HARMING.”

It is never going to be easy talking with other people about your self harm. Remember, you are in control of how and what they find out.





8. HOW CAN I HELP?

Finding out that someone you care about is hurting themselves is tough. Many people can't understand why someone would want to hurt themselves. It's hard not to take it personally and want to convince the person to stop.



Here are some tips for helping someone who self harms:

SEEK SUPPORT OF A HEALTH PROFESSIONAL – Self harm is a complex behaviour that may go on for a long time. It is important that you have the support and advice of a health professional.

DON'T TAKE IT PERSONALLY – When people self harm, they don't do it to intentionally make you feel bad or guilty. Even if it feels like they are trying to manipulate you, that may not be the reason they self harm.

MAKE A PLAN – If you're able to, sit down with the young person and make a plan about what to do if they feel like self harming or has self harmed. This might make things feel safer for you and the young person. This may also reduce the 'secrecy' around the self harming and make the young person feel supported. If in doubt, talk to a health professional.

BE SUPPORTIVE AND REMAIN CALM – Often, people react by making a big fuss about the self harm and become upset, angry or both. This may make the situation worse as the young person is already trying to cope with their own emotions. They may then self harm in secret because they fear your reaction.



In a calm voice, ask the young person if they want to talk – this leaves the control in their hands about this. Make the initial approach but don't push them.

Being supportive doesn't mean you're saying the behaviour is OK – it's saying that you want to be there for the young person to help them. You might start by saying, "People hurt themselves when they are feeling bad. Do you want to talk to me about it?"

"ANYTHING THAT DISTRACTS YOU FROM HOW YOU MIGHT BE FEELING CAN STOP YOU FEELING WORSE."

DON'T TAKE IT PERSONALLY... TRY TO REMAIN CALM (AND) UNDERSTAND WHY THE YOUNG PERSON IS SELF HARMING.



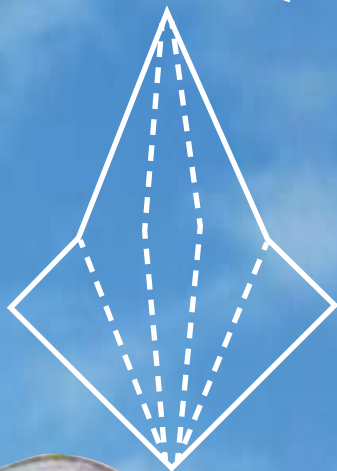
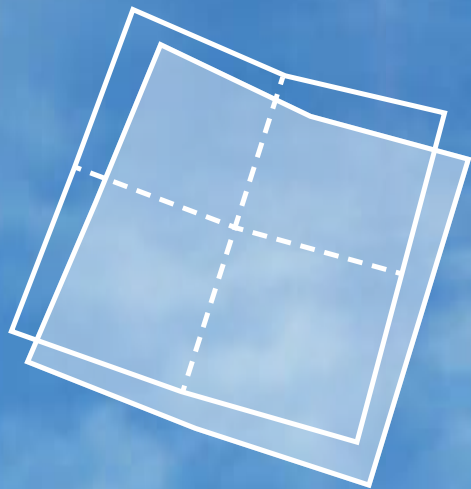
DON'T TELL THEM NOT TO DO IT: A normal reaction to self harm is to tell the person not to do it or that it makes you feel bad. This often leads to the young person feeling guilty and they may start to hide their self harm so you don't feel this way.

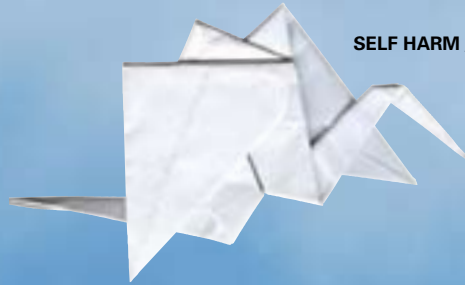
TAKE CARE OF YOURSELF – This is really difficult! You will need time to adjust. Make sure you are taking care of your own needs, as well as those of the person you care about. The more you are able to relax, the easier it will be to deal with the self harm.

BE CLEAR ABOUT WHAT YOUR LIMITS ARE – Most people feel completely out of their depth when it comes to self harm. It's OK if you feel uncomfortable with it and it's ok if you don't feel able to talk about it. Let the young person know this and together seek out the assistance of a health professional such as a psychologist, psychiatrist or counsellor (page 30-31).

TRY TO UNDERSTAND WHY THE YOUNG PERSON IS SELF HARMING – Some people feel sick at the thought that someone they know is harming themselves. Try to understand what the issues behind the self harm are and how you can support that young person to find different ways of coping.







9. LOOKING FORWARD

When everything seems too big to handle and you can't see a way out, it can be hard to think about your future. When you feel this way there are some things you can think about:

THE PEOPLE that you most look up to have probably gone through a really difficult time in their life – it does end.

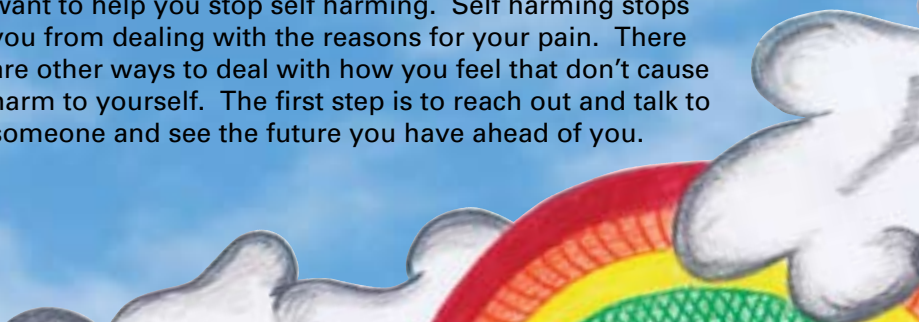
THE PROBLEMS that seem unsolvable will change.

LIFE is always changing.

FEELING BAD doesn't last forever – it only lasts as long as we think about it.

IF YOU WENT to live on the Moon, there would be at least one person who would be sad to see you go.

There are people who want to hear what you've got to say. There are people who understand. There are people who want to help you stop self harming. Self harming stops you from dealing with the reasons for your pain. There are other ways to deal with how you feel that don't cause harm to yourself. The first step is to reach out and talk to someone and see the future you have ahead of you.



10. RESOURCES

KIDS HELP LINE

Phone: 1800 551 800

LIFELINE AUSTRALIA

Phone: 131 114

FAMILIES SA - CRISIS CARE SERVICE

Phone: 131 611

YOUR GENERAL PRACTITIONER (Doctor)

YOUR SCHOOL COUNSELLOR

YOUR LOCAL COMMUNITY OR YOUTH (HEALTH) SERVICE

YOUR LOCAL CHILD AND ADOLESCENT MENTAL HEALTH SERVICE (CAMHS)

YOUR LOCAL FAMILIES SA SERVICE

THE EMERGENCY DEPARTMENT OF YOUR LOCAL HOSPITAL

CHILDREN YOUTH AND WOMEN'S HEALTH SERVICE AFTER HOURS MENTAL HEALTH SERVICE

Phone: 8161 8151

ASSESSMENT & CRISIS INTERVENTION SERVICE (Adults) (ACIS)

For young people over the age of 18 years

Phone: 131 465



SANE AUSTRALIA Mental Illness Help Line

Monday – Friday 9am – 5pm

Phone: 1800 688 382

www.sane.org

YOUNG ADULT HEALTH TOPICS

www.cyh.com

www.headroom.net.au

www.reachout.com.au

www.kidsmind.org.au

Other useful numbers, websites,
information:



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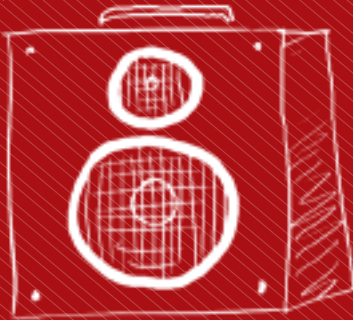
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Whilst the information contained within this booklet may assist young people struggling with self harm and those who care for them, it should not substitute for professional care.

If you are concerned about your physical and/or mental health or that of a young person in your care see a doctor or call the Child and Adolescent Mental Health Service in your area.

11. MY PLAN TO STOP SELF HARMING

Below is a plan that you can put together if you want to try to stop self harming. We have put this on the back page of this booklet so you can tear it out and put it somewhere safe.

WHO ARE THE PEOPLE I CAN TALK TO IF I FEEL LIKE SELF HARMING?

1.	
2.	Phone
3.	Phone

WHAT ARE THE THINGS THAT USUALLY TRIGGER SELF HARM FOR ME?

Think about the reasons you self harm or the things you have trouble coping with? This will help you to know when you are most likely to self harm and try to prevent yourself from doing so.

1.	
2.	
3.	

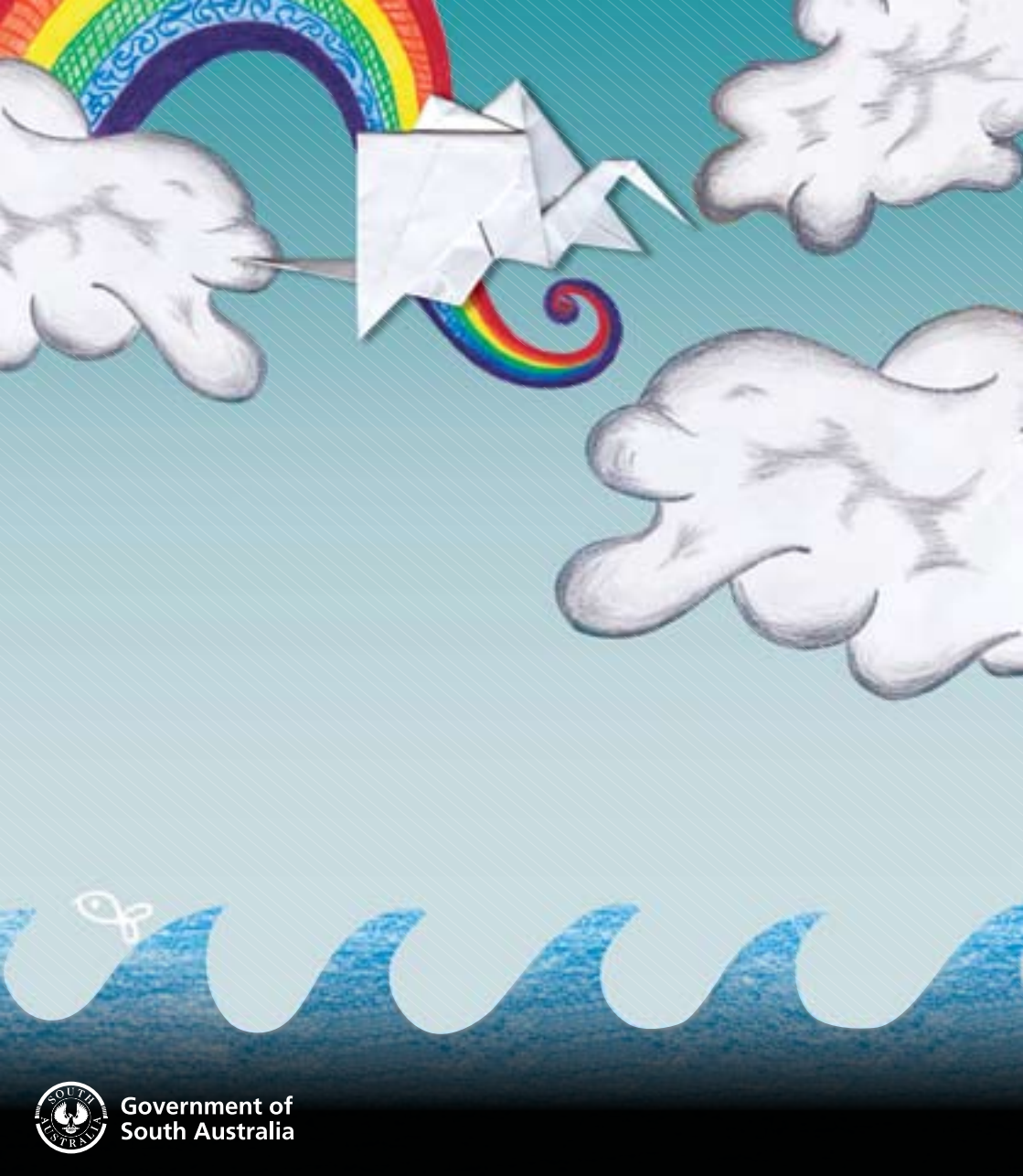
WHAT CAN I DO TO TRY TO STOP SELF HARMING IF I FEEL LIKE DOING IT?

1.	
2.	
3.	

WHAT ARE SOME OTHER THINGS I CAN DO IF I FEEL LIKE I'M NOT COPING INSTEAD OF SELF HARMING?

1.	
2.	
3.	

Make sure you reward yourself for your efforts trying to stop self harming. Other people may not notice but it is important you do. Changing is never easy so be proud of the effort you make.



Government of
South Australia