



Telling someone about my self-harm

You may decide that there are people in your life with who you want to talk with about your self-injury, as keeping it secret can leave you feeling very isolated. It may feel frightening to imagine telling another person but it does also give them a chance to offer you their support and understanding.

The following things may be helpful to consider before you take this step.

Showing that you accept yourself

The most important thing you can do to help dealing with other people's reactions is to start to accept yourself. Self-injury is much more common than people realise and there are always good reasons for it. It will help someone else understand if you have some idea of why you self-injure. (See our 'Why do I self-injure?' info sheet for help with this).

When you tell someone else try not to feel ashamed or apologetic, hopefully one day you will not need to hurt yourself, but for as long as you need to, it's ok and you are not doing anything wrong. If you accept what you are doing then it is more likely that other people will too. **Here's what one person said about her experience of telling friends:**

'My friends have been so important to me. Far more than doctors or professionals. I wish I'd started trusting people earlier. I thought they'd think I was mad, or wouldn't want to know, but

they just accept me as I am and I know I can ring one of them up and talk about things’.

Why am I telling them?

If you know the reason you want to tell the person about self-injury it may be a helpful way to start the conversation, e.g.: ‘I would like to talk to you about something that’s going on for me because I don’t like having secrets from you.’ or ‘I would like to tell you something that feels quite difficult for me because I am hoping you will be able to help me’. **If you are telling someone ‘professional’ like a teacher, school nurse or counsellor you may want to check beforehand what they do with the information you share.** It might feel awkward to ask but it’s important that you protect yourself and check that what you say won’t automatically be passed onto other staff and back to your family. You can simply ask ‘What is the rule about information that I tell you?’

Choosing your time

One of the things that is likely to affect the reaction of the person who you tell is the time that you choose to do so. If possible choose a moment when there is time to have a proper conversation. Sometimes when we feel anxious it can feel easy to blurt something out and then disappear. Or it may be tempting to drink alcohol to build courage, but try to do without, as alcohol may make the conversation more emotional than it may already be. You might also need to have a few conversations over time rather than saying everything at once.

What if they start to pressure me to do things differently or get really upset or shout at me?

If at any point you start to feel pressured by the other person to say more than you want to or to try and handle things differently

you can take charge of the conversation by saying something like 'I don't want to talk about that now' or 'please don't shout at me, it is not helpful.'

Don't feel that you have to answer other people's questions or to justify yourself, and it's your decision about whether you want to show people your injuries or scars. **It's ok for people to have feelings about what you are doing but it's not ok for them to make you responsible for them.** If someone that you tell does get upset or angry you can suggest that they find some support (like you have by contacting TESS). There are services that can support parents or friends of people who self-harm with their feelings. (You can tell them about our [Info sheet on supporting someone who self-harms](#) .

Dealing with your feelings afterwards.

Telling someone about your self-harm may bring up feelings for you depending on how it goes. You may feel relieved and happier to know that someone else knows and is willing to offer you some support. Or you may feel angry or disappointed that the person wasn't able to hear you in the way that you wanted. Try to find a way of accepting and expressing your feelings. Give yourself lots of praise for having the courage to tell someone else and try not to blame yourself for someone else's reaction. If you feel like you want to hurt yourself but would like to try not to you can look at our list of distractions and try other ways of expressing your feelings.