

SELF-HARM ALTERNATIVES

Over 130 Ideas for use during self-harm recovery

**Write down what made
you feel angry and
scribble it out until the
paper is worn through**

**Reread your favourite
childhood book**

Have a cold shower

**Put your books in
height, alphabetical
or colour order**



IDEAS THAT SIMULATE SELF-HARM

THESE ARE IDEAS THAT GIVE SOME OF THE VISUAL OR PHYSICAL SENSATION OF SELF-HARM WITHOUT ACTUALLY CAUSING HARM TO THE BODY.

Write on your skin

Finger paint with red paint

Clench ice cubes in your hands

Draw red lines on your skin where you want to harm

Paint your skin with red nail varnish or paint and pick it off

Ping an elastic band or hair band on your wrist (but not too hard)

Plunge your face into a sink full of freezing cold water for a few seconds

On a photo or drawing of yourself, mark in red where you want to hurt yourself

IDEAS FOR WHEN YOU NEED TO VENT YOUR FEELINGS

SOMETIMES OUR FEELINGS BECOME TOO MUCH FOR US TO BEAR AND THE ONLY WAY WE CAN THINK OF MANAGING THEM IS TO HURT OURSELVES. HERE ARE SOME ALTERNATIVES THAT WILL HELP YOU VENT ANGER, FRUSTRATION OR OTHER EXTREME FEELINGS

**Go somewhere quiet
and scream**

Punch a punch bag

**Make a ball out of play
dough and smash it**

**Hurl lumps of ice at the
ground and watch them
smash**

Hammer nails into wood

Play squash

Tear up a magazine

**Write down what made
you feel angry and
scribble it out until the
paper is worn through**

**Dance like nobody is
watching**

MORE IDEAS FOR WHEN YOU NEED TO VENT

SOMETIMES OUR FEELINGS BECOME TOO MUCH FOR US TO BEAR AND THE ONLY WAY WE CAN THINK OF MANAGING THEM IS TO HURT OURSELVES. HERE ARE SOME ALTERNATIVES THAT WILL HELP YOU VENT ANGER, FRUSTRATION OR OTHER EXTREME FEELINGS.

Play music loudly

**Bang drums or other
percussion instruments**

Run up hill

**Write a letter to the
person who has made you
angry, venting your
frustration (but don't send
it)**

Cry

**Cut up an old piece of
material**

Tear up cardboard

**Have a pillow fight with a
wall**

Stamp your feet

Snap sticks in half

Sing VERY loudly

IDEAS FOR WHEN YOU FEEL ALONE OR DOWN

THESE ARE IDEAS WHICH WILL HELP WHEN YOUR MOOD IS LOW. WHEN YOU FEEL ALONE OR DEEPLY SAD AND YOU DON'T KNOW WHY.

**Look at photographs of
your friends and family**

**Think of your favourite
day ever**

**Tell someone about
your favourite day ever**

**Talk to someone you
trust**

**Call a helpline or use an
online forum**

**Listen to soothing
music**

**Take a walk in the
garden, notice each
tree and flower and try
to learn their names**

Walk your dog

**Go to the park and
swing, listen to the
laughter of children and
let it infect you**

**Reread your favourite
childhood book**

**Watch silly videos of
cats on YouTube**

**Listen to a 'feel good'
playlist of songs to lift
your mood**

IDEAS FOR WHEN YOU NEED A DISTRACTION

SOMETIMES THE NEED TO SELF-HARM IS LESS INTENSE BUT IT DOESN'T GO AWAY THAT FAST AND YOU NEED SOMETHING TO TAKE YOUR MIND OFF IT FOR A LITTLE LONGER. THESE IDEAS MIGHT HELP. IF YOU REGULARLY SELF-HARM AT THE SAME TIME EACH DAY, YOU MIGHT ALSO FIND THAT THESE ARE GOOD ACTIVITIES TO DO AT THAT TIME, TO SEE IF YOU CAN AVOID YOUR REGULAR SELF-HARM SESSION.

**Watch something
light-hearted on TV**

Go for a walk

**Call your best
friend for a chat**

Have a shower

Do a jigsaw

**Find something
beginning with
every letter of the
alphabet**

**Write a letter or an
email**

Read a book

Sleep

**Learn the words to
a new song**

**Practice a musical
instrument**

**Curl up on a bean
bag and watch the
world go by**

**Play a computer
game**

Juggle

MORE IDEAS FOR WHEN YOU NEED A DISTRACTION

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**Practice a new skill
(e.g. speaking a
language, juggling)**

Bake

Sew or knit

**Build a card house or
line of cards then
knock it down**

**Look for pictures in
the clouds**

Do some cleaning

**Work in the garden,
dead-head some
flowers or do some
weeding**

Fly a kite

**Watch out for birds
and try to identify the
different types**

**Skim stones – how
many bounces can you
do?**

Dig for worms

Write a blog post

DELAYING TACTICS TO GIVE YOU TIME TO THINK

WHEN YOU'RE TRYING HARD TO GIVE UP SELF-HARMING, SOMETIMES YOU KNOW THAT IF YOU CAN JUST GIVE YOURSELF A LITTLE TIME TO THINK THEN YOU'LL BE ABLE TO REASON WITH YOURSELF. THESE IDEAS WILL BUY YOU A MINUTE OR TWO TO TRY AND CALM YOUR ANXIETY AND REMIND YOURSELF OF SAFER COPING MECHANISMS (YOU MIGHT DO ONE OF THESE BEFORE GOING ON TO TRY ONE OF THE IDEAS IN ANOTHER CATEGORY).

Set a timer on your phone for 60 seconds and watch it tick down before you do anything

Recite the alphabet forwards and then backwards

Practise your times tables

Take the item you intend to harm with and wrap it up in towels, blankets or newspaper

Count to 100

Sing 'Twinkle, Twinkle, Little Star'

Run up and down stairs three times

IDEAS TO HELP YOU FEEL MORE IN CONTROL

IF EVERYTHING FEELS OUT OF CONTROL AND YOUR URGE TO SELF-HARM IS BECAUSE YOU FEEL LIKE YOU NEED CONTROL SOMETHING, TRY ONE OF THESE IDEAS INSTEAD:

Put your books in height, alphabetical or colour order

Plan your diary for the next week, build in rest or fun breaks

Build something intricate like an airfix or lego model

Paint by numbers

Read a kids' 'choose your own adventure' book making all the 'wrong' choices

Make bread from scratch

Give your bedroom a facelift by shifting the furniture around

Give your room a deep clean

IDEAS THAT REMIND YOU THAT YOU HAVE A FUTURE

THE FUTURE CAN FEEL LIKE AN UNREAL PROSPECT AT TIMES AND ALL WE CAN THINK OF IS THE DESPERATE THOUGHTS AND FEELINGS WE'RE EXPERIENCING NOW. SOMETIMES, CASTING OUR MINDS FORWARDS CAN BE A HELPFUL WAY TO ENABLE OURSELVES TO FIND OUR WAY OUT OF THE EMOTIONAL DIFFICULTIES WE'RE FACING IN THE HERE AND NOW.

**Plan your ultimate 21st
birthday party**

**If you have exams
coming up, think
about how you'll feel
on your last day of
exams**

**Imagine who you'll be
friends with when
you're thirty**

**Plan the speech you'll
give at your 100th
birthday**

**Think about the 3
things you most hope
to achieve in life**

Write your bucket list

IDEAS FOR WHEN YOU'RE FEELING CONFUSED

SOMETIMES OUR THOUGHTS GET ALL MUDDLED AND WE DON'T KNOW WHAT TO THINK. THESE ARE IDEAS THAT CAN HELP US TO START THINKING A LITTLE MORE STRAIGHT AND BEGIN TO UNDERSTAND OURSELVES AND WHAT IS GOING ON AROUND US.

Write a poem called 'I don't understand'

Paint a big, abstract, picture using poster paints

Write a list of questions you wish you knew the answer to (you could share them with someone later)

Stop and work backwards through the last hour trying to answer the question 'what made me feel this way?'

Ask yourself what would the blade / flame etc say to me if it could talk?

Express yourself through music, art or words

Trace each of your scars with your finger and remember the story it tells

IDEAS THAT NURTURE RATHER THAN HARM

SOMETIMES, DOING SOMETHING WHICH INVOLVES CARING FOR SOMETHING OR SOMEONE ELSE CAN BE THE PERFECT ANTIDOTE TO FEELINGS OF SELF-HARM.

Water the garden

Feed or brush a pet

Play with a sibling

Sing to a baby

**Write a message to say
thank you to a friend or
family member for
something kind they have
done**

**Plan what you will buy
your family for Christmas**

**Massage the part of our
body that you feel the
urge to harm**

**Look after your older
wounds or scars, clean
them and dress them**

**Ask someone you care
about for a hug**

**Smooth body lotion into
the places you want to
harm**

**Rub bio-oil into your old
scars**

**Put on your cosiest,
biggest jumper and give
yourself a hug**

IDEAS THAT REMIND YOU THAT YOU'RE REAL

ON SOME OCCASIONS, THE CHIEF REASON THAT WE FEEL THE NEED TO SELF-HARM IS JUST TO REMIND OURSELVES THAT WE'RE REAL, TO PREVENT THE FEELING OF NUMBNESS FROM OVERTAKING US. IF THAT'S HOW YOU'RE FEELING, THESE IDEAS MIGHT HELP:

Google yourself

Read your last school report

Paint your finger and toe nails

Have a cold shower

Ask someone to give you a massage

Punch a cushion

Plunge your hands into a bowl of ice water

Eat an ice lolly, focus on how the cold feels on your tongue

Eat spicy food

Have a water fight with a friend or sibling

Smell different spices and really focus on the smell

Try to remember every birthday cake you've ever had

Read old blog posts or diary entries

Read your first school report and remember yourself as a five year old

IDEAS THAT WON'T BE NOTICED IN BUSY SITUATIONS

WHEN THE URGE TO SELF-HARM OVERCOMES YOU IN THE MIDDLE OF A CROWDED SITUATION OR IN A LESSON, IT CAN BE HARD TO KNOW WHAT TO DO TO MANAGE HOW YOU'RE FEELING. HERE ARE A FEW IDEAS THAT NOBODY WILL EVEN KNOW YOU'RE DOING:

Scream silently in your head

Imagine yourself in your favourite place with your favourite people

Become aware of every part of your body in turn, think about your toes, then your ankles then your knees etc

Breathe deeply and slowly, counting to five with each inhalation and each exhalation

Recite a fact about each other person in the room in your head

If you're amongst strangers, pick one and imagine what they did last Friday

Put your hands in your pockets and pinch your thighs