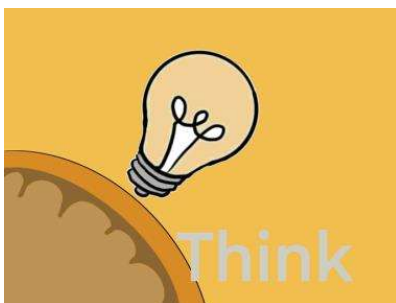


Self-harm

Self-harm is any deliberate, self inflicted act that injures your body. The severity of the injury bears no relation to the level of distress the person is experiencing. People may use self-harm to regulate feelings of depression, to cope with emotional distress, to feel a sense of control, to feel a sense of embodiment, to alleviate feelings of shame or to distract from intrusive thoughts. A recent study found that 42% of Autistic people self-harm.



Many Autistic people have difficulty in detecting, labelling and expressing their emotional experiences. This means that Autistic people may experience higher levels of fear, distress and anxiety in their lives yet have fewer resources or strategies to manage these emotions. One outcome may be that they turn to self-harm as a way of dealing with their experiences.



Autistic people tend to have different sensory experiences compared to their non-autistic peers and may have to deal with sensory distress and pain as part of their daily experience. Some Autistic people use self-harm to cope with the physical pain of Sensory Trauma. Self-injury may validate the pain a person is struggling to express or that others aren't noticing. It may temporarily calm the person or switch them back on from feeling numb. Some Autistic people do not see self-harm as a negative or harmful practice but see it instead as a viable coping mechanism in their lives.



Self-harm is an emotive issue for many people. Your own strong feelings may make it difficult to support someone who is self-harming. Asking the person to stop self-harming doesn't usually work – it can be more effective to support the person to regulate their senses and emotions and, in particular, to support them to find coping strategies that reduce their need to self-harm. An essential element in any response to self-harm is to validate the person's experience and to initiate and maintain channels for open communication.