

# hidden pain?

People with learning disabilities who hurt themselves



bristol crisis service for women



research centre



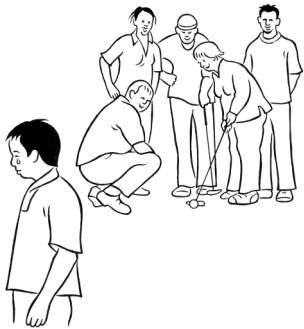
**Self-injury is when people do things to hurt themselves.**

- People might scratch themselves.
- People might cut their skin.
- People might hit themselves.
- People might bite themselves.
- People might take too much medication.



Pauline Heslop works at the Norah Fry Research Centre at the University of Bristol. Fiona Macaulay works at Bristol Crisis Service for Women.

Together they have been finding out about people with learning disabilities who hurt themselves. Pauline and Fiona talked to 25 people with learning disabilities who hurt themselves. This is what they found out.



## **1. Self-injury was different for everyone**

People hurt themselves for different reasons. How much people hurt themselves would often depend on what is happening in their lives.

## **2. Some people hurt themselves because of difficult things that were happening now.**

Some people said they hurt themselves because of difficult things that were happening now. This is what people said:

- People might hurt themselves when they feel they are not listened to.
- People might hurt themselves when they have been told off.
- People might hurt themselves when they have little or no choice about things.
- People might hurt themselves when they have been bullied.
- People might hurt themselves when they are involved in arguments, or hear other people arguing
- People might hurt themselves when they are feeling unwell.





### **3. Some people hurt themselves because of things that had happened in the past.**

Some people talked about remembering difficult times from the past which upset them. People said they hurt themselves because of having these memories.

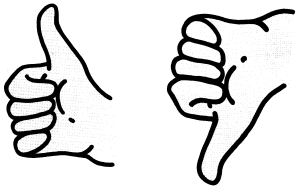
- People were upset when someone close to them had died.
- People were upset when they had been abused in the past.

### **4. Understanding and dealing with some feelings can be difficult.**



Remembering things from the past or having problems now could lead to strong feelings. When some people had these strong feelings they hurt themselves.

- People talked about feeling angry.
- People talked about feeling sad, depressed or low.
- People talked about feeling frustrated or wound up.



### **5. Self-injury can make people feel better and worse**

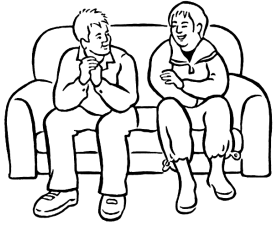
Most people said that hurting themselves made them feel better and worse at the same time. People might feel better after they have hurt themselves, but be upset that they have done it.

### **6. People hurt themselves less when they are happy**

People didn't hurt themselves when they are happy.

- People were happy when they had all the support they needed
- People were happy when they liked what they were doing
- People were happy when they liked who they were with.





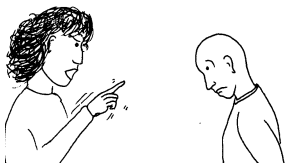
## **7. Most people are already trying to stop hurting themselves**

People said that they tried to stop hurting themselves by doing different things.

- Some people tried talking to someone.
- Some people tried to keep themselves busy.
- Some people tried telling themselves that they're OK.
- Some people tried to calm themselves down.

## **8. People with learning disabilities know what helps them**

Professionals and family members didn't always do what people with learning disabilities wanted. Sometimes people with learning disabilities were stopped from hurting themselves or being told off for hurting themselves. People said this was not helpful.



## **9. Ask people with learning disabilities what support they want**

Most people found it helpful to have someone to talk with, and someone to listen to them when they felt like hurting themselves. But different people had different ways in which they wanted this to happen. People who didn't speak much wanted someone to spend time with them to help them communicate how they are feeling.



## **10. Most people with learning disabilities wanted the same kind of support as people without disabilities.**

- People with learning disabilities who hurt themselves want someone to talk with.
- People with learning disabilities who hurt themselves want someone to listen to them.
- People with learning disabilities who hurt themselves want support with where their injuries.
- People with learning disabilities who hurt themselves want help to change how they think and feel, not what they do.
- People with learning disabilities who hurt themselves want to have contact with someone else who hurt themselves.



## For further information:

You can contact Pauline Heslop for more information.  
You can contact Pauline at:



Pauline Heslop  
Norah Fry Research Centre  
3 Priory Rd  
Bristol  
BS8 1TX

You can contact Fiona Macaulay for more information. You can contact Fiona at:

Fiona Macaulay  
Bristol Crisis Service for Women  
PO BOX 654  
Bristol  
BS99 1XH



[pauline.heslop@bristol.ac.uk](mailto:pauline.heslop@bristol.ac.uk)

[fiona.bcsw@btconnect.com](mailto:fiona.bcsw@btconnect.com)



[www.bristol.ac.uk/norahfry](http://www.bristol.ac.uk/norahfry)

[www.selfinjurysupport.org.uk](http://www.selfinjurysupport.org.uk)



0117 331 0980

0117 927 9600

You can get a copy of the report from:



[www.selfinjurysupport.org.uk](http://www.selfinjurysupport.org.uk)

[www.bris.ac.uk/norahfry](http://www.bris.ac.uk/norahfry)

We have made other things to help people with learning disabilities who hurt themselves. They are:



- A DVD about people with learning disabilities talking about hurting themselves
- A workbook for people with learning disabilities who hurt themselves
- A booklet for family members/supporters
- A training pack for professionals supporting people with learning disabilities who hurt themselves