

Understanding My Self-Harm Urges



Self-harm can serve different functions for different people. Understanding what is happening around an urge can help identify the need underneath it and create more options for responding.



AN URGE OFTEN HAS A CONTEXT

A difficult event, memory, thought, feeling, conflict or sense of numbness may come before an urge. Sometimes the trigger is obvious; sometimes it is not.



THE URGE MAY BE TRYING TO HELP

Self-harm may seem like a way to reduce distress, interrupt numbness, express pain, regain control or cope when other options feel unavailable.



RELIEF CAN BE SHORT-LIVED

The feeling may shift temporarily, while the original difficulty remains. Shame, guilt, secrecy or further distress can sometimes follow.



UNDERSTANDING CREATES OPTIONS

When you can identify what you were needing in that moment, you and your supports can explore other responses that may meet the same need more safely.

CURIOSITY, NOT JUDGEMENT

This worksheet is not about criticising yourself for having an urge. It is about slowing the experience down enough to understand what was happening and what support might be useful next time.

An urge is a signal that something needs attention.

You can learn to notice it, understand it and reach for support.

Exploring a Self-Harm Urge



Use this after an urge, or with your psychologist, when you feel safe enough to reflect. You do not need to describe the method of self-harm to understand what was happening.

WHAT WAS HAPPENING BEFORE THE URGE?

A situation, memory, interaction, thought, feeling or other experience that may have contributed.

WHAT WAS I THINKING, FEELING OR NOTICING IN MY BODY?

What was happening internally? Include numbness or disconnection if that fits your experience.

WHAT DID I HOPE SELF-HARM WOULD DO FOR ME?

For example: change an emotion, create relief, interrupt numbness, express pain or create a sense of control.

WHAT DID I NEED IN THAT MOMENT?

Comfort, safety, release, connection, space, reassurance, expression, control, rest - or something else?

WHAT ELSE MIGHT HELP MEET THAT NEED?

Think about safer actions, people, places or supports that could respond to the need underneath the urge.

WHO OR WHAT CAN I TURN TO IF THE URGE FEELS HARD TO MANAGE?

People, professional supports, crisis services, my safety plan, or a safer environment.

If you are in immediate danger or cannot keep yourself safe

Call 000 or go to your nearest Emergency Department. Lifeline 13 11 14 | Suicide Call Back Service 1300 659 467