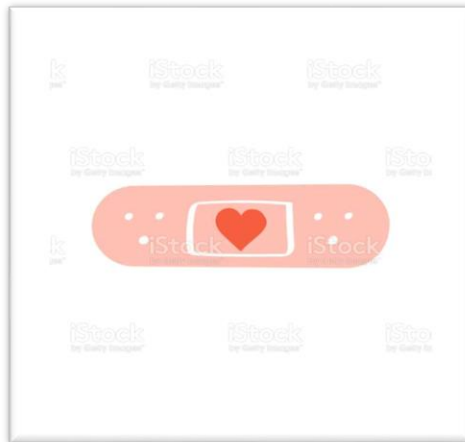




# SELF-INJURIOUS BEHAVIOUR



A GUIDE FOR PARENTS AND PROFESSIONALS  
SUPPORTING PEOPLE WITH LEARNING  
DISABILITIES AND/OR AUTISM

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# WHY DO PEOPLE SELF-INJURE?

Self-injurious behaviour (SIB) is a form of hurting oneself due to over-stimulation, environmental issues, pain, escape/avoidance, sensory stimulation, or needing attention.

For people with learning disabilities and/or autism, SIB can become an issue for the individual, which can impact parents, carers, and professionals.

## TYPES OF SIB

1. Cutting
2. Biting
3. Nipping
4. Hitting head or body parts
5. Burning
6. Head banging
7. Hair pulling
8. Ingestion of toxins

It is important to know that you are not alone, and there is support available.

Firstly, we need to know **WHY** someone self-injures, to help reduce this behaviour.

# FUNCTIONAL BEHAVIOUR

SIB can help to relieve overwhelming emotional states, including, anger, anxiety, frustration, and also being over stimulated when doing an activity that brings joy.

A person in your care may receive stimulation from self-injury. This is when your brain releases a chemical called an 'endorphin', which can make people feel happy.

SIB can serve a purpose from coping with emotional distress, a form of self-punishment, or to meet their specific needs.

Self-injury can mean different things at different times.

Sometimes it can form into a habit.

Some individuals get strong sensory feedback from SIB e.g. if a person bites their own hand they may gain intense physical pleasure or relief from this behaviour.

People may hurt themselves to meet the following needs:

**Sensory**

Meeting sensory needs when over stimulated  
e.g., *How bright or noisy a room is etc.*

**Escape/Avoidance**

Indication they don't want to do something e.g., *Going to school or unhappy with the environment*

**Attention**

Injuring self to get attention  
e.g., *As a form of communication*

**NOT** to be confused with attention seeking behaviour

**Medical**

Indicating they are in pain  
e.g., *Dental issues or ear infection etc.*

# REMEMBER: All behaviour is a form of **COMMUNICATION**

## HARM REDUCTION

If someone in your care displays SIB this may be hard to watch. How you react to the behaviour is important. Initial responses can include:

- ⇒ *Let the person know you are there for them. How you react to this behaviour can influence if it progresses or stops.*
- ⇒ *Be aware of your own body language and reactions, **try to appear calm**, speak to the person in a calm tone of voice, and be supportive*
- ⇒ ***Redirect the individual** to another room, activity, or to a quieter space – make reasonable adjustments to the environment*
- ⇒ *Use **distraction** techniques – use humour or change the subject and ask closed questions*
- ⇒ ***Provide alternative sensory stimulation** or resources to meet the persons sensory needs*
- ⇒ ***Rule out any medical conditions** by visiting your GP or contacting your local LD Nurse*

## USEFUL LINKS

There are many websites available that can provide further information on SIB. This list is not exhaustive and may not support each individual person.

### Websites

The National Autistic Society

<https://www.autism.org.uk/advice-and-guidance/topics/behaviour/self-injurious-behaviour/all-audiences>

The Challenging Behaviour Foundation

<https://www.challengingbehaviour.org.uk/understanding-challenging-behaviour/specific-behaviours/self-injurious-behaviour/>

Self-Injury Support

<https://www.selfinjurysupport.org.uk/>

Challenging Behaviour Community of Practice

*This website offers a range of lived-experience of SIB from parents to professionals. It holds a breadth of*

*knowledge and discussions on SIB, which you may find useful. Based in Wales, with participants from across the UK, you will not only get support on SIB, but learn that you are not alone!*

<https://padlet.com/ImprovementCymru/all-wales-challenging-behaviour-community-of-practice-cymune-sviqeg31a0qfc4a8?msclkid=6d345946c31511ecaf0b440bcc9db172>

## **APPS**

CALM HARM

<https://calmharm.co.uk/>

## **VIDEOS**

Progressive Muscle Relaxation (PMR)

[www.youtube.com/watch?v=ClqPtWzozXs&t=36s](http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ClqPtWzozXs&t=36s)

## PRODUCTS

In some cases, products can help meet an individual's specific needs. Below is a list of products that may help, there are other items available.

- Chew toys or chew necklaces
- Compression tops (hug shirts)
- Ear defenders
- Light projector
- Spiked massage roller
- Spiked massage ring
- Weighted blankets
- Fidget toys

Sensory Direct

[www.sensorydirect.com](http://www.sensorydirect.com)

Sensory Toy Warehouse

[www.sensorytoywarehouse.com](http://www.sensorytoywarehouse.com)

Sense Sensory

[www.sensesensory.co.uk](http://www.sensesensory.co.uk)

Harrys Department Store

[www.harrysdepartmentstore.co.uk](http://www.harrysdepartmentstore.co.uk)