

**Group Study on Self-Harm**

*What you will need:*

* A print out of this document
* A Bible

*Read aloud the following excerpt and use your Bible to look up the passages cited in the text*

Self-harm is exactly what it sounds like, harming yourself intentionally. This may sound like a strange idea to someone who has never felt like hurting themselves on purpose, but it is extremely common and you may know people who do this. In Australia there has been more than 20,000 hospitalisations each year since the turn of the century, and possibly many more that never get reported.

Self-harm may involve people cutting themselves or taking a drug overdose for the purpose of causing pain and suffering. Self-harm is not always linked with attempted suicide, although of course suicide is the most extreme example of self-harm. Many people who self-harm report that they do so because they want to live, not because they want to die.

People can have many complex reasons for wanting to self-harm. Some do it because they are depressed or bullied. Some are numb and want to feel something. Some do it out of a sense that they are bad and deserve punishment. Others report a temporary feeling of release from emotional pain after they self-harm. They try to replace their emotional pain with physical pain.

Self-harm is not the solution. Hurting your body cannot make you a better person. It cannot fix your problems or take away your pain. It may make you feel better for a time, but it cannot give you lasting peace.

We can, however, find true and lasting peace in Jesus. Jesus is the one who can forgive us, and make us clean and whole again. He says: *“Come to me, all you who are weary and burdened, and I will give you rest. Take my yoke upon you and learn from me, for I am gentle and humble in heart, and you will find rest for your souls. For my yoke is easy and my burden is light”* (Matthew 11:28-30).

Seeking healthy advice if you feel tempted to harm yourself is vital. There are some links and contacts below if you or someone you know is struggling with this. Be aware, however, that not all advice on the internet is helpful. Some sites glorify self-harm and fail to address the underlying issue. Speaking to someone you trust is important, especially someone who can help you understand and work through the reasons why you self-harm. You are not alone.

People to talk to include parents, a teacher or school counsellor, or a pastor. Counselling hotlines are also available 24 hours a day. Lifeline can be contacted on 13 11 14.

*Discussion questions*

* Why do you think people self-harm? Is this something you have struggled with?
* What could you say to a friend if you discovered they were self-harming?
* Jesus says: “Come to me, all you who are weary and burdened, and I will give you rest” (Matthew 11:28-30). What does it mean to come to Jesus? Where is He?
* You were created by God and are loved by Him. Might this help someone change the way they see their life and circumstances?
* It can be hard to deal with our own guilt and shame. Jesus died for all the sins of the world on the cross. What power does this have in peoples’ lives?
* Who are the people in your community you could trust to talk about a sensitive issue like self-harming?
* Do you find it easy to make time for God? How could you deepen your relationship with Him?

*Close with prayer*

*Optional further reading*

* ‘Lessons from the confessional on dealing with ‘cutting’’ by Father Terrance Klein: <https://cruxnow.com/commentary/2016/11/13/lessons-confessional-dealing-cutting/>
* ‘Understanding self-harm – for health professionals’: <https://headspace.org.au/health-professionals/understanding-self-harm-for-health-professionals/>

*Helplines*

* Beyond Blue Support Service (1300 22 4636): <https://www.beyondblue.org.au/get-support/get-immediate-support>
* Lifeline crisis support and suicide prevention (13 11 14): <https://www.lifeline.org.au>
* Kids helpline: <https://kidshelpline.com.au>
* Parent helpline: <https://kidshelpline.com.au/parents/parentline-services/>
* Raisingchildren parent helpline and hotline: <http://raisingchildren.net.au/articles/hotlines.html>