



CHILDHOOD NEURODIVERGENCE

UNDERSTANDING WHY YOUNG PEOPLE MAY HURT
THEMSELVES

Psychology in Schools Team

NSFT

- Please note that parent/carer workshops are designed to offer general guidance and support for understanding self-harm. They are **not intended to replace urgent mental health support.**
- **For urgent mental health support, Call 111** and select the mental health option to speak to the 24-hour urgent mental health helpline. If someone has attempted suicide, **call 999** and stay with them until help arrives. In life threatening emergencies, if anyone is at serious risk of harm, **call 999.**

CONFIDENTIALITY
AND PERSONAL
INFORMATION

Slido will be used as our main interaction tool. We will not be able to use the Q&A function or answer raised hands.

Slido is anonymous, but other users will be able to see what you have written. When answering questions please **do not** include personal or sensitive information such as names or anything that can identify you or your child.

By using Slido, you are consenting to your anonymised responses being used in possible service evaluation, research projects, publications and/or promotional material.

Our workshops are recorded and uploaded to YouTube, please be aware that anything shared on Slido may be included in a publicly accessible recording.

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#3689446**

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How old is your child/young person?

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What stage are you at?

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What presentation are you interested in today?

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How would you rate your knowledge of self-harm in neurodivergent young people?

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How would you rate your confidence supporting your young person with self-harm?

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CHILDHOOD NEURODIVERGENCE PARENT/CARER WORKSHOP SERIES



[Neurodiversity online parent/carer workshops -
Suffolk SEND Local Offer](#)



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LOOKING AFTER YOURSELF

- Emotional topics being covered today
- Do what you need to look after yourself
- Recording and resources will be shared with everyone who signed up for the workshop

SESSION AIMS



To increase understanding of harm to self

To encourage you to consider your child and the function that this behaviour serves for them

Introduce ways to find some helpful coping strategies

How you can best support your child through this

Give additional resources for if you / your child needs more support with this



- ❖ Individual differences will exist across children and young people
- ❖ Aim in supporting young people is to provide a helpful environment which lessens risk
- ❖ We hope that today's session can support you with the process of being curious and supporting alternative coping

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As a parent or carer, how do you feel when you think of your child/young person hurting themselves?

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LOOKING AFTER YOURSELF

Harm to self and the issues that underpin it can evoke strong emotional responses

Putting your oxygen mask on first

Supporting yourself- taking a break, connecting with others, establishing safety



WHAT DO WE MEAN BY HARM?

Self-harm is intentionally causing physical pain or harm to yourself, often as an attempt to manage difficult emotions or distress.

Sometimes people may hurt themselves in various ways, where harm is not the intent, but the result of an attempt to regulate or express, or to communicate a need. This is known as self-injurious behaviour.

(National Autistic Society)

Examples include:

Cutting

Scratching

Hair pulling

Burning

Hitting self

Pinching

Biting

Head banging

Poisoning/overdose

Medical mismanagement

We will be covering both today

UNDERSTANDING HARM IN NEURODIVERGENT YOUNG PEOPLE

- Self-harm is not a symptom of neurodivergence.
- However, rates of self-harm and self injury are sadly higher for neurodivergent children.
- For some families, managing harm to self is an important part of supporting their child with their emotions



INDICATORS OF SELF HARM AND SELF-INJURIOUS BEHAVIOURS

- These 'signs' do not necessarily mean that an individual is self-harming
- Multiple indications are greater cause for concern than any single one in isolation.
 - Method can change
- Concerns with escalating harm

Clothing and covering up

Unexplained cuts, bruises, burns / bald patches

Sharp objects

Low or fluctuating mood, irritability

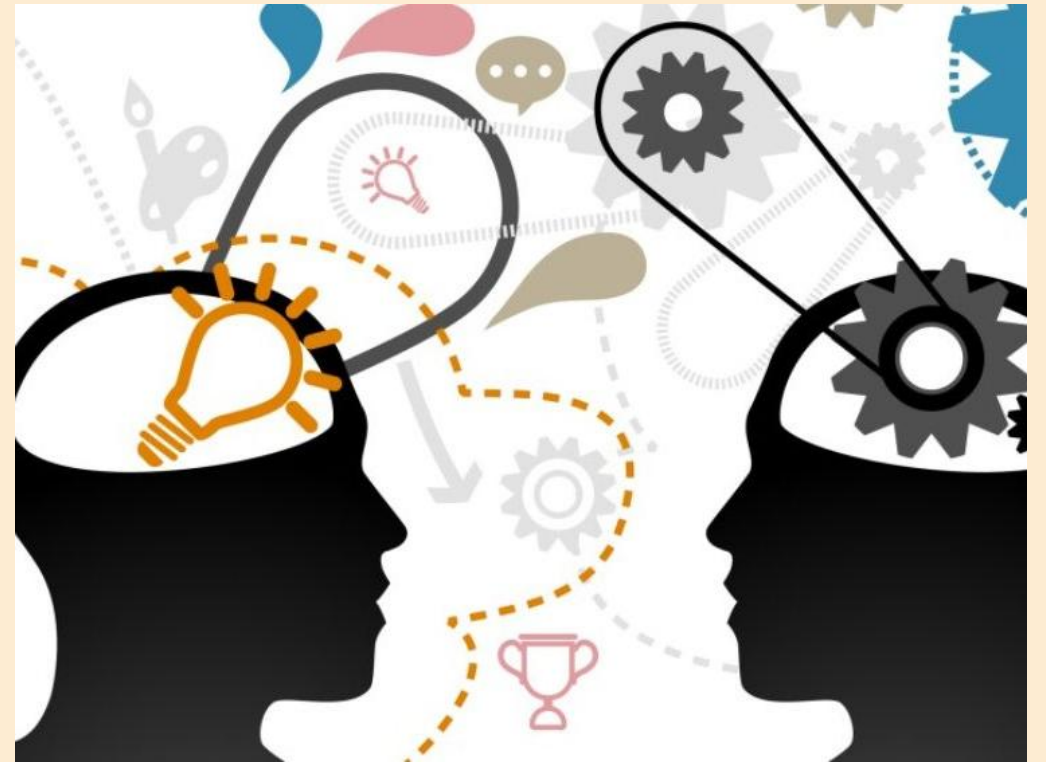
Becoming withdrawn

Low self-esteem

Changes in eating / sleeping

Drug / alcohol intake

**MAKING SENSE OF WHY
A YOUNG PERSON MAY
BE HURTING THEMSELF**



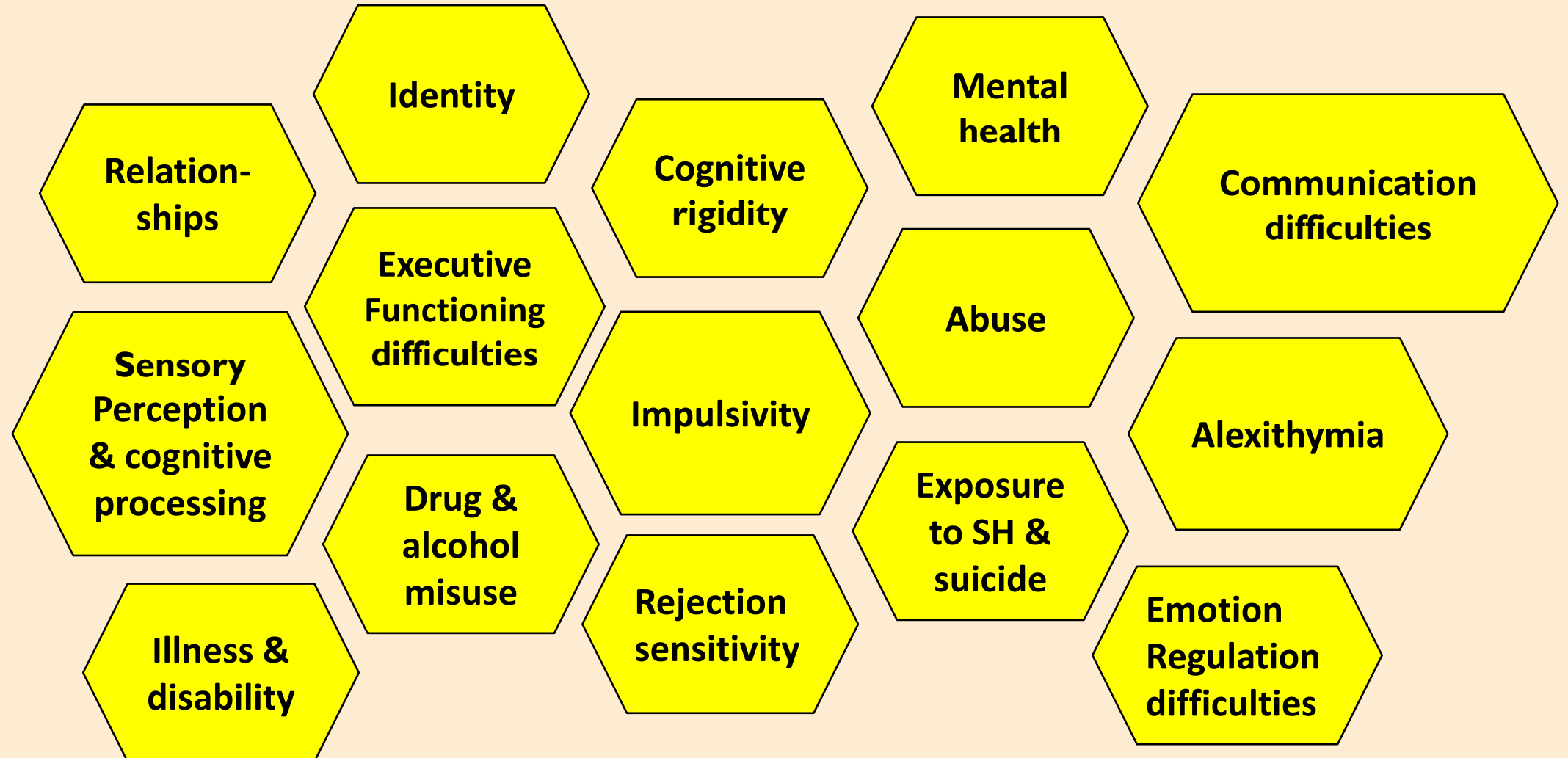
Understanding why Neurodivergent Young People Hurt Themselves

“Why do young people hurt themselves intentionally?”

- Harm to self is often a solution to how a child feels in the moment
- It can become a stable way of managing or escaping painful emotions
- For many, it is not a viable long-term strategy and can lead to feeling worse over time
- Harm to self can begin accidentally, and when its inadvertently reinforced, it can become a learned behaviour



UNDERLYING FACTORS





WHY MIGHT NEURODIVERGENT CHILDREN NEED MORE SUPPORT WITH THEIR BIG FEELINGS?

- Emotional literacy
- Emotion dysregulation
- Environment and experiences
- Brain differences in neurodivergent children

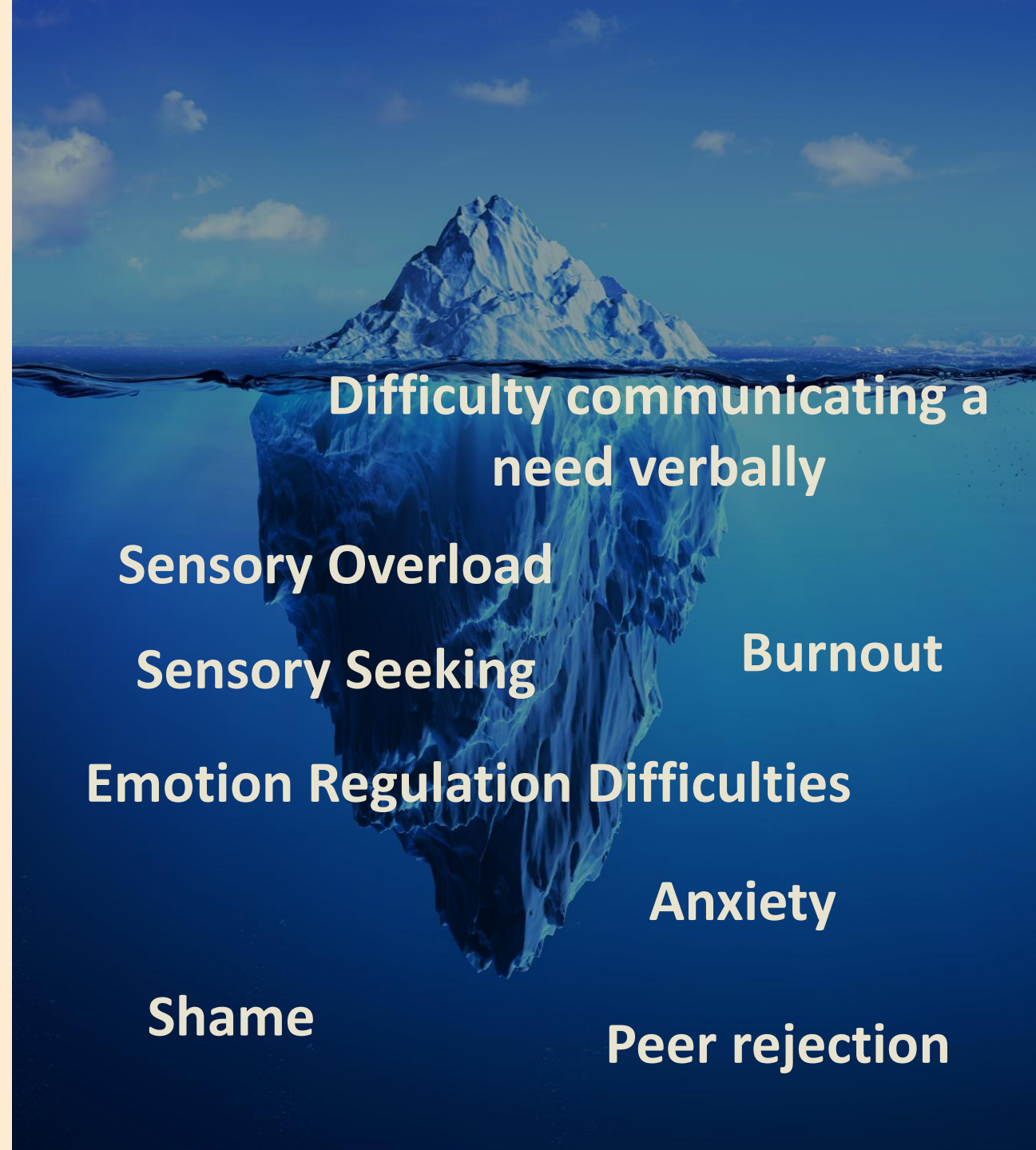
SUPPORTING TO PROBLEM SOLVE

We need to help
understand what is
underlying the behaviour

Support to understand any
problems and how they
may be addressed

Finding safer ways to cope
with the difficulties

Support to learn
additional communication
skills



**Difficulty communicating a
need verbally**

Sensory Overload

Sensory Seeking

Burnout

Emotion Regulation Difficulties

Anxiety

Shame

Peer rejection

MAKING SENSE OF THE FUNCTION:



- We can't know the function just by observing a behaviour
- Self-harm and self injury may serve a variety of different functions at different times/ for different reasons. For example
 - To distract from experiences
 - To communicate needs or distress
 - To connect
 - Emotional release
 - Managing a sense of shame
 - To manage sensory information
- To understand, we need to be curious and non-judgemental

MAKING SENSE OF THE FUNCTION: TRACKING BEHAVIOUR

When did it happen? Day & time	Where did it happen?	Who was present?	What was happening at the time?	What occurred immediately before?	What occurred immediately after?

HOW TO SUPPORT YOUR CHILD

- Difficult conversations
- Supporting your child to self soothe
- Supporting the use of coping strategies
- Wound hygiene and aftercare
 - Harnessing others' help
 - Parent tips



MANAGING DIFFICULT CONVERSATIONS



- Being present
- Getting the timing right
- Use 'I' statements
- Listen and be curious
- Do not interrupt or be judgmental
- Come alongside
- Let them know you want to support them and ask / discuss how you might do that

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What reasons might our children find it hard to open up to us?

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What things do you do or could you do that might help your young person to talk/open up?

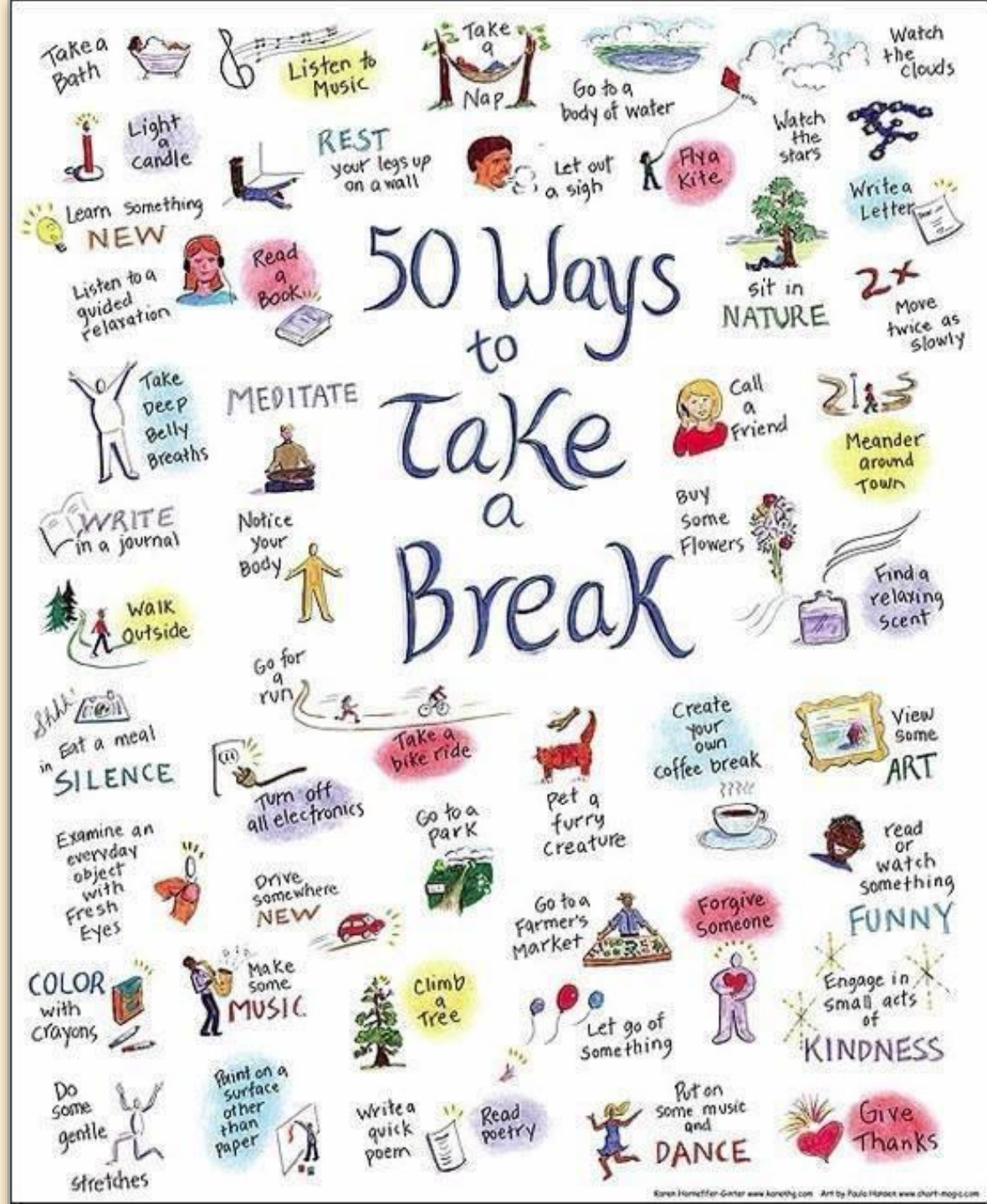
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TALKING ABOUT HARM WITH YOUR YOUNG PERSON

- Things to avoid:
- Metaphors (“doing this to yourself”, “dark thoughts”)
- Abstract questions (“Why do you do this?”)
- Avoid emotional overload in the moment
- What helps instead:
- Simple, concrete language
- One question at a time
- Visual supports
- Talking *after* regulation, not during crisis

SELF CARE

- We all need to learn ways to look after ourselves
- We all need to be kind to ourselves
 - Show compassion, discourage self criticism
- Plan to do something enjoyable and relaxing everyday

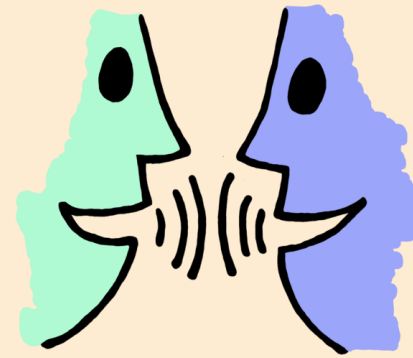


SELF-SOOTHE BOX



SUPPORTING THE USE OF COPING STRATEGIES

- Consider other ways to help manage symptoms
- Coping strategies should be linked to the **function**
- Consider accessibility



SUPPORTING THE DEVELOPMENT OF COPING STRATEGIES

FUNCTION OF BEHAVIOUR	HOW TO SUPPORT COPING STRATEGIES
Distraction	Offer alternative, high-engagement distractions (e.g., loud music, videos, games, intense movement/exercise)
Sensory regulation/snap out/feel something	Provide safer sensory input/modulation (e.g., ginger, sour sweets, crunchy foods, cold water, deep pressure, squeezing, fidgets, environmental adaptations like ear defenders, low stimulus), consider further information on sensory differences Childhood Neurodiversity: Understanding and Supporting Sensory Needs and Occupational Therapy support available
Communicate	Support alternative methods of communication – e.g., agree on traffic light system, colour coded cards to express levels of distress, visual charts, agreeing key words

SUPPORTING THE DEVELOPMENT OF COPING STRATEGIES

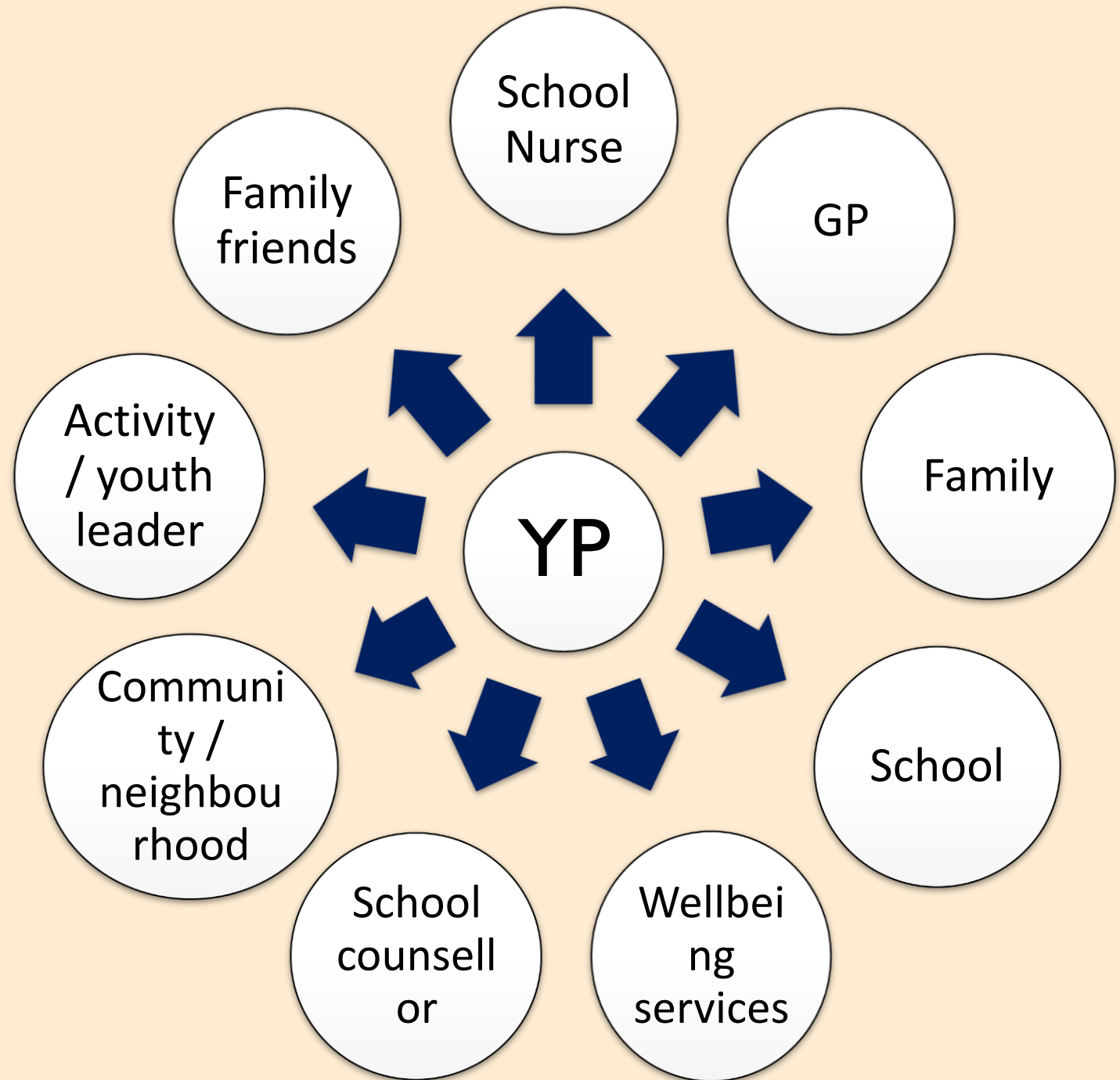
FUNCTION OF BEHAVIOUR	HOW TO SUPPORT COPING STRATEGIES
Need for connection / reassurance	Build in predictable, regular connection during calm times (not only when distress is high)
Emotional release / overwhelm	Consider preventative methods to reduce overwhelm including environmental adaptations and social stories. Support safe ways to release emotion (e.g., scream into a pillow, hit pillow, rip paper, write it out, do a short burst of high impact movement)
Self-criticism / shame	Encourage repair, compassion and self soothing e.g self soothe box, coping statements

WOUND HYGIENE AND AFTERCARE

- Apply pressure to any bleeding cuts, then clean them under a running tap. Use of a sterile adhesive dressing
- With burns, cool with water for 10-30 minutes, then cover with cling film
- If a wound is infected, seek medical help
- **If concerned about any injury, or a child has taken tablets/harmful substances, seek urgent medical help. Always follow NHS advice**
- Speak to a health or social care professional to get specific guidance and support.



**BUILDING
YOUR
SUPPORT
NETWORKS**





PARENT/CARER
TOP TIPS

- Be curious and help understand what is going on underneath
- Your reaction is important; validate and be non-judgmental
- Work together on a plan
- Managing your own emotions
- Encourage your child to learn to self soothe and use alternative coping strategies
- Seek additional support / use resources below

‘Listen to your child. Help them manage their reactions. Throw lots of love at the whole thing.’

‘Let them know we love them and want to help’

HOLDING HOPE

‘Be there for them, ensure there are no distractions’

‘Reaffirm that your love is unconditional’



‘It is common for young people to not be able to explain why they do it’

‘Remember about our own self care’

KEY RESOURCES IF YOU ARE WORRIED ABOUT YOUR YOUNG PERSON

- **Young Minds parent helpline** 0808 802 5544 (9am -4.30pm M-F) and webchat service: <https://www.youngminds.org.uk/parent/parents-helpline-and-webchat/>

- **111, option 2 crisis support**

- **Papyrus – Prevention of Young Suicide**

[Papyrus UK Suicide Prevention | Prevention of Young Suicide \(papyrus-uk.org\)](https://www.papyrus-uk.org/)

- **Psychology in Schools Parent**

Workshop: Understanding Self Harm in Children/Adolescents

[Understanding Self-Harm in Children/Adolescents \(youtube.com\)](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=...)

- [MIND urgent help](#)



- **Calm Harm app:** <https://calmharm.co.uk/>
- **HelpGuide – Self-Harm** “A Guide to Self-Harm & How to Feel Better Without Hurting Yourself”
- **School /school nurse**
- **Self-Harm UK Alumina** – Free online group self-help support group for 11-19 year olds. This is an online 7-week course for young people struggling with self-harm.
- **kooth.com** – free online counselling for 11-25 year olds (N&S)
- **ChildLine**

Other useful contacts and websites for self-harm/suicide prevention

www.themix.org.uk - (0808 808 4994) Helpline, email help, webchat, crisis messenger, counselling and general info.

www.nshn.co.uk/downloads.html - Ideas to help distract you when you want to self-harm

www.samaritans.org.uk (116 123) Email: Jo@samaritans.org Listening support 24 hours a day, no matter the issue.

www.childline.org.uk - Freephone: 0800 1111) - ChildLine is a free service for young people that are available at any time for any issue. You can either call or email them.

RESOURCES FOR PARENTS/CARERS

- **Young Minds parent helpline** 0808 802 5544 (9am -4.30pm M-F) and webchat service: <https://www.youngminds.org.uk/parent/parents-helpline-and-webchat/>
- **Parent guide** to coping with self harm
- https://www.psych.ox.ac.uk/files/news/copy_of_coping-with-self-harm-brochure_final_copyright.pdf
- [Keeping children safe online | NSPCC](#)
- The Truth about Self harm: <https://www.mentalhealth.org.uk/a-to-z/s/self-harm>
- If child is really struggling: Get help in a crisis (NHS 111, Option 2): [Help in a crisis | Norfolk and Suffolk NHS \(nsft.nhs.uk\)](#)
- Suffolk mental health services [Suffolk Children and Young People's Emotional Wellbeing Hub | Suffolk County Council](#)
- Norfolk mental health services: <https://www.justonenorfolk.nhs.uk/emotional-health/children-young-peoples-emotional-health>

PSYCHOLOGY IN SCHOOLS: FREE LIVE WORKSHOPS AND VIDEO RECORDINGS

Upcoming LIVE Parent/Carer workshops on mental health
www.nsft.uk/workshops Eventbrite



Recorded previous mental health workshops on a range of topics:

- School Avoidance, Tics and Tourette's, Self-harm, Managing Behaviour, Social Media, OCD, Exam stress and more!

www.nsft.nhs.uk/parent-workshops

Childhood Neurodiversity Workshops:



[Neurodiversity online parent/carer workshops - Suffolk SEND Local Offer](#)

Access recorded workshops from previous series here:

[Parent workshops | Norfolk and Suffolk NHS](#)

Recovery College

Recovery College

Open to all aged 16 and above and interested in mental health recovery in Norfolk and Suffolk, the Recovery College provides free educational courses to equip you with the skills and strategies to move on with your recovery and/or to support others.

[Recovery College | Norfolk and Suffolk NHS](#)

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How would you rate your knowledge of self-harm in neurodivergent young people after attending the workshop today?

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How would you rate your confidence in supporting your young person with self-harm after attending the workshop today?

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Two things I will take away from this workshop are...

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One thing that could be improved about this workshop is...

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**I found today's workshop
helpful...**

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Childhood Neurodiversity: Parent/Carer Feedback Survey

