

Managing the Urge to Self-Harm during the COVID-19 pandemic using the Calm Harm app

A booklet for young people from stem4



By Dr Nihara Krause, Consultant Clinical Psychologist

About

This booklet accompanies a video outlining how you can use the Calm Harm app to manage the urge to self-harm during the COVID-19 pandemic.

stem4 is a London based charity supporting positive mental health in teenagers through a portfolio of mental health apps and providing mental health literacy in secondary schools and colleges.

Dr Nihara Krause is a Consultant Clinical Psychologist with many years of clinical practice and is also the clinical creator of the stem4 digital portfolio.

stem4 thank the CAF Coronavirus Emergency Fund for their generous donation towards the creation of this booklet and the accompanying video.

Introduction

The outbreak of Coronavirus (COVID-19) has been difficult, both in terms of the restrictions it has caused and how it has created an uncertain and anxious time for us all.

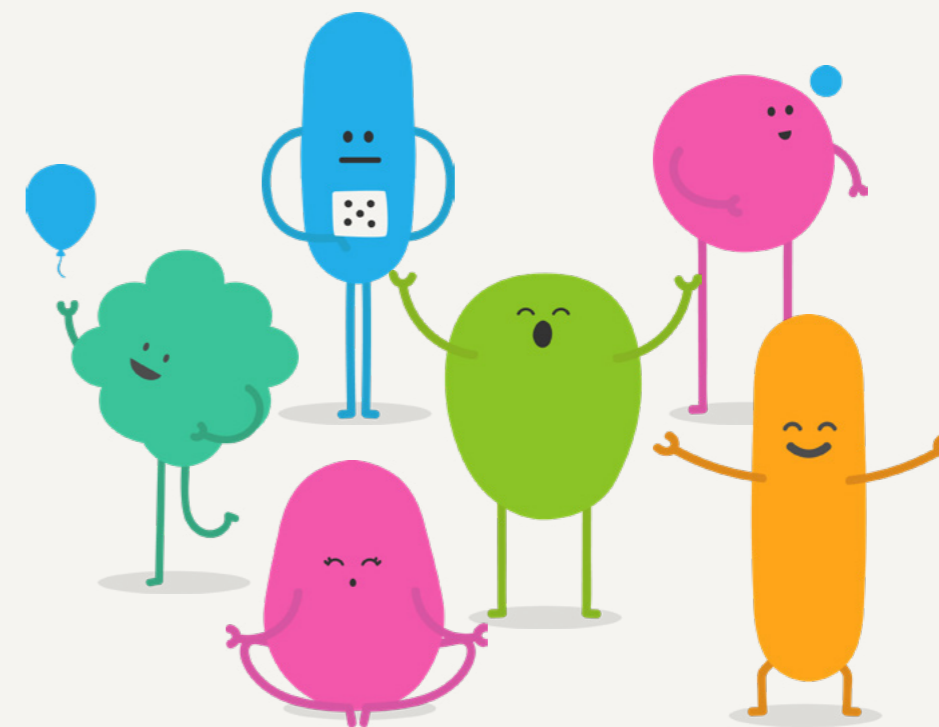
Many young people - particularly those who had mental health difficulties before the outbreak - are worried about how the situation might impact their mental health.

The most important thing to remember is that if you find yourself finding it difficult to cope with difficult emotions and behaviours - you are not alone.

This booklet, which supports the Calm Harm app and accompanying video on using Calm Harm during the COVID-19 pandemic, will help you and your loved ones get through this period, and protect your mental health as best you can.

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Chapter 1

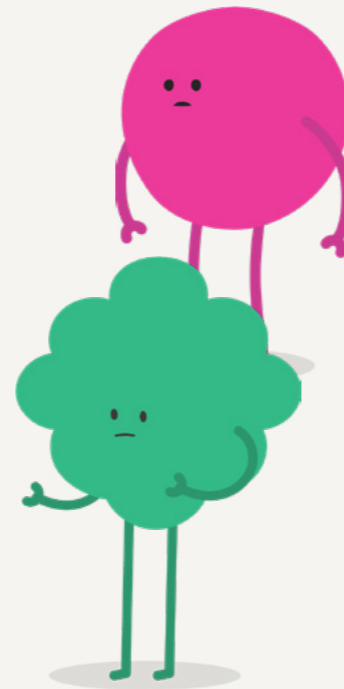
About Self-Harm

Self-harm is when someone hurts themselves in order to express, deal with or communicate difficult emotions.

In most cases there is no suicidal intention, but this is always a factor that needs to be monitored. Self-harm is a behaviour that is used by all ages and genders (although it is more common in teenagers and girls). Self-harm with suicidal intent however, is more common in boys and men, and in people who are LGBTQ+.

Some identifying features include:

- Regular self-harm marks
- Covering of arms and parts of their body even when it's very warm and it's noticeably different to how the person usually is
- Someone in the friendship group self-harms or a member of the person's family self-harms
- Carrying out a lot of risky behaviour without care about the consequences
- Experiencing difficult to manage emotions or poor mental health
- In some cases, eating and body related issues
- LGBTQ+ related issues
- Bereavement by suicide in someone close



Self-harm, particularly if identified early and the person is motivated to change, responds well to treatment. In general, psychological treatment is the most effective. One effective form of treatment is called Dialectic Behaviour Therapy (DBT).

This is a form of talking treatment that is used to help people who feel very intense emotions. It focuses on helping them notice, understand and accept difficult emotions as well as learn how to manage them.

Chapter 2

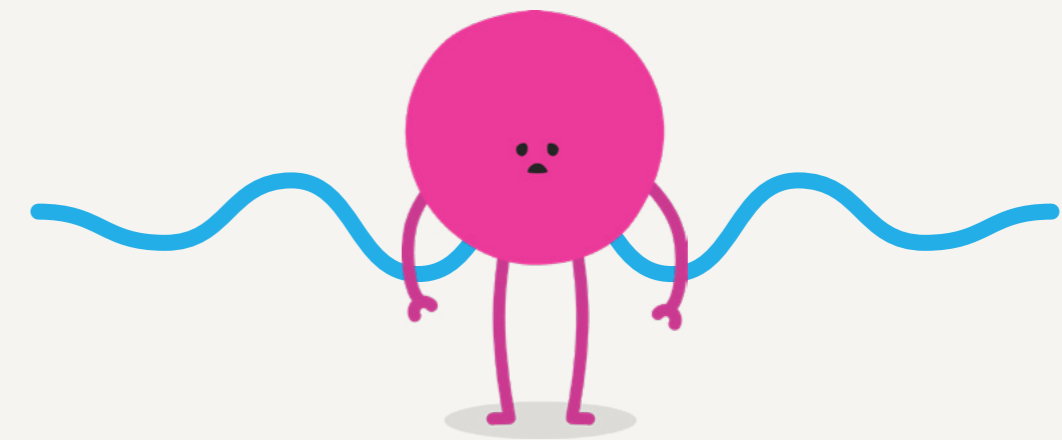
Self-Harm and COVID-19

The spread of COVID-19 and the uncertainty surrounding how to protect ourselves has caused significant unrest in the community.



Not being able to go out or do many things, as well as feeling bored, anxious or depressed about the future are all consequences of this difficult time. Some families have had to face great pressure and change connected with poor health, financial difficulties and relationship issues.

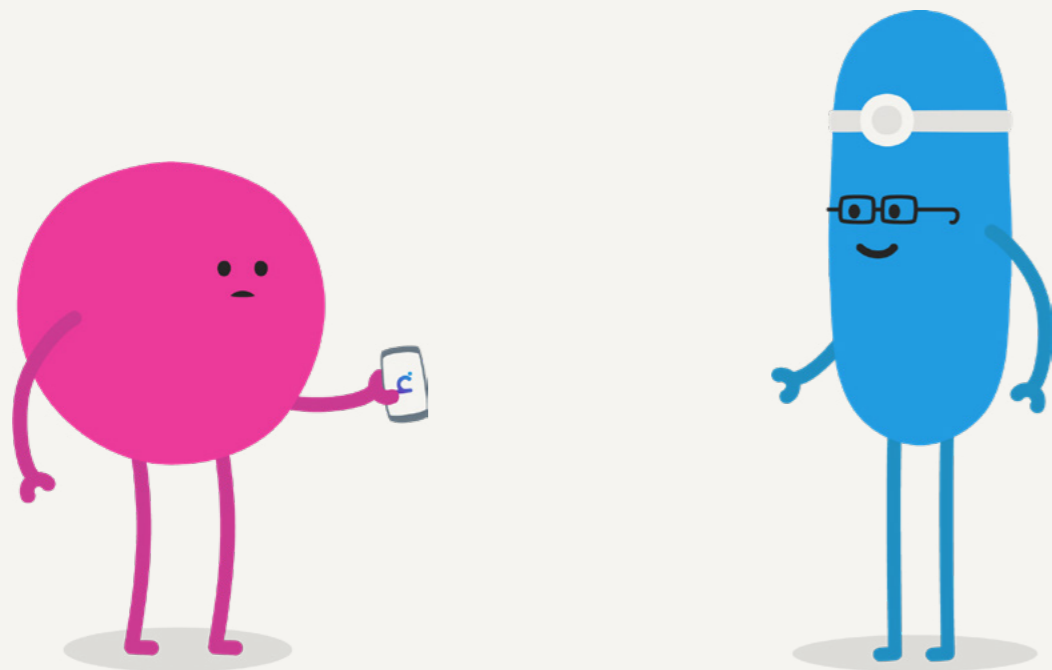
As a result of such enormous pressures, some young people may struggle to cope and have thoughts of hurting themselves. Those who were already self-harming prior to the pandemic may have further self-harmed due to being without the structure or support they usually have to stop and with limited access to self-soothing activities such as exercise. A very small proportion may even want to end their own life.



It is important to remember that thoughts of hurting yourself and intense emotions do pass and that there are things that can be done to help cope with distress. Since everyone is different and the reasons for self-harm are different, finding out what will help the most is useful. To do this check out helpful websites such as the stem4 self-harm section.

The first step in getting help is to try and talk to a responsible adult. This isn't easy to do but it is the first step to recovery and can often be a huge relief. Try and tell them about how you are feeling. You don't have to give details, just focus on the feelings behind your self-harm.

Very occasionally the person you tell might not react in the way you hoped for. Please don't let this reaction put you off seeking the help you deserve. Once you have told someone who can help, the next step is to explore all the different options of help. Talking to your GP can help to identify what these are.



The reason for making change is because self-harm is not a positive or long-term solution to deal with difficult emotions. If you are worried about your own or someone else's safety do not hesitate to call an emergency number such as 111 or 999 or talk to someone on Childline 0800 1111.

During COVID-19 access to services for self-harm has been disrupted. This has been difficult to deal with. In addition, people have also avoided going to Accident and Emergency Departments, sometimes neglecting vital care. If you think you have an injury that needs medical attention or that might be infected, please don't let COVID-19 prevent you from seeking help.

Chapter 3

About the Calm Harm app

Calm Harm is a free app that helps children and young people (CYP) from 13 years onwards, resist or manage the urge to self-harm, created by Consultant Clinical Psychologist Dr Nihara Krause for stem4.

Calm Harm encourages users to break the pattern of self-harm early in its development. It provides a range of suitable activities to suit different ages based on the underlying reasons for self-harm, encourages self-monitoring and provides the opportunity to start to learn alternative and safe ways to deal with distress.

The app provides users with four categories of tasks based on the main causes of self-harm:



The app also includes a breathing technique to help reduce symptoms of anxiety and allow users to stay in the moment.

Calm Harm is an aid to help young people manage and resist the urge to self-harm and is not intended to replace treatment. It is essential that a young person who is self-harming takes the steps to access appropriate treatment.

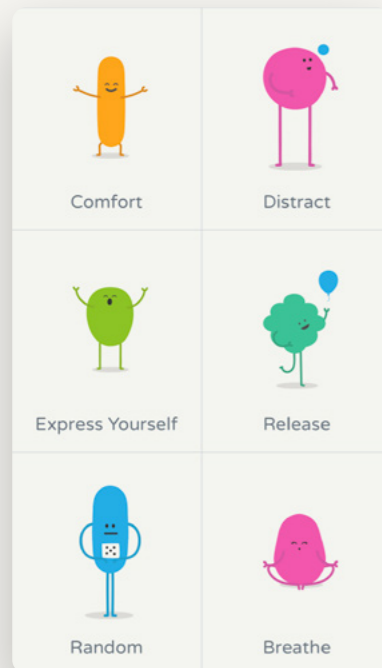
The app has been developed for young people and based on their age, they are provided with age relevant tasks. The app uses a surfer analogy where 'the urge to self-harm is like a wave. It feels the most powerful when you start wanting to do it.' The user is encouraged to learn to 'ride the wave' through the use of activities or through self-soothing so that 'the urge to self-harm will fade.'

Calm Harm is completely private and password-protected and is free to download for iOS and Android devices from the App Store and Google Play.

Chapter 4

Using Calm Harm over the pandemic period and after

If you are controlling the emotions felt as a result of the pandemic through self-harm



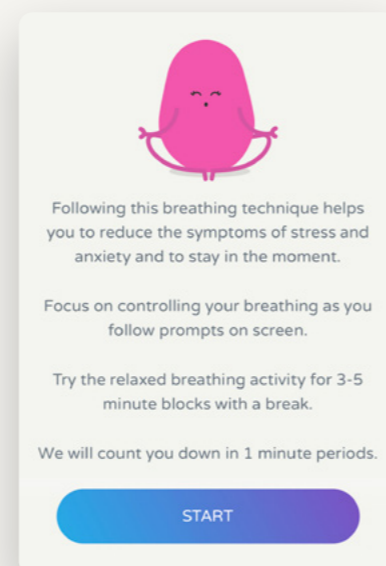
Calm Harm has several sections that help manage difficult emotions.

If you feel sad, hurt or upset choose tasks from the 'Comfort' section that will help you to be kind to yourself to soothe difficult emotions rather than hurt yourself. Many of them can be carried out whilst observing social distancing rules.

You can also express difficult feelings rather than using harm to release them. To help you with this try some of the tasks in the 'Express' section of the app.

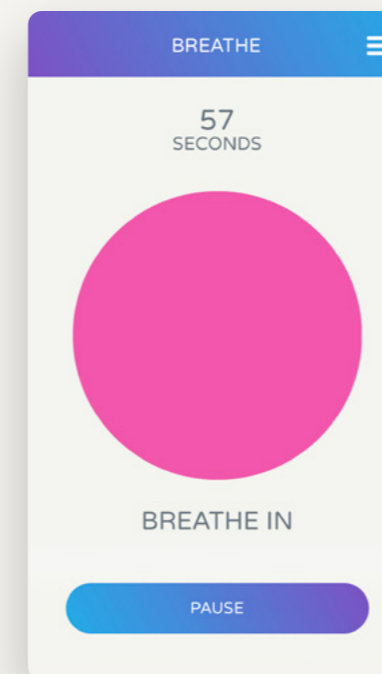
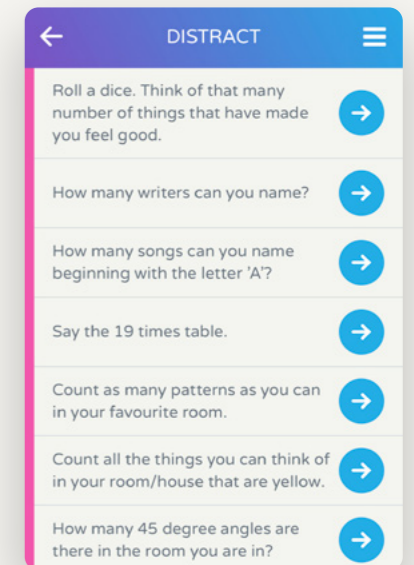
If you feel that your feelings are too big and that the only way you know to release them is through self-harm, then try the activities in the Release section of the app. These activities provide alternatives to self-harm that are safe.

You may also wish to use the 'Breathe' section and the Comfort section after you have released feelings to calm.



Affected by the ongoing news about COVID-19 or the impact that restrictions and change is having on your life?

Use the 'Distract' section of Calm Harm to give yourself a break and to provide a move away from both the distressing triggers as well as thoughts of self-harm. Once you feel in more control of managing your behaviours, use any of the other categories to provide you with alternative coping behaviours.



Anxious about the uncertainty brought about by the pandemic, worries about health issues or the impact on others?

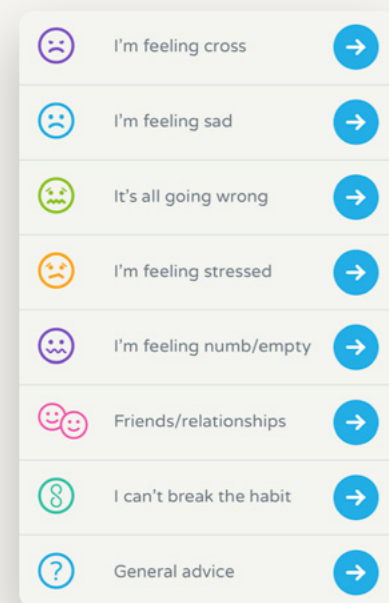
Anxiety has been high during the pandemic and may well increase as life resumes. One of the most common reasons our users tell us they have used Calm Harm over the pandemic has been to deal with stress or anxiety.

To help manage stress or anxiety and avoid harm, start with the 'Breathe' section of the app. This should help to make you feel physically more relaxed. You may wish to have a break from anxious worrying or overthinking and to do this you could use the 'Distract' section of Calm Harm.

Often anxiety is helped by identifying what the actual problem is, coming up with a plan, or even feeling a little more in control of anxious feelings. Manage this by using the 'Express Yourself' section of Calm Harm which has many tasks which enable you to state exactly what might be making you anxious and provide you with an opportunity to come up with a management plan.

Self-harming because of suicidal thoughts?

Suicidal thoughts are thoughts a person has about wanting to end their life in order to feel less emotional or physical pain. The uncertainty and the consequences of COVID-19 together with possible grieving you may have experienced might make you feel sad about your life.



Please look at the 'Get Help' section for helpful numbers which include Childline [0800 1111](tel:08001111), Samaritans [116 123](tel:116123), NHS [111](tel:111) which are all free phone numbers to support you and direct you to help.

It can also be helpful to distract yourself from difficult thoughts and using the 'Distract' section of the app. Using 'Release' can be helpful as well.

If the thoughts make you feel alone do carry out the 'Comfort' activities and don't hesitate in contacting someone who can help. This may be a responsible adult or trying the numbers above.

Your log and journals which can be accessed through the app will help you to see that change is possible.

So, please keep in mind that the thoughts of hurting yourself will pass. There are things you can do right now to help you to cope with the distress you might be feeling. Write a list of helpful people and numbers and get in touch with them.



Resources

There are many resources listed in Calm Harm. They are listed in the 'Get Help' section and under 'General Advice':

Mind
www.mind.org.uk

The Calm Zone
www.thecalmzone.net

Childline
www.childline.org.uk

Anxiety UK
www.anxietyuk.org.uk

No Panic
www.nopanic.org.uk

Relate
www.relate.org.uk

Harmless
www.harmless.org.uk

NSHN
www.nshn.co.uk

Young Minds
youngminds.org.uk



www.stem4.org.uk

This resource has been made possible through generous funding from The CAF Coronavirus Emergency Fund.

Email: enquiries@stem4.org.uk

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