



DIVERSUS
HEALTH

Alternative Coping Mechanisms to Avoid or Reduce Self-Harm

Alternatives for when you're feeling angry or restless:

- Scribble on photos of people in magazines
- Viciously stab an orange
- Throw a pair of socks against the wall
- Have a pillow fight with the wall
- Scream into a pillow
- Tear apart newspapers, photos, or magazines
- Go to the gym, dance, exercise
- Listen to music and sing along loudly
- Draw a picture of what is making you angry
- Beat up a stuffed bear
- Pop bubble wrap
- Pop balloons
- Splatter paint
- Scribble on a piece of paper until the whole page is black
- Filling a piece of paper with drawing cross hatches
- Throw darts at a dartboard
- Go for a run
- Write your feelings on paper then rip it up
- Use stress relievers
- Build a fort of pillows and then destroy it
- Throw ice cubes at the bathtub wall, at a tree, etc.
- Get out a fine-tooth comb and vigorously brush the fur of a stuffed animal (but use gentle vigor)
- Slash an empty plastic soda bottle or a piece of heavy cardboard or an old shirt or sock
- Make a soft cloth doll to represent the things you are angry at; cut and tear it instead of yourself
- Flatten aluminum cans for recycling, seeing how fast you can go
- On a sketch or photo of yourself, mark in red ink what you want to do. Cut and tear the picture
- Break sticks
- Cut up fruits
- Make yourself as comfortable as possible
- Stomp around in heavy shoes
- Play handball or tennis
- Yell at what you are breaking and tell it why you are angry, hurt, upset, etc.
- Buy a cheap plate and decorate it with markers, stickers, cut outs from magazines, words, images, whatever that expresses your pain and sadness and when you're done, smash it. (Please be careful when doing this)



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Alternatives that will give you a sensation (other than pain) without harming yourself:

- Hold ice in your hands, against your arm, or in your mouth
- Run your hands under freezing cold water
- Snap a rubber band or hair band against your wrist
- Clap your hands until it stings
- Wax your legs
- Drink freezing cold water
- Splash your face with cold water
- Put PVA/Elmer's glue on your hands then peel it off
- Massage where you want to hurt yourself
- Take a hot shower/bath
- Jump up and down to get some sensation in your feet
- Write or paint on yourself
- Arm wrestle with a member of your family
- Take a cold bath
- Bite into a hot pepper or chew a piece of ginger root
- Rub liniment under your nose
- Put tiger balm on the places you want to cut. (Tiger balm is a muscle relaxant cream that induces a tingly sensation. You can find it in most health food stores and vitamin stores.)

Alternatives that will distract you or take up time:

- Say "I'll self-harm in fifteen minutes if I still want to" and keep going for periods of fifteen minutes until the urge fades
- Color your hair
- Count up to ten getting louder until you are screaming
- Sing on the karaoke machine
- Complete something you've been putting off
- Take up a new hobby
- Make a cup of tea
- Tell and laugh at jokes
- Play solitaire
- Count up to 500 or 1000
- Surf the net
- Make as many words out of your full name as possible
- Count ceiling tiles or lights
- Search ridiculous things on the web
- Color-coordinate your wardrobe
- Play with toys, such as a slinky
- Go to the park and play on the swings
- Call up an old friend
- Go "people watching"
- Carry safe, rather than sharp, things in your pockets



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- Do schoolwork
- Play a musical instrument
- Watch TV or a movie
- Paint your nails
- Alphabetize your CDs or books
- Cook
- Make origami to occupy your hands
- Doodle on sheets of paper
- Dress up or try on old clothes
- Play computer games or painting programs, such as photoshop
- Write out lyrics to your favorite song
- Play a sport
- Read a book/magazine
- Do a crossword
- Draw a comic strip
- Make a chain link out of paper counting the hours or days you've been self-harm free using pretty colored paper
- Knit, sew, or make a necklace
- Make 'scoobies' - braid pieces of plastic or lace, to keep your hands busy
- Buy a plant and take care of it
- Hunt for things on eBay or Amazon
- Browse the forums
- Go shopping
- Memorize a poem with meaning
- Learn to swear in another language
- Look up words in a dictionary
- Play hide-and-seek with your siblings
- Go outside and watch the clouds roll by
- Plan a party
- Find out if any concerts will be in your area
- Make your own dance routine
- Trace your hand on a piece of paper; on your thumb, write something you like to look at; on your index finger, write something you like to touch; on your middle finger, write your favorite scent; on your ring finger, write something you like the taste of; on your pinky finger, write something you like to listen to; on your palm, write something you like about yourself
- Plan regular activities for your most difficult time of day
- Finish homework before it's due
- Take a break from mental processing
- Notice black and white thinking
- Get out on your own, get away from the stress
- Go on YouTube
- Make a scrapbook



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- Color in a picture or coloring book.
- Make a phone list of people you can call for support. Allow yourself to use it.
- Pay attention to your breathing (breath slowly, in through your nose and out through your mouth)
- Pay attention to the rhythmic motions of your body (walking, stretching, etc.)
- Learn HALT signals (hungry, angry, lonely, tired)
- Choose a random object, like a paper clip, and try to list 30 different uses for it
- Pick a subject and research it on the web - alternatively, pick something to research and then keep clicking on links, trying to get as far away from the original topic as you can.
- Take a small step towards a goal you have.

Alternatives that are completely bizarre. At the least, you'll have a laugh:

- Crawl on all fours and bark like a dog or another animal
- Run around outside screaming
- Laugh for no reason whatsoever
- Make funny faces in a mirror
- Without turning orange, self-tan
- Pluck your eyebrows
- Put faces on apples, oranges, or other sorts of food
- Go to the zoo and name all of the animals
- Color on the walls
- Blow bubbles
- Pull weeds in the garden

Alternatives for when you're feeling guilty, sad, or lonely:

- Congratulate yourself on each minute you go without self-harming
- Draw or paint
- Look at the sky
- Instead of punishing yourself by self-harming, punish yourself by not self-harming
- Call a friend and ask for company
- Buy a cuddly toy
- Give someone a hug with a smile
- Put a face mask on
- Watch a favorite TV show or movie
- Eat something ridiculously sweet
- Remember a happy moment and relive it for a while in your head
- Treat yourself to some chocolate
- Try to imagine the future and plan things you want to do
- Look at things that are special to you
- Compliment someone else
- Make sculptures
- Watch fish
- Let yourself cry



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- Play with a pet
- Have or give a massage
- Imagine yourself living in a perfect home and describe it in your mind
- If you're religious, read the Bible or pray
- Light a candle and watch the flame (but please be careful)
- Go chat in the chat room
- Allow yourself to cry; crying is a healthy release of emotion
- Accept a gift from a friend
- Carry tokens to remind you of peaceful comforting things/people
- Take a hot bath with bath oil or bubbles
- Curl up under a comforter with hot cocoa and a good book
- Make affirmation tapes inside you that are good, kind, gentle (Sometimes you can do this by writing down the negative thoughts and then physically re-writing them into positive messages)
- Make a tray of special treats and tuck yourself into bed with it and watch TV or read

Alternatives for when you're feeling panicky or scared:

- "See, hear and feel"- 5 things, then 4, then 3 and countdown to one which will make you focus on your surroundings and will calm you down
- Listen to soothing music; have a CD with motivational songs that you can listen to
- Meditate or do yoga
- Name all of your soft toys
- Hug a pillow or soft toy
- Hyper focus on something
- Do a "reality check list" – write down all the things you can list about where you are now (e.g. It is the 9th November 2020, I'm in a room and everything is going to be alright)
- With permission, give someone a hug
- Drink herbal tea
- Crunch ice
- Hug a tree
- Go for a walk if it's safe to do so
- Feel your pulse to prove you're alive
- Go outside and attempt to catch butterflies or lizards
- Put your feet firmly on the floor
- Accept where you are in the process. Beating yourself up, only makes it worse
- Touch something familiar/safe. Leave the room
- Lay on your back in bed comfortably (eyes closed), and breathe in for 4, hold for 2, out for 4, hold for 2. Make sure to fill your belly up with air, not your chest. If your shoulders are going up, keep working on it. When you're comfortable breathing, put your hand on your belly and rub up and down in time with your breathing. If your mind wanders to other things, move it back to focusing ONLY on the synchronized movement of your hand and breathing.
- Give yourself permission to.... (Keep it safe)



Alternatives that will hopefully make you think twice about harming yourself:

- Think about how you don't want scars
- Treat yourself nicely
- Remember that you don't have to hurt yourself just because you're thinking about self-harm
- Create a safe place to go
- Acknowledge that self-harm is harmful behavior: say "I want to hurt myself" rather than "I want to cut"
- Repeat to yourself "I don't deserve to be hurt" even if you don't believe it
- Remember that you always have the choice not to cut: it's up to you what you do
- Think about how you may feel guilty after self-harming
- Remind yourself that the urge to self-harm is impulsive: you will only feel like cutting for short bursts of time
- Avoid temptation
- Get your friends to make you friendship bracelets: wear them around your wrists to remind you of them when you want to cut
- Be with other people
- Make your own list of things to do instead of self-harm
- Make a list of your positive character traits
- Be nice to your family, who in return, will hopefully be nice to you
- Put a Band-Aid on the area where you'd like to self-harm
- Recognize and acknowledge the choices you have NOW
- Pay attention to the changes needed to make you feel safe
- Notice "choices" versus "dilemmas"
- Lose the "should-could-have to" words. Try... "What if"
- Kiss the places you want to Self-Harm or kiss the places you have healing wounds. It can be a reminder that you care about myself and that you don't want this
- Choose your way of thinking, try to resist following old thinking patterns
- The Butterfly project- draw a butterfly on the place(s) that you would self-harm and if the butterfly fades without self-harming, it means it has lived and flown away, giving a sense of achievement. Whereas if you do self-harm with the butterfly there; you will have to wash it off. If that does happen, you can start again by drawing a new one on. You can name the butterfly after someone you love.
- Write the name of a loved one [a friend, family member, or anyone else who cares about you] and write their name where you want to self-harm. When you go to self-harm remember how much they care and wouldn't want you to harm yourself.
- Think about what you would say to a friend who was struggling with the same things you are and try to be a good friend to yourself.
- Make a bracelet out of duct tape and put a line on it every day (or any period of time) you go without self-harm. When it's full of lines, take it off and make a chain out of all the bracelets and hang it up somewhere where you can be reminded of your great progress.



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Alternatives that give the illusion of seeing something similar to blood:

- Draw on yourself with a red pen or body paint, or go to a site such as this, where you ‘cut’ the screen (be aware that some users may find this triggering, so view with caution)
- Cover yourself with plasters where you want to cut
- Give yourself a henna or fake tattoo
- Make “wounds” with makeup, like lipstick
- Take a small bottle of liquid red food coloring and warm it slightly by dropping it into a cup of hot water for a few minutes. Uncap the bottle and press its tip against the place you want to cut. Draw the bottle in a cutting motion while squeezing it slightly to let the food color trickle out.
- Draw on the areas you want to cut using ice that you’ve made by dropping six or seven drops of red food color into each of the ice-cube tray wells.
- Paint yourself with red tempera paint.
- ‘Cut’ your skin with nail polish (it feels cold, but it’s hard to get off)

Alternatives to help you sort through your feelings:

- Phone a friend and talk to them
- Make a collage of how you feel
- Negotiate with yourself
- Identify what is hurting so bad that you need to express it in this way
- Write your feelings in a diary
- Free write (Write down whatever you’re thinking at that moment, even if it doesn’t make sense)
- Make lists of everything such as blessings in your life
- Make a notebook of song lyrics that you relate to
- Call a hotline
- Write a letter to someone telling them how you feel (but you don’t have to send it if you decide not to)
- Start a grateful journal where every day you write down three: good things that happened/ things that you accomplished/ are grateful for/ made you smile. Make sure the journal is strictly for positive things. Then when you feel down you can go back and look at it