

SAFER SUPPORT WHEN SELF-HARM URGES FEEL STRONG

You deserve support through this moment.

Self-harm urges can be intense, especially during sensory overload, shutdown, rejection, distress or difficulty communicating. The goal is not to shame or demand calmness. The priority is safety, connection and reducing the intensity of the moment.

If you may seriously hurt yourself or cannot stay safe:

Move towards another person. Call Kenya emergency services on 999 or 112, or go to the nearest emergency department.

Try one safe step first



PAUSE AND DELAY

Tell yourself: "I will wait ten minutes." Set a timer and move away from anything you could use to hurt yourself.



CONNECT WITH SOMEONE

Call, message or sit near a trusted person. You can say: "I am not safe alone right now. Please stay with me."



CHANGE THE SPACE

Move to a shared, quieter or safer place. Reduce noise, bright light, demands or conflict where possible.



USE SAFE SENSORY INPUT

Hold a cool cloth, squeeze putty, wrap in a comfortable blanket, use headphones, chew something safe or smell a familiar scent.



MOVE WITHOUT HURTING

Walk, stretch, push against a wall, shake out your hands, rock, pace or do another regulating movement that is safe for your body.



COMMUNICATE YOUR NEED

Speak, type, point, sign, draw or use AAC. Try: "I need space," "Stay with me," "It hurts," or "Please help me feel safe."

Avoid substitutions that still cause pain or injury.

Snapping bands, rubbing ice directly on skin, hitting, stinging, extreme hot/cold exposure or marking the body may reinforce the same pain cycle. Choose comfort, movement, connection or professional support instead.

Supporting a neurodivergent person respectfully

Self-harm is communication of distress, not “bad behaviour” or attention-seeking. Stay calm, speak plainly, reduce demands and take all statements about self-harm or suicide seriously.



RESPOND WITHOUT SHAME

- Say: “Thank you for telling me.”
- Ask: “Are you in immediate danger?”
- Listen without arguing, punishment or lectures.
- Do not promise secrecy when safety is at risk.



MAKE THE ENVIRONMENT SAFER

- Stay nearby if risk is immediate.
- With consent where possible, create distance from items or places linked to harm.
- Reduce sensory load, conflict and unnecessary language.
- Seek urgent medical help for injuries or immediate danger.



MAKE COMMUNICATION ACCESSIBLE

- Offer speech, text, gesture, writing, sign or AAC.
- Ask one question at a time and allow processing time.
- Do not force eye contact, touch or explanations.
- Use the person’s preferred identity and communication language.



BUILD A PERSONALISED SAFETY PLAN

- Early signs: what happens before the urge?
- Supports: what reliably reduces distress?
- People and places: who feels safe?
- Professional care: clinician, clinic and emergency contacts.

A simple message to send

“I am having urges to hurt myself and I need support. Please call me, stay with me, or help me reach professional care.”

Immediate danger in Kenya: call 999 or 112, or go to the nearest emergency department.