



Images to support a discussion about self harm

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[By Alison Matthews](#)

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Discussions about mental health can be challenging for any of us, but with additional communication needs the challenge can be much greater. The Royal College of Speech & Language Therapists has produced a series of fact sheets including one about the links between communication impairment and mental health, see the link

<https://www.rcslt.org/-/media/Project/RCSLT/rcslt-mental-health-rcslt-factsheet.pdf?la=en&hash=A03246F0EC51B2CD485A329A4D668F0800B5B3EA>

Working in a mental health setting has made me aware of some of the difficult topics which need to be broached and the level of skill needed in order to address these issues sensitively. Self-harm is a particularly challenging area and even more so when communication is also a challenge.

The purpose of this blog is not to delve into the complexities of self-harm, but just to say that anyone who feels so much emotional pain that they gain relief from externalising that pain into a cut or other action deserves the right support. There are many good practitioners around with the skills and knowledge to address this topic, yet I have struggled to find resources to support these types of discussions, in particular visual resources. I would be really interested in hearing from anyone who is aware of any useful images, hopefully this resource is a useful start.

I decided as a Speech & Language Therapist working closely with the psychology team, I would firstly develop some Boardmaker symbols as a means of discussing self-harm. These worked quite well particularly using a talking mats approach. I then received a small amount of funding from Forever Manchester and with the help of Bury People First and colleagues in mental health, our graphic artist turned the symbols into line drawings which are now available on the website for download. We have added written labels to one set and removed them from others. To my surprise all of the people I worked with knew and understood the vocabulary such as absconding which seemed to me to be unnecessarily complex. The wording on the set with labels is so well used in mental health that the vocabulary is generally understood by all including people on the wards with learning disabilities. However the set without wording provides an opportunity to use alternative language which may be better understood.

I would urge anyone using these images to ensure they have the right training and support and that they are used with care and sensitivity. Please be aware that in purchasing the images you are agreeing not to circulate them widely. We are a not for profit company and a proportion of our sales goes towards supporting advocacy.

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