

Distractions and Displacement



What do we mean by distractions and displacement?

When you are trying to tackle the urge to self-harm you might look for things to **distract you from the urge or to replace or 'displace' the self-harm** by creating similar sensations or feelings using other methods.

Everyone is different and finds different things useful – and some people don't find distraction and displacement useful at all – but for most people when they use this technique it helps them **to think in advance about what would distract and what the key need from self-harm is that they might need to replace.**

Trying to think about these things when you are struggling with urges to self-harm can be very challenging, so it **can help to think about it and note some down in advance.**

Some of the things you think might help may not, so **please don't beat yourself up** about this, but put it down to experience, as most of this stuff is trial and error.

We are very open to hearing about what works for you and will compile and add to a list of distractions and displacement activities which you can add to at any time by contacting us on: info@selfinjurysupport.org.uk

Distractions & Displacement Resources

Distractions from Self Harm: <https://tinyurl.com/te76hfm>

Distraction Techniques and Alternative Coping Strategies: <https://tinyurl.com/ydelvixu>

Distractions and Distancing from Self Harm: <https://tinyurl.com/ybevyh3i>

Distractions That Can Help: <https://tinyurl.com/ycj2sdf7>

I Need to Find a Displacement Activity for The Physical Sensations of Self-Harm

There are a **range of physical sensations associated with self-harm** which will be different for different people. These are some of the sensations people have told us they needed to find displacement activities for:

Physical pain:

Some people find snapping an elastic band on their wrist or **creating a short sharp pain in a non-damaging way** helpful, as this brings physical pain which can be a grounding and reconnecting experience.

Sensation of blood or seeing an injury:

The sensation of blood or being able to see blood is important for some people, so trying to **recreate that with food colouring and gelatine or drawing on yourself with red pen** can be useful.

Taking care of wounds:

For some people taking care of wounds is a key area, so **applying ointments and dressings** can be another way to replace actual self-harm.

How Do I Choose a Useful Distraction or Displacement Activity?

Distraction

The idea of distraction is what it says on the tin - **aiming to move your focus to something different for long enough** that your thoughts or urges to self-harm are not as strong, or have gone away.

The type of distraction that helps will depend on both **what you're interested in**, as well as **what you need in that moment**. There's no point picking something you hate doing just because someone else has recommended it. You might feel able to make the choice to **immerse yourself** in an activity you enjoy, but you might need to specifically pick something which **requires close concentration** or focuses on **reconnecting with your senses**.

Displacement

Displacement focuses more on **trying to recreate or replace what you need from self-harm**, especially on a sensory level. Thinking about your experience of self-harm and **the feelings and sensations you associate with it** can help you to consider what kind of displacement activities you might find helpful. You might want to **recreate a feeling of release or control**, or you might want to **focus on physical sensations or responses**.

The list of potential distractions and displacement activities is huge and what works for each person will be different – probably at different times, but thinking in advance and creating a list of things to try as distraction or displacement activities can help you to be prepared if you are struggling with self-harm urges and want to focus on distraction or displacement as a way to manage.

I Need to Feel Reconnected with My Body and My Surroundings

Sensory distractions are where you focus on a specific sense to reconnect with your body and try to break the chain of urges to self-harm. These distractions can focus on **one or more of the five senses**, such as:

- *sight*
- *sound*
- *touch/sensation*
- *taste*
- *smell*

Thinking carefully about what might help you in advance and which sense you would like to focus on can be helpful.

It's also important to remember that **sights, smells, sounds, tastes and other sensations can also trigger specific memories and associations**, so you might want to think about choosing a distraction that has a **positive association** for you and **avoid things that bring up negative associations or memories**. Some suggestions of sensory distractions are things like:

- immersing your face in very cold water
- tapping your fingers on your face like gentle rain
- snapping an elastic band on your wrist (we know – not everyone, not all the time!)
- sucking on ice
- smelling or eating an orange or lemon
- playing loud music
- focusing on a bright picture or screen

I Need to Change My Focus and Do Something That Needs A Lot of Concentration

Another type of distraction can be ones which **require concentration and help you to bring your focus** to something completely different such as:

- *colouring (swearing colouring books are available!)*
- *cross-stitch (say you've always wanted to say but never could out loud!)*
- *crosswords or other puzzles*
- *online games or quizzes*
- *jigsaws*
- *any other task which requires your full attention*

It **can take some effort** to get drawn into these types of distractions, but they can be very effective too. It might be helpful to **choose an activity in advance** that you would like to try and have it ready for when you want to use it.

I Need to Be Totally Immersed in Something Else to Distract Myself

Some distractions are also known as ‘hobbies’ and if you’re able to get **totally immersed in something then that can be helpful in distracting** you from how you are feeling and any urges to self-harm.

Having a **specific place that you go to and do this activity that you have decided is safe** might also be helpful.

Hobbies people have told us they have used as distractions include:

- *reading*
- *gaming*
- *watching films or boxsets*
- *doing sports*
- *doing crafts*