When the urge shows up

Ideas to try instead of self-injury

Why do urges happen?

Self-injury is often a way of trying to cope with something that feels too intense or overwhelming. That might be intense emotions, feeling numb or empty, guilt, shame, or feelings that are hard to put into words. It may seem to help in the moment, but it hurts you and doesn't change why you're feeling this way. It can leave scars, create distance from friends and family, and isn't a helpful or sustainable way to cope long term. Often, an urge is trying to meet more than one need at the same time, like calming anger and easing guilt. These ideas can help you meet those needs in **safer ways**. You might need to try ideas from more than one card.

Riding the wave

Emotions are like waves

- They build, peak and pass. Even comfortable ones do this.
- A wave can settle at any point.
- Feeling irritated doesn't mean you'll end up in a rage.
- Feelings don't last forever, even when it seems they will.
- You are not your feelings. Notice them, and let them pass.
- Feel the feels **AND** ride the wave.

Urges are waves too

- They can feel strong, like you have to act now.
- **AND** you can ride the wave until it passes.
- Think of a mosquito bite. Scratching makes it itch more. Leave it alone, and the itch fades.
- Each time you ride an urge out, it gets easier.
- Over time, urges come less often and feel less intense.

Stressful times, like exams, arguments or a break-up, can bring stronger urges. **Be extra watchful, and use your strategies early. You can be really upset AND still use your skills.**

How to use this handout

1. Ask yourself: **"What do I need right now?"**
2. Find the card that matches
3. Try a few ideas, and add what helps to your plan on page 4

Ride the wave

if you need to calm intense feelings or tension

- **STOP:** Stop. Take a breath and step back. Observe what's happening inside and around you. Proceed mindfully, choosing what will help. **Don't let your emotions control your actions.**
- **4-2-6 breathing:** breathe in for 4, hold for 2, out for 6
- **TIPP:** Temperature (splash cold water on your face), Intense exercise (like star jumps), Paced breathing (4-2-6 or box breathing) or Paired muscle relaxation
- Throw pillows on the floor, or cushions at a bed or wall
- Shred, rip or tear paper
- Use your coping kit, sensory toys or fidgets

Distract your mind

if you need a break from your thoughts

- Watch your favourite show, movie or YouTuber
- Play a video game, or a game on an app
- Read a book, or do a puzzle, sudoku or crossword
- Listen to music or a podcast
- Go for a walk, ride, run, scoot or skate
- Colour, draw, craft, crochet or do sticker art
- Bake or cook something
- Play with a pet, or do some homework
- Put the problem in an imaginary box for later
- Play Fizz Buzz: say *"fizz"* for 5s and *"buzz"* for 7s

Be kind to yourself

if you feel guilt or shame, or want to punish yourself

- Talk to someone who cares about you
- List as many good things about you as you can
- Think about something good you've done
- Write some kind, positive things to yourself
- Do something nice for someone else
- Read a kind message or card someone sent you
- Work out what's behind the guilt

When someone's hurt you

if you're angry at someone who hurt you

- Stomp your feet, or throw a pillow or cushion
- Squash empty cans, bottles or boxes for recycling
- **Silent scream:** clench your fists, tense your whole body, open your mouth wide, scream with no sound
- Write them a message or letter you don't send
- Talk it through with someone you trust
- Do something that helps you feel good about you

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When the urge shows up

More ideas to match what you need

Wake up your senses

if you feel numb, empty or disconnected

- Taste something intense, like a sour strap, Warhead, strong mint, lemon, wasabi peas or chilli chips
- **5, 4, 3, 2, 1:** name things you can see, hear, feel, smell and taste
- **1 of 6 Senses:** find 1 thing to see, hear, feel, smell and taste, then do 1 movement
- Hold a Calm Buddi turtle, sheoak cone or a spikey fidget
- Hold something that brings back soothing memories
- Name an animal, city or food for each letter, A to Z
- Smell something strong, like perfume or tea
- Squish play dough or putty, or shake a glitter jar
- Do a quick burst of intense exercise, like star jumps

Care for yourself

if you need comfort, soothing or nurturing

- Have a warm bath or shower
- Wrap up tightly in a blanket, doona or weighted blanket
- Put on an Oodie or a fluffy jumper
- Eat a favourite food, or sip a hot (or cold) drink
- Listen to comforting music or sounds of nature
- Imagine your safe, calm place in lots of detail
- Look at your favourite photos, or list things that make you smile
- Rest, sleep, cry, or rock or hug yourself
- Talk to someone who helps you feel calm
- Cuddle your pet, or a soft toy

Find your edges

if you need space, or to feel like your own person

- Set a boundary, or say no to something that doesn't feel right
- Do a body scan, noticing where your body begins and ends
- **PMR (progressive muscle relaxation):** tense one muscle group for 5 seconds, then let go. Work from your toes up to your face.
- **Snap, Stomp, Sigh:** snap your fingers, clap, tap your thighs and stomp your feet, twice each. Then sigh. Repeat 3 times.
- Roll a spikey sensory ball over your arms and hands
- Brush your hair slowly
- Do something that's just yours: your music, art or style

Seek adventure

if you want excitement or something new

- Watch a thriller, a scary movie or a comedy
- Try something new, like indoor rock climbing or scooter tricks
- Turn up your favourite song and dance like no one's watching
- Eat something spicy, or a flavour you've never tried
- Try temporary hair colour, a new haircut, make-up or clothes
- Join a new team, club, class or activity
- Speak up about something you care about
- Explore somewhere new, like a park or beach
- Go down the waterslide at your local pool

Belong

if you want to fit in or feel connected to others

- Join a team, club, class or group
- Spend time with friends doing something you all enjoy
- Chat with a friend about something completely different
- Call, text or message someone you trust
- Look at photos or videos of people you love
- Listen to a recording of someone who cares about you
- Do a random act of kindness
- Help a sibling or friend with their homework
- Volunteer at a food bank or animal shelter

Ask for what you need

if you want someone to understand you or change

- Work out what you want them to know or do
- Ask yourself what you're trying to avoid, and why
- **Opposite action:** do the opposite of what the urge wants, like watching a comedy when you feel sad
- Tell them in person, in a text or in a letter
- Try *"I feel... when... I need..."* to say it calmly
- Ask a trusted adult to help you say it
- **Pros and cons:** list the pros and cons of acting on the urge and of not acting, both now and in the long term
- Write it down first if it's hard to say out loud

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When the urge shows up

More ideas to match what you need

Find your inner strength

if you want to feel tough or able to handle things

- Exercise: run, swim, kick a footy, shoot hoops, or do pilates or yoga
- Join a group exercise class
- Play the drums or another percussion instrument
- Stand up for something you care about
- Learn a skill that takes practice
- Remember the tough things you've already got through
- Tell yourself: *"This is hard, **AND** I can get through it."*

Show how it feels

if you want to show how much you're hurting

- Draw, paint or sculpt the feeling
- Write it in a journal, poem, story, song or rap
- Make a playlist or take a photo that shows the feeling
- Make a vlog, blog or voice memo just for you
- Write letters about what you'd like to say (you don't have to send them)
- Tell the story of your life on a timeline
- Tell someone you trust how strong it feels, out of 10
- Pick an emoji, meme or GIF that shows how you feel

You've got this

if you want to feel in control or independent

- Sort out what is, and isn't, in your control
- List things you've achieved, starting small
- Do something you're good at, like sports, schoolwork, art, music, gaming, dance or cooking
- Finish something you've been putting off
- Set a **SMART goal:** Specific, Measurable, Achievable, Relevant, Time-bound. Then write the steps.
- Tidy or reorganise your space
- Validate yourself: *"It makes sense that I feel this way."*
- Make a plan for tomorrow, or for your week

Stay safe

if things feel too intense, or you might not be safe

- Tell a trusted adult or a mental health professional
- Call Kids Helpline 1800 55 1800 or Lifeline 13 11 14
- Use your safety plan, or make one with the Beyond Now app or website: lifeline.org.au/beyond-now
- List what keeps you going: people, pets, goals, places
- Go somewhere you feel safe, and don't stay alone
- Ask an adult to look after sharp objects and medicines
- Avoid alcohol and other drugs
- Try a coping app, like Calm Harm or Smiling Mind
- If you're in danger, call 000 or go to hospital

If it's not helping, keep going

- If the first idea doesn't help, try another. Then another.
- Or wait 10 minutes, then check in with yourself again.
- An urge can have more than one emotion, thought, memory, physical sensation or reason behind it.
- So try ideas from a different card too, until your distress comes down.
- Practice these coping skills when you're calm, so they're easier to remember when you're distressed or overwhelmed.
- Add the ideas that work best to "My own ideas".
- Every minute you ride an urge out counts.
- Tell yourself: *"It will pass." "Distress doesn't mean disaster." "One thing at a time."*
- Be around people. You don't have to talk, just leave your bedroom and sit in the lounge room. Urges are harder to act on with others around.
- Lapses happen. Be kind to yourself and keep going.
- If urges get stronger or come more often, tell a trusted adult or your GP.

My own ideas

strategies, skills, or things that work for me

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My plan for riding the wave

Fill this in when you're feeling calm, so it's ready when you need it.

My triggers and warning signs

What sets off an urge? Think about situations, people, places, thoughts, feelings and things online.

What do I notice in my body, thoughts, feelings or behaviour when an urge is building?

What is the urge trying to do for me?

It's often more than one thing at the same time, so tick all that fit. Then pick ideas from the matching cards on pages 1 to 3.

- ☐ Ride the wave
- ☐ Distract your mind
- ☐ Be kind to yourself
- ☐ When someone's hurt you
- ☐ Wake up your senses
- ☐ Care for yourself
- ☐ Find your edges
- ☐ Seek adventure
- ☐ Belong
- ☐ Ask for what you need
- ☐ Find your inner strength
- ☐ Show how it feels
- ☐ You've got this
- ☐ Stay safe

My top 5 things to try

Pick ideas from pages 1 to 3, or add your own.

1.
2.
3.
4.
5.

My go-to ideas, wherever I am

Keep a few for school, a few for home, and a few for when you're out.

At school	At home	When I'm out

How strong is it?

Rate your distress from 0 to 100. This is called **SUDS**.



Right now I'm at

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When the urge is strong

Ways to get through the next few minutes.

My 3 D's

Use the 3 D's to stop yourself acting on an urge in ways that make a hard situation worse. The urge will pass.

D Delay

Delay acting on the urge for a set time, like 5, 10, 30 or 60 minutes. Set a timer on your phone.

I'll wait ..... minutes, then another ..... minutes.

D Distract

Do something that grabs your attention. Try something physical to use up the energy of the urge, like burpees, a walk or shooting hoops.

My go-to:

.....

.....

D Decide

When the timer ends, decide **NOT** to act. Weigh it up: what's good about not acting, what acting would cost you, and your values and goals. **Don't let your emotions control what you say or do.**

My reasons not to act:

.....

.....

My plan for each level

Use your SUDS rating on page 4 to choose what to do.

0 to 30
To stay here, I'll keep doing:

.....

40 to 60
When it's building, I'll try:

.....

70 to 100
When it's very strong, I'll go to:

.....

When friends self-injure

It's hard when someone you care about is hurting. These can help keep you both safer.

- Tell a trusted adult if you're worried about a friend. That isn't dobbing, it's caring.
- Mute, leave or report chats, groups or accounts that share self-injury.
- Connect in other ways, like watching a show together, doing something active, or making something creative.
- Spend time with people who help you feel good.
- Talk to your school counsellor, GP or psychologist.
- Remember: keeping them safe isn't up to you. Trusted adults and professionals can help.

Notice your colourful days

My 4 P's: Practice · Patience · Persistence · Perseverance

Recovery isn't a straight line. Lapses happen, and that's okay. Pick a tracker you like.

Paper chain



Add a coloured link for each day, and write what helped on it.

Beads



Add a coloured bead for each day. String them into a bracelet or necklace, or fill a jar and watch it grow.

Paper tracker



Colour in a dot for each day, like the example below.

Paper tracker adapted from The New Happy (@newhappyco)

- Add colour for each day you get through without self-injury. Next time an urge shows up, look back at what worked.
- If there's a lapse, add a white link, bead or dot and keep going. White links are part of the chain, not a break in it.
- When things feel hard, look at your colourful days. You've got through it before, and you can again.

Example: one dot for each day, coloured by the skill that helped.



Mindfulness · 4-2-6 breathing · 5, 4, 3, 2, 1 · 1 of 6 Senses · Snap, Stomp, Sigh · Lapse

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My people and support

Lean on your people. Save these numbers in your phone too.

People I can reach out to

Family, friends or other people who help you feel safe.

Name	Phone	How they help

At school

A trusted adult, like my school counsellor, Year Level Coordinator or Head of House

Where I can go if I need to

My professional supports

My psychologist, counsellor or GP

Number and next appointment

What keeps me going

My reasons, my hopes, and the people, pets and things I'm doing this for.

Reviewing my plan

Life is always changing, so your plan should change too. Look at it often, ideally with someone you trust. The more familiar it feels, the easier it is to remember and use when you're overwhelmed or distressed.

Date	What's working	What to change

Need to talk to someone now?

000
Emergency, if you're in danger

13 92 76
13YARN, 24/7 support for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people

1800 55 1800
Kids Helpline, 24/7 (ages 5 to 25)

1800 184 527
QLife, LGBTIQ+ peer support
3pm to 9pm daily

13 11 14
Lifeline, 24/7

1800 650 890
eheadspace, ages 12 to 25
3pm to 10pm daily

Your GP
or a trusted adult, school counsellor or psychologist

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This handout isn't a substitute for professional support.
If you're struggling, please reach out.