



We all feel a range of emotions throughout the day, but during adolescence, these are much stronger than in adulthood. Young people will often say that they are surprised at how quickly their emotions change and how frightening that can be for them. Alongside this change, they also experience a less developed frontal cortex which can make the emotions they are experiencing seem permanent (even though they are not). This creates a perfect storm when a young person experiences an intense reaction to something and believes their emotional response might not change; imagine being in a constant state of fear, anger, surprise or dread.

Anything we can practically do to offer support around recognising, expressing and regulating emotions is a great way to help a young person manage the extreme emotional highs and lows they may experience.

We've included some ideas below which can be used with young people who are self-harming and struggling to regulate and understand their emotions.

The Emotions Wheel is a fantastic tool to help young people identify and recognise the multitude of emotions they can experience each day. It can not only help young people better understand how they are feeling and put that into words, but the process can also make a young person feel more in control. A study conducted by UCLA professor of psychology Matthew D. Lieberman found that putting feelings into words makes sadness, anger and pain feel less intense. Anything that helps young people increase in their emotional literacy and become able to recognise a broader range of emotions is a useful tool to help them regulate and express how they feel.

The Emotions Wheel can help us to become more self-aware, to question how we feel and explore why we think we feel that way. It can help us to put plans and alternatives in place to help with consistent and regularly-occurring difficult emotions. Recognising patterns in our emotions can also help us to identify the triggers for them; this can be really helpful as young people begin to talk in more depth about some of the issues behind their self-harm.

### **Here's a few exercises you can have a go at with a young person using the Emotions Wheel:**

1. Use it to help a young person tell you about their day. How many of these emotions have they felt during today and what made them feel that way? It can really help to have a physical tool in front of them to open the conversation, especially if they haven't really spoken about their emotions much before. What did they do when they felt that emotion? Use this conversation to discuss ways of coping and alternatives.
2. Use the wheel as a tool to get conversation started. Young people can find talking about how they feel quite daunting and can struggle to find the words to explain feelings. The emotions wheel can help them to identify a range of emotions that perhaps they wouldn't have initially thought of; it can help them explain how they are feeling in that moment.
3. Use the wheel to talk through a different range of scenarios and ask young people to identify which emotions they would feel in response. Then look to alternative ways of responding or releasing that emotion. Here's some scenarios you could use:  
Someone pushes in front of you in the queue. Think about how you manage feelings of frustration, injustice or anger (you could release this emotion through exercising, talking it through or writing down your frustrations).  
You're going somewhere new for the first time. Think about how you manage feelings of nervousness and excitement (you could release this emotion but distracting yourself or through a physical activity such as going for a run to burn off some of the anxiety).

It's never too late to learn new ways of regulating emotions and anything we can do to practically help a young person explore this further is another way of offering support.