



# ALUMINA

## FREE ONLINE SELF-HARM SUPPORT FOR YOUNG PEOPLE

**Alumina is a ground-breaking online support programme for young people who are struggling with self-harming behaviour. Live sessions through a web browser connect young people with trained youth workers over six weeks. It helps young people reduce their harming behaviour and find alternative ways of coping.**

Self-harming behaviour is often due to a set of complex issues that has roots in low self-esteem, difficult relationships, communication struggles as well as possible childhood trauma. It's an issue that many young people face daily and most know someone for whom it is a current issue. Research published in October 2017 found that self-harm reported to GPs among teenage girls under the age of 17 in the

UK increased by 68% over a period of three years. The sharp rise is partly attributed to the pressures of school work and social media. Self-harm among boys is also increasing.

Developed through funding from Comic Relief and the National Lottery, Alumina is a new approach to supporting young people via phone, tablet, laptops or desktop computers.

- Open to young people aged 14-19
- Online is a comfortable context for young people to engage
- Sign up is free, quick & easy
- Run by trained youth workers and counsellors
- Clear safeguarding policy and procedures

"THE SUPPORT I HAVE HAD OVER THE LAST 6 WEEKS HAS HELPED ME TO UNDERSTAND AND TALK ABOUT SELF-HARM IN A SAFE ENVIRONMENT, AND THE ALUMINA STAFF WERE NON-JUDGMENTAL, VERY KIND AND OPEN MINDED. I FOUND MYSELF REALLY LOOKING FORWARD TO EACH SESSION, AND IN THE SESSIONS THEMSELVES THERE WAS NO PRESSURE TO TALK, AND I FELT LIKE I BEGAN TO SHARE MORE AS THE SESSIONS PROGRESSED."

Young person

"ALUMINA IS A WELL THOUGHT THROUGH SUPPORT SERVICE FOR YOUNG PEOPLE; IT IS PROFESSIONAL, CARING AND ACCESSIBLE TO ALL. SIGNPOSTING A YOUNG PERSON TO ALUMINA WILL HELP THEM BEGIN THEIR RECOVERY JOURNEY."

Dr Kate Middleton, Psychologist.  
Director of Mind and Soul.



## WHAT IS ALUMINA?

Since 2014, Alumina has been offering young people pastoral support alongside practical ideas that are helpful in dealing with emotions and self-care, in order to help teenagers reduce their self-harming behaviour. Alumina combines 'active listening' with a teaching programme that educates young people to take control of their harming by giving them tried and tested strategies for coping. By empowering young people, Alumina can reduce self-harm.

In the sixty-minute sessions that take place once a week for six weeks, young people can log onto a safe and secure online environment joining two of our trained course leaders and up to five other young people. The sessions are accessed through a secure email link which brings participants into a virtual chatroom.

Young people can see a live video stream of the two course leaders but are not visible themselves. They interact with each other and the course leaders using a live whiteboard and chat. They do not need to reveal their names and they will not be able to contact others on the course outside of the sessions.

The work of Alumina has been funded by Comic Relief and other grant-making trusts and is offered free to young people.

## WHY THE NAME 'ALUMINA'?

ALUMINA IS A REFINING PROCESS THAT TURNS A ROCK INTO A CRYSTAL – A GEOLOGICAL PROCESS THAT PRODUCES A CRYSTAL THROUGH IMMENSE PRESSURE AND TIME – WHICH MIRRORS THE LONG AND OFTEN PAINFUL PROCESS MANY YOUNG PEOPLE GO THROUGH ON THEIR SELF-HARM JOURNEY, WITH A SENSE OF GREAT PRESSURE FROM THEIR INTERNAL EMOTIONS. THERE'S NO 'QUICK FIX' TO SELF-HARM AND WE JOURNEY ALONGSIDE YOUNG PEOPLE TO ASSIST THEM TO FIND THEIR OWN WAYS OF MANAGING THEIR TRIGGERS.

## WHO IS IT SUITABLE FOR?

Alumina is suitable for young people aged 14 to 19; we support those of all genders and those who do not gender identify. A young person can access our services whether they have begun to have thoughts of self-harm; if they have been harming a short time or if it is a longer term challenge for them.

Alumina is not designed for young people who are thinking about suicide, and we would always encourage these young people to access other services which can give them better support. Before inviting young people to join a group we email with them to make sure Alumina is an appropriate fit, and to understand what current support they have (if any).

## HOW DO I REFER A YOUNG PERSON TO ALUMINA?

- School staff, social workers, youth workers and other professionals can talk to a young person about joining Alumina, but the final decision is theirs.
- Young people apply to join alumina at [selfharm.co.uk](https://selfharm.co.uk) and fill in a simple form which includes their email address.
- One of our team will contact them within 48 hours to introduce themselves and ask the young person to provide contact information for an adult should there be any wellbeing concerns during the course. That adult can be a parent, teacher, health care professional or youth worker.
- Sessions run in the evenings and young people will be sent a link to sign in and join a session at a time that suits them.

## WHAT SUBJECTS DOES ALUMINA ADDRESS?

- Who am I? What's my story and how does it affect me?
- Control: what can, and can't I control?
- The addictive nature of self-harm
- Getting our brains to think differently – using alternative strategies
- Talking about feelings
- What other support might I need?

## WHAT ABOUT SAFEGUARDING ISSUES?

At Youthscape we take safeguarding as a paramount duty in our support of young people. Within Alumina we manage safeguarding concerns online by:

- Ensuring each young person provides us with a contact person (aged 18+) , should we have any concerns. This can be a member of school staff, parent, youth worker or health care professional – this safeguards any immediate concerns we may have regarding wellbeing.
- Empowering young people to recognise their emotions and use the practical coping strategies they will learn in order to reduce their harming behaviours. We do not encourage an 'immediate stop' strategy as this increases risk.
- Allowing young people in Alumina to only engage with each other within the Alumina group setting.
- Young people's email addresses are kept solely for the purpose of sending the Alumina session links. Data will not be passed on within the organisation, to any other parties nor for any other purposes.
- Young people may sign up without parental consent if aged over 14 in line with other comparable therapeutic support work.

## QUESTIONS?

Email the project manager, Jenny Flannagan, at [helloalumina@youthscape.co.uk](mailto:helloalumina@youthscape.co.uk)

## ABOUT YOUTHSCAPE

Youthscape is a registered charity founded in 1993 based in Luton in Bedfordshire. We support young people's social and emotional development offering a wide range of programmes including those tackling mental health, educational disengagement and social isolation. We have developed a specialist team supporting young people who self-harm and, in 2004, launched [selfharm.co.uk](https://selfharm.co.uk) – a UK-wide website offering young people advice and support to reduce harming. In 2020 we launched Headstrong, a positive mental wellbeing online service. The charity produces a wide range of teaching materials, resources and books on self-harm and emotional well-being. Each year we train more than 400 teachers, youth workers and social workers how to support young people who are harming.

## TO FIND OUT MORE VISIT

[selfharm.co.uk](https://selfharm.co.uk)

*Youthscape*

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