

SCRATCHES: AUDIENCE SELF CARE GUIDE

We know this show might be challenging to engage with for some audiences, especially if you're affected by the content.

In an analysis of self-harm and mental illness, the show presents characters' experiences of self-injury, suicidal ideation, depression and anxiety. There are frank discussions of self-harm throughout, although no descriptions or depictions of the moment of harming or methods of harming.

We hope the information and resources in this document will help audiences experiencing the show, and support planning for anyone who may be concerned about their visit.

CONTENTS

1. About the show
2. Content warnings
3. Helplines & support
4. Self-care suggestions
5. Character summaries
6. Thanks & about self-care

ABOUT THE SHOW

"But although it's a sad memory. I always think of that.

Like always.

Whenever I feel really alone.

Because I remember that you did see me.

And you followed me.

And I mattered to you.

And I wasn't alone.

Because you saw me."

Based on personal experiences, SCRATCHES was originally written by Aoife Kennan *"as a way to work out my own feelings about this mad, unmentionable thing I was struggling with"*.

Developed in close collaboration and conversation with friends and family, the play celebrates survival, healing and the power of friendship in a show filled with heart and humour, while presenting a frank and honest depiction of self-harm.

SCRATCHES combines stand-up, dialogue, music and song as GIRL presents the audience with a series of formative events in her life, trying to make sense of her self-harming and mental health, and the impact it had on her relationships. She is joined by her BEST FRIEND who supports, questions and occasionally upstages her.

The play examines how the taboo around self-harm contributes to an inability to break the cycle and the danger. It is a hopeful play, calling for conversation and laughter as a way of beginning a conversation, encouraging those suffering to reach out and speak up without shame.

Age recommendation: 18+.

CONTENT WARNINGS

SCRATCHES contains strong themes which some people may find difficult. Analysing self-harm and mental illness, GIRL describes her own experiences of self-injury, suicidal ideation, depression and anxiety and the ways in which people have reacted or been unable to help.

Through scenes performed with BEST FRIEND (who plays her parents, partners and GPs) GIRL delves into her past and tries to make a story out of the events that have led her to presenting the story on stage. There are themes of suicidal ideation and descriptions of self-harm throughout.

The play never describes the specifics of the self-harm, referring to it instead as 'the thing' and focussing on the impact it had. There are multiple references to blood but this is never graphic and it is never depicted literally or shown on stage.

The play also discusses panic attacks, depression, anxiety, CBT, antidepressants and drug use.

The tone of SCRATCHES is generally light-hearted, in the style of a stand-up comedy show or a sketch show and the occasionally silly song. However these are interspersed with more serious scenes from GIRL's past.

HELPLINES AND SUPPORT

If you're affected by the show's themes and need support, or just want someone to chat to, you can call **Samaritans** on **116 123** *any time* 24/7 for free.

If you prefer to text, the UK has a free 24/7 service: **text SHOUT to 85258**.

If you don't need immediate support but would like to learn more about mental health and services that may be available for yourself or someone you know, we'd recommend looking into the following organisations:

MIND

<https://www.mind.org.uk/>

Papyrus - Prevention of Young Suicide

<https://www.papyrus-uk.org/>

Rethink

<https://www.rethink.org/>

Young Minds

<https://www.youngminds.org.uk/>

Black Minds Matter

<https://www.blackmindsmatteruk.com/>

distrACT app - *information and links to support people who self-harm and may feel suicidal.*

<https://www.expertselfcare.com/health-apps/distract/>

Harmless - *User-led organisation that supports people who self-harm, and their friends and family.*

[Harmless.org.uk](https://harmless.org.uk)

LifeSIGNS - *Self-Injury Guidance and Support Network*

<https://www.lifesigns.org.uk/>

Twitter: @lifesigns Instagram: @instalifesigns

The Mix - *Support and advice for under 25s, including a helpline, crisis messenger service and webchat.*

[Themix.org.uk](https://themix.org.uk)

Call - 0808 808 4994 Text - 85258 (crisis messenger service, text THEMIX)

National Self Harm Network (NSHN) - *Survivor-led online support forum for people who self-harm, their friends and families.*

nshn.co.uk

Self-Injury & Support - *Information and support for women and girls affected by self-harm, trauma and abuse.*

<https://www.selfinjurysupport.org.uk/>

SELF CARE SUGGESTIONS

If you're concerned about attending the show, there are a few things we'd suggest that might help.

Read the summary

Have a look at the full character summaries on the next page which will give you a clearer and more detailed idea of what will happen to help you prepare. If it doesn't sound like it's for you, that's completely fine.

Come with a friend

It might be worth seeing if you can book to see the show with a friend, family member or someone you trust.

During the show

There is nothing wrong with deciding that the show isn't for you, or that it's too much. During the performance, you're welcome to leave the auditorium at any point. VAULT bars remain open during and after the show. A staff member will help find an appropriate moment to re-enter, if you'd like.

After the show

Owing to the nature of VAULT Festival, we need audiences to leave the auditorium promptly. However, we recommend a quiet corner of VAULT Festival bar or stepping outside for some quiet reflection if needed. If you've found the show distressing, we'd suggest talking to someone you're with, calling a friend, or contacting one of the support services listed on the previous page.

Breathe

Breathing is a great way to help you feel calm. Try breathing in for four seconds, holding your breath for four seconds, exhaling for four seconds and holding again. Repeat this for as long as you need.

CHARACTER SUMMARIES

The play presents GIRL exploring her own life experiences and mental health. The character BEST FRIEND steps in to play all the other people in her life. If you'd like to know more about the content and themes that will come up, here is a detailed summary for each one.

GIRL

GIRL struggles with self-harm. She uses the play as a vehicle to talk about her experiences, although sometimes she becomes lost in the story and is more affected by her experiences than she means to be. She talks about the moments before and after harming herself, but never describes the act, instead referring to it as her 'thing'. She begins by telling a story about harming herself before having sex with her boyfriend making it seem light and funny. She then introduces a series of characters and events, explaining how different people have reacted to her harming. Remembering her parents' reaction causes emotional distress which she dances out until confronted by her best friend about his fears. She tells him that the fact that he has been there has been one of her main sources of hope.

BEST FRIEND

Had agreed to be in GIRL's play, but dropped out at the last minute. He re-enters the play, and we discover that he dropped out because he was worried about the nature of the material, and the risk of glorifying self-harm. He jumps through the play keeping an eye on GIRL, providing light relief when needed and playing all the other characters in the story.

BOYFRIEND

Played by BEST FRIEND. Used to struggle with self-harm in school, prior to meeting GIRL. His relationship with GIRL is initially loving and supportive, but it becomes strained when he starts to struggle with anxiety, depression and self-harm again. We see conversations and moments which stand out to GIRL, including cycles of apologies and a moment in a theatre.

MAM

Is a doctor, and cares for GIRL, but struggles to engage in conversations about self-harm and GIRL's mental health. We see Mam ask short, practical questions.

DAD

Played by BEST FRIEND with heaps of comedy cliché. Is a GP, and also struggles to engage with GIRL in talking about her mental health. He can also sometimes be impersonal and removed when discussing GIRL's medication. BEST FRIEND enjoys over emphasising his love of IRELAND and GOLF.

THANKS AND ABOUT SELF-CARE

In writing this document, we were inspired by recent approaches taken by several other companies. We are grateful to everyone whose work has informed our own approach, but especially the Self-Care Guides created for Clean Break's production of *Typical Girls* by Morgan Lloyd Malcolm at Sheffield Theatres, and the New Diorama Theatre's production of *For Black Boys Who Have Considered Suicide...* by Ryan Calais Cameron. As these documents explain:

'The concept of self-care comes from the Black Feminist movement. Self-care is important because it's about recognising that we experience discrimination and oppression because of how others react to who we are, or what we've experienced. Self-care is a choice to listen to our needs and look after ourselves, so we are able to keep going and live our best lives, despite the difficulties we experience in life and how they make us feel.'

Finally, our thanks to you for reading this, and for coming to the show – if you choose to. We think it's an important piece of theatre, and look forward to sharing it with you.