It has the same meaning of the English expression “As one makes one’s bed so one must lie in it.”

The idiom may be applied to a range of situations. A terrorist who blows himself up while making a bomb is “自作自受” (zi4 zuo4 zi4 shou4), so is a child who ignores the advice of their parents, goes out without warm clothing in winter, and catches a cold.

When someone is already suffering from the consequences of his or her own mistake and you say “自作自受 (zi4 zuo4 zi4 shou4)!” it is like saying “You deserved it!” That, of course, is a rather mean thing to do.

Terms containing the character “自” (zi4) include:

- 自己 (zi4 ji3) – oneself
- 自然 (zi4 ran2) – nature, naturally
- 自動 (zi4 dong4) – automatic
- 自由 (zi4 you2) – freedom