

Self-Harm/Self-Injury Education for Caregivers

Self-harm is a term used when someone purposely does anything to hurt their own body. Many people have used the term “self-harm” to describe suicidal ideation, however suicidal ideation and self-harm are not the same thing and should not be used interchangeably. Some youth engage in self-harm/self-injury when they are experiencing emotional distress to cope with the need to control and/or release their pain. Often after someone self-harms they can have strong feelings and thoughts of shame and guilt which can increase their negative feelings. This can reinforce self-harming behaviors. It is normal to need ways to cope and process hard things. There are effective treatments for self-harm that can support someone to feel in control, manage emotions, and engage in coping skills. Self-harm looks different across ages and across cultures.

Types of Self Harm

- Cutting, scratching, or pinching their skin
- Banging or punching objects or self to the point of bruising or bleeding
- Ripping and tearing their skin
- Carving words or symbols in their skin
- Interfering with the healing of wounds
- Burning their skin with cigarettes, matches, or hot water
- Pulling out hair
- Overdosing deliberately on medications when it is NOT meant as a suicide attempt

Possible Indicators of Self Harm

- Scars, fresh cuts, burns, scratches, or bruises
- First aid supplies being used up more quickly than expected
- Rubbing an area excessively to create a burn
- Having sharp objects on hand
- Wearing long sleeves or long pants, even in hot weather

Why Do People Self Harm?

- Process their negative feelings
- Distract themselves from their negative feelings
- Feel something physical, particularly if they are feeling numb
- Develop a sense of control over their lives
- Punish themselves for things they think they've done wrong
- Express emotions that they are otherwise embarrassed to show
- Feel pain or relief
- Show control of their body



17% of Youth Engage in Self-Harm or Self-Injuries Behaviors

How we can support youth:

1. Give reassurance and listen non-judgmentally

- If you are worried someone might be hurting themselves, ask how they are doing and be prepared to listen non-judgmentally. While you might not fully understand, emphasize you are there to help. Don't dismiss emotions or turn it into a joke.

2. Help them explore reasons they might be hurting themselves

- If you can connect with them, ask what they feel before, during, and after self-injury. Could there be other ways to release emotions that are less harmful and more supportive? For example, if they self-harm for physical sensation, can they try a physical activity like a kickboxing or a sport they enjoy that can release endorphins? If they self-injure to express emotions, can they practice writing those feelings into words or on their phone? Understanding the root of why they self-injure can help find a solution to the deeper need.

3. Encourage them to get treatment and support

- Self-harm isn't uncommon. Many youths participate in support groups and see individual therapists to work through emotions and utilize techniques when they are in distress. You can encourage youth to talk to someone about their emotions and work through ways to cope.

Additional supports shown to be effective: [Cognitive Behavioral Therapy](#), [Dialectical Behavioral Therapy](#)

Resource for activities, practice, and tools for self-harm management:

<https://www.crisistextline.org/resources/>