

Self-Injury

What is Self-Harm?

Self-injury is the deliberate act of inflicting pain on oneself or causing damage to one's own body as a way to cope with emotional distress. Self-injury often refers to scratching, burning, cutting, biting or hitting oneself. Other forms can include inflicting internal or emotional harm, such as engaging in risky behavior or ingesting poisonous substances. Although some people who engage in self-injury may attempt suicide, many are not actively suicidal. The main difference between suicide and self-injury is intent. Not all people who self-injure are engaging in self-injury as an attempt to end their life. Self-injury is often done to distract oneself from daily stressors, cope from emotional turmoil or feel a sense of control. People often self-injure to escape their feelings, cope, express their pain, punish themselves and/or feel euphoria. Endorphins are released into the blood stream when the body experiences pain, creating a 'natural high'/euphoria. Self-injuring behaviors can become addictive and habit forming. Self-injury is often a symptom of a larger condition and often causes shame.

Signs to look out for: Signs and Symptoms

- Scars
- Fresh cuts, scratches, bruises, injuries
- Carving words or symbols on their skin
- Frequent reports of accidental injury
- Wearing long sleeves and pants in hot weather
- Refusal to wear short sleeves, shorts, bathing suits
- Difficulties in interpersonal relationships
- Wearing large jewelry on wrists or wrist warmers and refusal to remove them
- Thumb holes in sweatshirts so hands and arms remain covered
- Keeping sharp objects readily available (in backpacks, pockets)
- Depression, unstable moods, comments about hopelessness or worthlessness
- Impulsivity and unpredictability
- Blood on clothing, sheets, tissues in trash
- Common places for self-injury are wrists, arms, legs, thigh front torso
- Needing to be alone for long periods of time

When to seek outside services:

- Whenever there are injuries- there is a need to assess for infection or treatment of bigger issues
- When there has been active self-harming and/or an intent to harm self or passive or active thoughts of death and suicide
- Symptoms of depression, anxiety, eating disorders, substance use

Resources:

Websites:

<http://www.selfinjury.bctr.cornell.edu/perch/resources/parenting-2.pdf>

<http://sioutreach.org/learn-self-injury/parents-and-families/#ffs-tabbed-16>

Books: Teenagers and Self Harm: What every parent & teacher needs to know By John Ashfield

Coping Skills for Kids Workbook: Over 75 coping strategies to help kids deal with stress, anxiety and anger By Janine Halloran

What can parents do at home?

- Express your concern, but don't yell or make accusations
- Don't ignore it, get them help
- Listen, don't judge or lecture
- Create opportunities for connection
- Consult with pediatrician for medical evaluation of injuries and referral for mental health support

What can students do at home?

- Confide in someone-trustworthy
- Identify your triggers to self-harm
- Practice new coping skills and expression of emotions in a positive way
 - Art, color
 - Write in a journal
 - Listen to music
 - Take a bath or shower
 - Cuddle a pet/Snuggle in blankets
 - Massage your hands, neck, feet
 - Hold an ice cube in the crook of your arm or leg or to where you normally cut
 - Chew something with a strong taste (chili pepper, peppermint, grapefruit peel)
 - Rip paper, magazines
 - Squeeze a stress ball, play-doh, clay
 - Where a rubber band on your wrists legs, arms and snap it instead of cutting.

Mental Health Crisis

IMMEDIATE RISK OF HARM TO SELF OR OTHERS:

- CALL 911
- GO to the Nearest Emergency Room

Non Life-Threatening Crisis:

Washington County Crisis Response: 651.275.7400

Crisis Text Line: Text MN to 741741

- **From your cell phone:** dial **CRISIS
- (you will be connected to the closest crisis response service)

National Youth Crisis Hotline: 1-800-442-4673