

Mental Health Support

Self Harm /Injury

Self-Injury

When a person intentionally hurts him/herself without suicidal intent.

Self-Cutting/Harm Versus Suicidal Behavior

There is a difference between self-harm and suicidal acts, thoughts, and intentions. With suicide, ending life to escape

Examples: cutting, scratching, burning, biting, ripping/pulling hair, bruising, swallowing toxic substances.

Facts About Self-Harm

- Self-harm is **not** usually a failed suicide attempt
- People who self-harm are **not crazy** and do **not** need to be locked up.
- People who self-harm are **not just trying to get attention**
- Teen girls are **not** the only ones who self-injure, some boys do too.
- Self-harm **Is Serious**, even if the wounds aren't "bad enough". Hospitalization, even accidental death can occur.

Signs of Self-Harm

- Unexplained cuts, bruises, or cigarette burns, usually on their wrists, arms, thighs and chest.
- Keeping themselves fully covered at all times, even in hot weather.
- Signs of **depression**, low mood, tearfulness, lack of motivation or interest in anything.
- Self-loathing and expressing a wish to punish themselves.
- Becoming withdrawn, not speaking to others.
- Signs of low self-worth, such as blaming themselves for any problems or thinking they're not good enough for something.

Why People Self-Harm

In most cases, people who self-harm do it to help them cope with overwhelming emotional issues, which may be caused by:

- **Social Problems**

Being Bullied, difficulties at work or school, having difficult relationships with friends or family, coming to terms with sexuality, gay or bisexual, coping with cultural expectations.

- **Trauma**

Physical or sexual abuse, death of a close family member or friend.

Why People Self Harm

Psychological causes

Such as having repeated thoughts or voices telling them to self-harm, disassociating (losing touch with who they are and with their surroundings), as well as other psychological disorders.

Self-harm is linked to anxiety and depression

Factors That Increase the Risk of Self-Cutting

- **Gender:** Females are at greater risk of self-cutting than males.
- **Age:** Self-injury often starts in the early teen years.
- **Friends:** Being around people or friends who self-cut.
- **Life issues:** Being in unstable and/or dysfunctional relationships or having experienced traumatic events.

Warning Signs of Self-Cutting

- Marks on body (including scars) on arms, legs, abdomen, or feet.
- Cutting instruments found among teen's belongings, such as razors, knives, and pins/needles.
- Hearing of teenage friends or peers who are cutting themselves.
- Wearing long pants and long-sleeve shirts consistently, even in warm/hot weather.
- Wearing thick wristbands that are never removed.
- Blood stains on clothing.
- Secretive
- Spending long periods of time alone.

Dangers:

- **Permanent scars**
- **Infections (objects used)**
- **Spreading diseases**
- **Self-harm is a distraction from problems, not a solution.**

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Self-Injury/Harm can last for weeks, months, or years. For many it goes in cycles: it is used for a time, then stopped, then resumed.

Addictive?

For some people it is difficult to stop, even when they are no longer feeling overwhelmed with emotional pain.

Self-Harm can be contagious: Self-Harm because you want to fit in with a group of people who self-harm.

Treatment of Self-Cutting

A teen who is self-cutting needs a mental health professional to help them. Parents or guardians should seek professional help immediately; talk to family doctor about a mental health treatment program. Treatments might include:

- Individual therapy
- Group therapy
- Family therapy
- Medication
- In-patient hospitalization
- Stress reduction and stress management skills

What to Do If Your Teen is Self-Cutting.

If you become aware that your child is engaging in self-injurious acts and if the injury appears to be a medical risk (excessive bleeding, need of stitches), call 911 immediately. If the injury does not appear to be an immediate medical risk, remain calm and nonjudgmental.

- Obtain professional mental health services.
- Provide moral and nurturing support.
- Participate in the child's recovery (eg. family therapy)
- Support the child with an open and understanding heart.