



Self-Harm



What is Self-Harm?

Any intentional physical injury to one's own body in an attempt to alter a mood state

Self-Harm can also be called:

- Self-Mutilation
- Self-Injury

How do I know if someone is Self-Harming?

You may see signs of tissue damage (scars)

Self-Harm can involve:

- Cutting
- Burning/branding
- Picking at skin/reopening wounds
- Hair pulling
- Head banging
- Hitting
- Bone breaking
- Choking themselves
- Cutting off circulation with elastic bands, etc.

It is NOT Self-Harm if the purpose is:

- Sexual gratification
- Body decorating (piercing, tattooing)
- Spiritual enlightenment
- Fitting in/being cool

Is Self-Harm Attempted Suicide?

No. It's a coping mechanism, so it's actually saving their life.

Why Self-Harm?

They may feel that it is a way of:

- Temporarily relieving intense feelings, pressure or anxiety
- Being able to feel pain on the outside instead of the inside (physical pain verses emotional pain) - a distraction
- Controlling and managing pain (unlike the pain experienced through physical or sexual abuse)
- Asking for help in an indirect way
- Getting attention from others
- To escape feelings of depression, emptiness and numbness (to feel alive/real)
- relieving intense emotional pain
- Expressing or coping with feelings of alienation, self-hatred or guilt

Self-Harm is often a symptom of a more severe brain illness:

- Personality disorders
- Bipolar disorder
- Major depression
- Anxiety disorders (especially obsessive-compulsive disorder)
- Schizophrenia

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Warning Signs:

- Wearing pants/long sleeves in warm weather
- They have lighters, razors or sharp objects that you would not expect to see them carrying
- Low self-esteem
- Difficulty handling their feelings
- Relationship problems
- Trouble functioning at work, school or home
- Frequent cuts/burns that can't be explained
- Self-punching, hitting or scratching
- Head banging
- Eye pressing
- Finger, arm, tongue or lip biting
- Pulling out one's hair
- Picking at one's skin
- Choking themselves
- Pinching or clamping their skin to constrict blood flow

What to do:

- Talk to your friend/family member
- Ask them if they are having trouble dealing with anything in their life
- Ask them if they are intentionally hurting themselves
- Tell them that you will be there to support them
- Go with them to get professional help because they are currently not dealing effectively with their problems. Professional help will offer them counseling and alternative ways to cope with their problems.

Should I tell them to stop hurting themselves?

No. This is their way of coping with the pain that they're in. It's keeping them alive.

Explain to them that they may be self-harming because they have other issues that they need help figuring out. That's why you need to go together to a mental health professional or doctor.

Resources:

Contacts:

- Parents
- Teachers
- Coaches
- Friends
- Family members

24 Hour Crisis Lines:

- Alberta Help Line 1-877-303-2642
- Kid's Help Phone 1-800-668-6868
- Child Abuse Hotline 1-800-387-5437

Clinics:

- Mental Health Clinic (walk-in)
403-340-5466
- Parkland Family Counselling (walk-in)
403-340-8995

Websites

- www.suicidehelp.ca
- www.cmha.ca
- www.facetheissue.com
- <http://www.focusas.com/SelfInjury.html>

