

THE BASICS OF SELF-HARM

WHAT IS SELF-HARM?

Self-harm, also referred to self-injury or SI, refers to a person harming themselves physically on purpose. SI is a coping skill which means people self-harm are trying to feel better. Self-harm isn't a positive coping skill but it's nothing to be ashamed of (see below).

WHAT SELF-HARM IS NOT?

Self-harm is never "just a cry for help." Self-harm is never just for attention. Self-harm is never a fad or something people do because it is popular. In fact, throughout history there are examples of people with mental health troubles who have self-harmed.

WHY DO PEOPLE SELF-HARM?

Some people with mental health troubles experience emotional numbness. Others feel disconnected from reality or from their physical body. Yet others experience such overwhelming, big negative emotions (anxiety, grief, despair) they aren't sure how to cope with them.

WHAT HAPPENS IN THE BRAIN DURING SELF-HARM?

When someone self-harms their brain releases a series of neuro-chemicals, just as it does anytime we are injured. These endorphins 'jump start' a decrease in negative emotions and an increase of positive emotions.

Simultaneously, self-harm is a sensory based experience. When people have trouble coping sensory based experiences can be helpful. A sensory based experience refers to focusing on hearing, touch, smell, taste, and smell, as a way to help our minds calm down.

SELF-HARM IS NOTHING TO BE ASHAMED OF.

Self-harm is a symptom of mental health troubles the same way a fever is a symptom of a physical illness. There is no reason to be ashamed of symptoms of an illness.

THE STATS

- 15% of teens will experience self-harm.
- 67% of people who self-harm will do so less than 10 times. 10% will do so more than 50 times.
- Methods of self-harm include punching walls/things/yourself, cutting yourself, carving your skin, trying to break your own bones, drinking poison or bleach, burning yourself, pulling your own hair out, and head-butting things.

WHAT ABOUT SUICIDE?

Most people who self-harm will never attempt suicide. Self-harm is rarely a sign of feeling suicidal. Self-harm is a symptom of mental illness, however, and suicidal ideation (and suicide attempts) can be a symptom of chronic, untreated mental illness. Self-harm is an indicator mental health may need addressed, but it is definitely not the same thing as suicidal thoughts or feelings.

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DO'S AND DON'TS FOR PARENTS

DOS	DON'TS
It is most important to validate your child's feelings. Remember that this is different from validating the behavior.	Yelling
First make eye contact	Lecturing
Be respectful listeners before offering your opinion	Put downs
Speak in calm and comforting tones	Harsh and lengthy punishments
Offer reassurance	Invasions of privacy (i.e., going through your child's bedroom without his/her presence)
Consider what was helpful to you as an adolescent when experiencing emotional distress (empathy)	Ultimatums