



Information on Self-Harm and Self-Injury

It is important to be approachable and willing to discuss self-harm and self-injury with your student. Below is a description of self-injury, reasons individuals may self-injure, warning signs, and how to help.

What is Self-Harm/Self-Injury?

- Self-injury or self-harm refers to the intentional self-infliction of wounds to the skin without the intent to die.
- Self-injury can include behaviors such as cutting, burning, hitting, picking, hair pulling, and head banging. . The most common form of self-injurious behavior is cutting.
- Oftentimes individuals who self-harm will frequently engage in the behavior repeatedly and in a secretive manner.
- Those who self-injure are typically NOT suicidal. Self-harm is usually a coping strategy to make the student feel better or release emotions. However, suicide is always a concern with these individuals and accidents can occur with self-injurious behaviors.

Why Individuals Self-Injure

- Self-injury is often associated with individuals who have difficulty regulating their emotions as well as coping with relational conflicts.
- When facing fear of disconnection from important relationships, self-harm might seem like the only way for an individual to express or avoid overwhelming feelings that seem too intense to endure by focusing on physical pain.
- On the other hand, self-injury can also be a way for individuals to attempt to feel something, instead of feeling numb.
- Individuals who self-harm may be seeking a method of gaining control of a situation.
- Individuals may be experiencing symptoms of depression, low self-esteems, or other psychological disorders as well.

Warning Signs of Self-Harm

- Unexplained wounds, scars, cuts, and/or bruises.
- Frequent “accidents” in order to explain away injuries.
- Covering up or wearing clothing that is inappropriate for the weather. This can include long sleeves or long pants even in hot weather.
- Blood stains on clothing, towels, or bedding.
- Sharp objects or cutting instruments in the person’s belonging. This can also include items that could be used to burn ones skin.
- Needing to be alone for long periods of time.
- General signs of depression, including isolation and irritability.
- Discussions or posts about self-injury on social media.

How to Respond to Self-Injury

DO	DON'T
LISTEN to your child.	Agree to keep self-injury behavior a secret or ignore it. This is a cry for help!
Let your child know how much you love and support them.	Use punishment or negative consequences when your child self-injures.
Understand that this is your child's way of coping.	Overreact, say or do anything to cause shame or guilt.
Encourage substitute behaviors that focus on stress reduction and coping strategies i.e. journaling, exercise, listening to music.	Reward your child in response to self-injury behavior in an attempt to make it go away i.e. out to lunch or going shopping.
Encourage participation in extracurricular activities and clubs	Make deals in an effort to stop self-injury.
Be aware of what your child is posting or reading on social media, including their phone i.e. text messages and posts.	Agree that your child can keep their communications on social media/texts "confidential."

Who to Talk to if Concerned

- Talk with school staff, including the School Counselor, Principal, or Vice Principal or reach out to therapist, doctor, or other Health Care Professional to discuss options.
- Access and Crisis Line: 1-888-724-7240 Available 7 days a week/24 hours a day.
- Emergencies: Dial 911 Non-emergencies: Local police department or sheriff's office

Myths and Facts

Myth: People who self-injure are trying to get attention.

FACT: People who self-harm generally do so in secret. They are struggling with powerful emotions that are difficult to regulate. Self-injury is a way for the individual to cope with these feelings and should ALWAYS be viewed as a cry for help.

Myth: Self-injury is just a fad. Ignore it and kids will grow out of it.

FACT: Self-injury should not be minimized or referred to as a "fad"; there is no evidence that individuals spontaneously "grow out of it." Self-injury involves real tissue damage and potential scarring. It is indicative of serious distress that requires assessment and treatment by a mental health professional.

Myth: Self-injury is not a problem in our school.

FACT: Based on an emerging body of research, self-injury is occurring at high rates in many middle and high schools throughout the United States. Rates of 10% to 20% in school settings have been commonly reported. The large majority of middle and high schools in the United States report some type of self-injury among their students.

Adapted from resources provided by: City of Davis Police Department and North Colonies Central Schools