



## Self Harm

### What is self harm?

Self harm includes any action a person takes to intentionally injure or alter their own body. Self harm can include hair pulling, scratching, skin picking, skin cutting, interfering with the healing of wounds, self-hitting, head-banging, burning, carving or chewing of lips, tongue or fingers.



### Why do people inflict self harm?

Self harm is used by some people as an unhealthy way to cope with various issues. Individuals involved in self harming behaviours may view their actions as a way to:

- release tension or feelings
- return to reality
- establish control and security
- create uniqueness
- vent anger
- create a euphoric feeling

Self harm can also be triggered by negative feelings of self, sexuality, or pressure from others.

### When does self harm begin?

Self harm typically begins in early adolescence. In some cases it may begin unintentionally, such as tripping and injuring oneself or cutting oneself in the kitchen. These individuals may notice that these self harming actions provide a temporary relief from emotional pain and begin self harming behavior

intentionally. Some people may also learn self harming from a friend, through television, movies, music videos, or even chat rooms.

### How do we prevent self harm? Healthier Alternatives

- Wear an elastic band around your wrist and snap it when you feel an urge to self-harm.
- Punch a bed or pillow when you need to let out your frustration or anger.
- Draw red lines with a washable marker or lipstick on the areas where you would normally cut.
- Write in a journal or read.
- Do anything that produces an intense sensation (example: take a cold bath or shower; eat something with a strong flavor or scent, hold ice cubes).

### Relaxation

- Practice deep breathing.
- Massage the area of your body that is normally harmed.

- Listen to soothing music.
- Meditate, pray, or go to a place of worship.
- Draw or work with paint or clay.
- Play a musical instrument.

### Exercise

- Go for a walk, run, bike ride or swim.
- Join a recreational sports team or try an exercise class.
- Do housework or garden.
- Turn up the music and dance.

### Communication

- Call a friend or crisis line.
- Spend time with others (visit a friend, go shopping, etc.).
- Talk with your parents, a teacher, or therapist.
- Write a letter expressing your feelings to a person that has hurt you (the letter does not necessarily need to be sent).
- Write down your strengths and why you do not deserve to be hurt.
- Sing a song about what you are feeling.

## Protect yourself from infection

When one feels the urge to inflict self-harm, they might resort to using dirty tools such as another family member's razor, dirty cans, or even broken glass. These tools may be dull or dirty and may harm healing tissues or increase the risk of infection. If you have tried the healthier alternatives and other suggestions mentioned above, yet still absolutely feel the need to cut, take steps to minimize your risks. Clean your tools before and after using them, use only your own tools, and cleanse the area before inflicting self-harm.

## Warning Signs

- Unexplained injuries, cuts, burns, scratches
- Wearing long pants or long sleeved shirts that is unseasonable fashion
- Low self esteem, self deprecating comments
- Problems handling emotions
- Problems with relationships

## What to do?

- Watch for the signs
- Build relationships that may allow for discussion
- Express concern
- Respond to the knowledge of self-injury with respectful curiosity. The behaviour should not be dismissed, minimized or normalized.

## Resources

- **Kids Help Phone:**  
1-800-668-6868 • [www.kidshelpphone.ca](http://www.kidshelpphone.ca)
- **Self Abuse Finally Ends (S.A.F.E) Alternatives:**  
1-800-DONTCUT (1-800-366-8288) • [www.Selfinjury.com](http://www.Selfinjury.com)
- **Telehealth Ontario**  
1-866-797-0000
- **C.A.S.T** (Crisis Assessment and Support Team)  
1-866-487-2278
- **Canadian Mental Health Association (CMHA)**  
Haldimand-Norfolk Branch  
1-888-750-7778

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