

Self-Harm

(Easy Reading Version)



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The urge to self-harm is common, especially in teenagers and young adults. It can also happen later in life. Hurting yourself is a sign that you need help. Thinking about hurting yourself is also a sign that you need help.

What is Self-harm?

Self-harm or self-injury means hurting yourself on purpose. Common ways include cutting, burning, skin picking, self-poisoning, or hitting. It makes it hard to learn other ways of dealing with your feelings. Self-harm can cause feelings of shame, which makes many people try to hide it. However, there is help available.

Why People Self-harm

Self-harm happens when people don't know how to cope with their feelings. It can be a symptom of many different mental illnesses, including depression, eating disorders, borderline personality disorder, anxiety, or posttraumatic stress disorder. Victims of trauma, neglect, or abuse are most at risk for self-harm.

People might self-harm for one or more of the following reasons:

- To help manage serious emotional pain and symptoms
- To help feel emotions (for those experiencing numbness)
- To help feel in control
- To avoid burdening others with their emotional pain

Sometimes loved ones worry the person is hurting themselves for attention, and that if they offer to help, they'll make it worse. This isn't true. If someone is self-harming, they need help and attention to feel better. If you're afraid the person is hurting themselves to get you to act a certain way, a therapist can help you handle that.

Self-harm isn't the same as attempting suicide. Sometimes the behaviors will look similar. The difference is when someone attempts suicide they're trying to end their life, and when someone self-harms they don't intend to die. Self-harm is a sign of serious emotional pain. People who self-harm may be more likely to feel suicidal.

Getting Help

There are treatments for self-harm. Therapy helps you learn new coping strategies. You may also need medication. Most people who hurt themselves are able to stop when they get the help that they need.

Dialectical Behavioral Therapy (DBT): Can help a person learn healthy coping skills.

Cognitive Behavioral Therapy (CBT): Helps a person learn how their thoughts, actions, and feelings are connected to increase healthy coping.

Psychodynamic: Talking with a therapist about your past experiences and learning new ways to cope.

How to Talk About Self-harm

- If you're worried about yourself, ask someone you trust for help. You might feel ashamed, alone, or like others might judge you. You're not alone! Being open and honest will get you the help that you need.
- If you are worried about someone else, ask how they are feeling and what they need.
- Be ready to listen or find someone who can help, even if they are having strong or difficult feelings.
- Offer to help them find help – a school social worker or your local county crisis team can be a great start. Find your local crisis information here: <https://mn.gov/dhs/crisis/>
- Don't ask the person to promise to stop – they need help to learn new skills.

See more at: <http://www.nami.org/Learn-More/Mental-Health-Conditions/Related-Conditions/Self-harm>
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