

Parent Information Sheet: Non-Suicidal Self-Injury

This resource is to help you better understand Non-Suicidal Self-Injury and how to best speak to your child.

Definition

Non-Suicidal Self-Injury is the deliberate and direct destruction of one's body tissue, without suicidal intent and for reasons not socially or culturally sanctioned. This definition excludes tattooing or piercing, and indirect injury such as substance abuse or eating disorders. (Taken from Self-Injury Outreach & Support)

If you think your child is engaging in non-suicidal self-harm behaviour, below are some helpful guidelines explaining how best to speak to your child about it.

Guidelines for Helping Parents Speak to Their Child about Self-Injury

1. It is best to use a calm concerned approach which is reassuring and supportive: *"I've been terribly concerned about you. I see all these scars on your arms, and I suspect you may be hurting yourself. If that's the case I want you to know that you can talk to me about it. I just want to help."*
2. Children and youth who self-injure tend to feel that their parents are going to be angry with them or feel badly they are stressing them. It is best for parents to show they are able to accept as a fact that their child is self-injuring and guide the conversation towards an open dialogue.
3. Children and youth who know that their parents accept them without judgement about their self-injury behaviour are more likely to enter into conversations about obtaining more support and treatment.
4. Any type of emotional over-reaction may result in the child or youth who then self-injures to withdraw and it may also become a trigger for further self-injury if the child is suffering from guilt and anger.
5. Don't ignore cutting. Express concern even if the child dismisses your comments.
6. Avoid threats of punishment.
7. Remember this behavior is very emotionally charged for the child or youth.
8. The child or youth likely will not be able to express feelings.
9. Listen; don't try to fix the problem. Listening provides the opportunity for the expression of feelings.
10. Try to inform the child or youth that self-injury influences not only him or her but others around him or her are concerned about their welfare.
11. Form a collaborative relationship with the child or youth about who else in the family should be informed as well as outside the family, such as a school guidance counsellor.
12. If, at any time, you are concerned about your child's immediate risk to themselves or others, please go to the nearest emergency department, urgent care site, contact the Distress Centre, or phone 911.

Helpful Websites and Resources

<http://www.selfinjury.bctr.cornell.edu/>

<http://www.sioutreach.org/>

All information found on the websites is provided for information and education purposes only. The information is not intended to substitute for the advice of a physician or mental health professional. You should always consult your doctor for specific information on personal health matters, or other relevant professionals to ensure that your own circumstances are considered.

The following was developed by a working group made up of representatives from various Calgary and Area school divisions and from Alberta Health Services (AHS), Calgary Zone, Addiction and Mental Health. For questions about this work please contact: Aleta.Ambrose@albertahealthservices.ca, Senior Project Manager with Child and Adolescent Addiction and Mental Health, AHS.

