

TEENS & SELF-HARM

What is self-harm?

The act of purposely hurting oneself (as by cutting or burning the skin).

What does it mean to be in crisis?

- **Powerful overwhelming emotions.**
 - Most teens who do it struggle with powerful emotions. To them, it might seem like the only way to express or interrupt feelings that seem too intense to endure.
- **Self-inflicted physical pain is specific and visible.**
 - For some, the physical pain can seem preferable to emotional pain. Emotional pain can feel vague and hard to pinpoint, talk about, or soothe.
- **A sense of relief.**
 - Many teens describe the sense of relief they feel as they're cut or self-harm, which is common with compulsive behaviors. Endorphins are the “feel good” hormones released during injury.
- **Feeling "addicted."**
 - As with other compulsive behaviors, the brain starts to connect the injury to the momentary sense of relief from bad feelings.
- **Other mental health conditions.**
- **Peer pressure.**

Risks for Self-Harm

- Low self-esteem
- Feeling rejected or lonely
- Feeling unsafe at school or at home
- Perfectionism
- Frequent conflicts with friends or family
- Impulsive behavior
- A tendency to take unhealthy risks (behaviors that could result in physical harm)
- Low distress tolerance for overwhelming feelings.

Signs of Self-Harm

- Suspicious looking scars
- Wounds that don't heal or get worse over time
- Isolation
- Talking about self-injury (they might mention peers who engage in self-harm)
- Collecting sharp items
- Secretive behavior
- Wearing long sleeves and/or long pants in hot weather
- Avoiding social activities
- Wearing a lot of bandages
- Avoiding sports or other activities where they might have to change clothes in front of others