

SELF-INJURY

What is self-injury?

Self-injury, sometimes called self-mutilation or self-harm, is when someone purposely hurts themselves physically. Common methods include cutting, scratching, burning the skin or banging their head.

MYTH:

Most teens who self-injure want to die.

FACT:

Self-injury is often a way to cope with overwhelming feelings or pain. Teens might feel out of control on the inside, and self-injury can make them feel in control on the outside. For some, it creates a temporary “rush” or feeling of being alive. But what starts as a way to cope can become a habit that is hard to break. It can also lead to serious injuries or infections.

Signs someone might be self-injuring:

- Unexplained cuts, burns or scars
- Frequent excuses for injuries
- Blood on clothes, sheets or tissues
- Having sharp objects in their possession
- Wearing long sleeves or pants in hot weather
- Spending a lot of time alone
- Being irritable or upset

What can I do if I am self-injuring?

- Talk to someone you trust — you don’t have to deal with this alone.
- Identify what situations or thoughts trigger your urge to self-injure.
- Try alternative coping strategies like drawing on your skin with a marker or holding an ice cube where you usually self-harm.

How can I help someone who may be self-injuring?

- Be curious, supportive, and nonjudgmental — they need your understanding, not your criticism.
- Encourage them to express their feelings openly.
- Discuss safer ways to manage intense emotions.
- Suggest they reach out to a hotline, a trusted adult or get professional help.

For teens seeking peer support, call Teen Line at (800) 852-8336 (6-10 p.m. PST) or text TEEN to 839863 (6-9 p.m. PST).

If you or someone you know is in a mental health or suicidal crisis outside of Teen Line hours, call or text 988 (24/7, free & confidential).

TeenLine.org

