



How to Talk to Kids about Self-Harm

Introduction

When depression, anxiety or other emotions become overwhelming, some people turn to self-harm to find a release. Deliberate self-harm, also called self-injury, is any form of hurting yourself on purpose. Usually, self-harm is not a suicide attempt but instead an attempt to release painful emotions.

What are the warning signs of self harm?

Common Warning Signs

- * Scars
- * Fresh cuts, burns, scratches or bruises
- * Excessive rubbing to create a burn
- * Having sharp objects on hand
- * Relationship problems
- * Wearing long sleeves or pants, even in hot weather
- * Unstable behavior (being impulsive or unpredictable)
- * Saying they feel helpless, hopeless or worthless

What are common forms of self harm?

Common Forms

- * Biting
- * Burning
- * Cutting
- * Hitting or punching oneself (ex. banging your head against a surface)
- * Pulling out hair
- * Scratching and picking skin
- * Carving words or symbols into the skin
- * Piercing the skin with sharp objects
- * Picking at existing wounds

If you notice signs of self-harm, what can you do?

- * Ask the person generally how they're doing. "How are things at home? How is work or school? How is your relationship with ____?"
- * Tell them that you care about them. "I've noticed some signs of self-harm, and I am here for you."
- * Create a safety plan that includes:
Coping strategies, personal warning signs, ways to stay safe at school, people or places that can provide a distraction, trusted adults they can contact for help, ways to keep the environment safe.

*** Text a Crisis Counselor at 741741.**

Why does self-harm happen?

Often, self-harm happens when someone survives (or is living with) serious trauma and they're trying to:

- * Numb pain
- * Feel a release
- * Gain a sense of control
- * Process or avoid negative feelings
- * Punish themselves for things they think they've done wrong
- * Feel something physical to avoid numbness
- * Express emotions they're embarrassed of

The person may or may not be receptive. All you can do is let them know you've noticed and you care about their health.

learn more at
RAINN.org



Our Kids is a Nashville-based clinic that provides expert medical evaluations and crisis counseling in response to concerns of child sexual abuse. For more, visit **OurKidsCenter.com**