



SELF-HARM AWARENESS MONTH TOOLKIT:

What Are the Signs, Symptoms, How Do We Talk About It, and
What Resources Are Available?



What Is Self-Harm?

Self-harm is any form of hurting oneself intentionally. Self-harm is not usually an attempt at suicide - typically, people self-harm as a way to release painful emotions. It is an unhealthy skill that someone who is trying to cope with the hard stuff may turn to. People might self-harm to process their negative feelings, distract themselves from negative feelings, feel something physically if they're feeling numb, feel a sense of control, punish themselves for things they think they've done wrong, or to express emotions that they are embarrassed to show. Self-harm can manifest differently in everyone. Some common types of self-injury include:

- Cutting
- Scratching
- Burning
- Carving words or symbols into the skin
- Hitting or punching oneself
- Pulling out hair
- Picking at existing wounds



What Are the Signs & Symptoms of Self-Harm? |

Unfortunately, there is significant stigma that surrounds self-harm, which can make it hard for people to get help if they need it. And while the intention of self-harm is not usually to die by suicide, it is very dangerous and has lasting physical, emotional, and social effects. This is why it's important to know the signs and symptoms of self-harm. Here are some warning signs to keep an eye out for:

- Scars
- New cuts, burns, scratches, or bruises
- Excessive rubbing areas of the skin
- Hoarding sharp objects (paperclips, razors, staples, etc.)
- Wearing long sleeves or pants, even in hot weather
- Struggles with relationships
- Persistent questions about personal identity
- Emotional instability, impulsiveness, or unpredictability
- Frequent expression of helplessness, hopelessness, or worthlessness





What Can We Do If We Discover a Student Is Self-Harming?

First and foremost, even if the intention of self-harm is not to die by suicide, we ALWAYS need to assess a student for suicide if we discover they are self-harming. Also, check in with the student's friends – contagion can be present around self-harm just as it is with suicide. If you discover a student is self-harming, let them know that you understand that emotions can be painful and that it's OK to ask for help. Remind them that you care about them and that you are there to keep them safe. One of the best things we can do is help our students find healthier and normal ways to cope with and process difficult emotions. Here are some tips and guidance to helping students push through, process, and cope:

- Encourage students and families to seek help – whether it's a SAP referral, regular check-ins with a counselor or social worker, or seeking outside therapy - connection to the proper help can help a student potentially get help for the underlying issue that has led them to self-harm while also learning healthy coping mechanisms to manage their emotions
- Get creative – studies have shown that creative pursuits like making art can help people process emotions, so give a student who self-harms some markers, paper, or coloring sheets and encourage them to express themselves creatively next time they may feel like self-harming





What Can We Do If We Discover a Student Is Self-Harming?

cont.

- Find your Zen – research has found that meditation can be a powerful way to help people find calm and re-center themselves as they are moving through difficult emotions
- Encourage students to identify their reason for self-harming as well as a reason for why they'd like to stop – i.e. “What do I feel before, during, and after I self-injure?” & “Which of those emotions do I actively seek out, and which are harmful?”
- Help students identify other ways of achieving the same result – for example, if a student self-harms for physical sensation, maybe they can seek other ways of releasing endorphins, like exercise; if a student self-harms to express emotions, perhaps can they instead express themselves by journaling



Help Is Out There

There is a lot of help and a lot of hope out there – make sure students and their families know what resources are available to them:

- Crisis Text Line: text “**Home**” to **741741**
- National Suicide & Crisis Lifeline: **Dial 988**
- Know your county’s crisis line – [find it here](#)
- The Trevor Project – a crisis resource for LGBTQ youth – text “**START**” TO **678-678** or **call 1-866-488-7386**

