

SELF-INJURY BEHAVIOUR - HOW TO HELP

If you are concerned that a friend or family member is self-injuring, it is important to ask about it – ignoring the issue will not make it go away. Asking will not cause someone to start injuring themselves. The parent of an adolescent may want to assure him/her that he/she won't be punished. Before asking, learn more about self-injury as it may be very shocking to hear about. It is important that an individual does not detect shock or recoil in those they confide in.

- Remain calm and non-judgmental; let them know that self-injury is okay to talk about and that you are there to listen.
- Try not to react as though their behaviour is impossible to understand.
- Offer support and validation of feelings without making judgements and before offering solutions.
- Try to gain an understanding of what prompts the behaviour, but avoid probing or abrupt questions.
- Let the other person guide the discussion.
- Ask what you can do to assist in managing the triggers to self-injury.
- Help the person think of alternative, healthier ways of coping.
- Encourage/assist the individual in obtaining professional help.
- Understand that the person cannot just stop. Have realistic expectations; there may be slips along the way to recovery.
- Do not attempt to be a “rescuer” – set limits on how you are willing to help - Support an individual on the fact that they are the only one who can keep themselves safe.
- Family members: examine family dynamics that may have contributed to the development of self-injury.
- Celebrate small steps towards recovery with the person.
- Remain available for emotional connection and support – caring responses will help in the development of self-soothing skills.