

Facts & Tips for Parents/Caregivers of Adolescents Who Self-Harm

Facts

- More than half of teenagers who have engaged in self-harm in the past say they **no longer** engage in self-harm.
- For many adolescents, self-harm is a temporary behavior that is engaged in for a limited period. Some teenagers experiment with SH in order to deal with specific stressful life events. Once the situations are resolved, the adolescent may no longer feel the need to self-harm. However, a smaller percentage may continue to engage in the behavior due to more chronic stressors or emotional difficulties.
- Adolescents who have engaged in self-harm report significantly more depression and anxiety as compared to adolescents who have not engaged in self-harm. Even if teenagers are no longer hurting themselves, this group may still be vulnerable to increased mental health difficulties.
- Although the person who engages in self-harm does not intend to die as a result of their acts, they are at increased risk for attempting and committing suicide: 55 to 85% of self-injurers have made at least one suicide attempt, and a person who self-injures is 18 times more likely than non-self-injurers to eventually commit suicide.

How Parents/Caregivers can Help:

- 1) Keep a first-aid kit in an easy-to-access location for your adolescent. Assess the lethality of the wound. If necessary, take him/her to the hospital.
- 2) Make it clear that self-injury is okay to talk about.
- 3) Respond to your child without judgment.
- 4) Make statements that demonstrate empathy and understanding of his/her feelings: "I see you are having a bad time again," "You must be in a lot of pain right now," versus "Your behavior is really getting out of control," "I can't believe you did this again," "I just don't understand you."
- 5) Take time to understand why your child is engaging in self-harm: A wide variety of reasons motivate an individual to self-harm.
- 6) Remember that self-harming behavior can be complex and has been of benefit to your child in helping him/her get quick relief from emotional distress and as a way to sooth him/herself.
- 7) Get him/her professional help, or encourage him/her to seek help.
- 8) Model appropriate coping skills when stressed.
- 9) Be a positive role model, avoiding violent and unhealthy behaviors.

- 10) Parents can ask their adolescents the following questions to gain a better understanding of why they are self-harming and what they can do differently to reduce the likelihood of future slips and prevent prolonged relapsing situations:
- "How long have you been cutting?"
 - "How often do you cut?"
 - "Where on your body do you cut?"
 - "In what ways has it been helpful to you?"
 - "Have you tried to stop?"
 - "What happened when you tried to stop?"
 - "How can we best provide support or comfort to you right now?"
 - "Is there something going on right now in your life that's really stressing you out that you would really like help with?"
 - "Is there anything that we are doing that gets in the way of you opening up to us about these things?"
 - "Is there anything missing in our relationship with you that if it were present, would make a difference?"
 - "You know you tend to get triggered by (Wendy) when you respond to her e-mails. How about doing that (sound meditation) that you like?"

Do Not:

- 1) Scold or reprimand your child for harming him/herself.
- 2) Respond with disgust, anger, and hysteria; this may further overwhelm the adolescent.
- 3) Make your child stop his/her actions. The self-harming behaviors are coping strategies, and if forced to stop, your child is likely to replace this behavior with another, possibly more serious form of self-harm.

Helpful website for family and friends

[www.siari.co.uk/Family and friends/Self Injury self-harm Information for family friends and supporters.htm](http://www.siari.co.uk/Family_and_friends/Self_Injury_self-harm_Information_for_family_friends_and_supporters.htm)

OR go to: www.siari.co.uk -then click on "Resources" - then click on "For friends, family, and supporters"