



Self-Harming Behaviors

Why do youth self-harm?

When youth are having a hard time coping with strong emotions, they look for ways to feel better. Self-harm offers temporary relief by releasing endorphins and other hormones that provide a sense of pleasure before the child feels the pain. It is a temporary way to distract themselves so they can cope with what they are feeling. These behaviors can be addictive because it is a quick solution to their problem offering them relief, much like a drug. It is important for them to seek professional medical and mental health treatment.

How can I talk to my child?

The first thing you want to do is stay calm and not show anger. The child will already have an overwhelming sense of shame, and depending on your reaction, it could push them away. Also, do not assume that self-harming behaviors automatically mean they are suicidal. Do not make your child promise to stop self-harming, because then they will try to hide it if they do slip up and self-harm. The best thing to do is be open and explain that you care, and that you are going to get them help.

What is the treatment for self-harming behaviors?

The child may need to be checked out by a medical professional to make sure the self-harm is not critical. The next step is for your child to get professional mental health counseling as soon as possible so they can learn skills to cope with their emotions. To find a provider, you can call your insurance company or ask your school counselor for references in your area. For more information please visit kidshealth.org.