

How to Support Someone Dealing with Self Harm

Discovering that a friend, family member or loved one is self-harming can be a lot to process. It can be tough to understand why someone would intentionally hurt themselves, and you might find yourself feeling emotions like shock, sadness, anger, guilt, confusion and more.

1 Ask them!

If you have concerns that someone you know is self-harming, don't ignore your instincts. You might see scars on someone's arms, legs or torso. It is also important that self-harm can take a variety of forms like cutting, piercing, biting, burning, hair pulling, hitting, and more. Do not skirt around what you are trying to say. Ask compassionately, gently, but directly.

- "I've noticed some scars on your legs, and you've seemed sad lately. Are you self injuring?"
- "You said that your anxiety has been intense. Did you buy that lighter to self-harm?"

2 Listen without judgement

Self-harm is a coping method used by some people who feel guilt, rejection, sadness, self hatred, worthlessness, confusion, loneliness, anxiety, anger, and/or more. It is a myth that those who self-harm are doing it for attention. Listening openly to their feelings can help to identify why they are self-harming. Do not place personal judgements on what they are saying. Remind them that you care and are there to support them.

It is not urgent to get them to stop self-harming immediately. Instead, find out about their method of self-harming, and check to see if they have been self-harming safely.

3 Check in about safety

If they are unsure about safely self-harming, and if it feels appropriate, you can gently offer to brainstorm some distractions or alternatives to self harming. If the person is not open to this, do not push it. Instead, continue to encourage safety while self harming. You can explore options again in the future if it feels right

Check out youthspace.ca/youthspace-resources/ for distraction ideas and more.

4 Keep them and yourself safe

Take care of yourself. If you are new to talking about self-harm, you might find yourself reacting strongly or having intense feelings. Do not feel obligated to keep everything to yourself, because supporting someone alone can be a lot to carry.

It is important to take care of your own needs so that you can best support someone else!