

Self-Harm

Definitions & Discussion Questions

Nonsuicidal Self-Injury (NSSI):

Direct, intentional destruction of one's own body tissues without the intention to commit suicide; most commonly, by cutting, scratching, burning or hitting the arms, legs, wrists and stomach.

Most Common Reason Youth

for engaging in nonsuicidal self-injury is to reduce emotional distress because they have not learned healthier ways to cope.

Other Reasons Youth Cite for NSSI

Other reasons children or teens may seek out physical pain as a solution to emotional pain include:

- As a substitute for inflicting pain on someone else who hurt them
- To self-medicate by releasing endorphins
- To distract from thinking about painful events
- To dissociate from thinking about past trauma
- To feel powerful when feeling helpless
- To draw negative attention, whether or not consciously aware of it
- To inflict pain upon themselves before someone else can hurt them

Critical Thinking Section

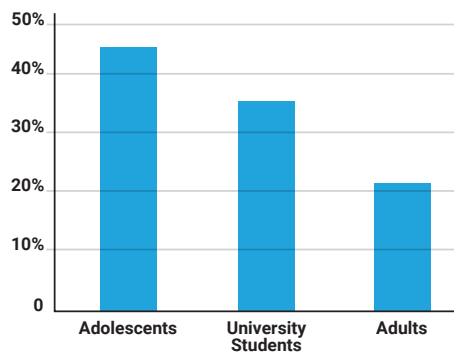
Students:

- If you felt sad, lonely or isolated, would you self-injure to escape the pain?
- Have you heard anyone report that they self-injured? How did it make you feel to hear that?
- How does self-injury help some people cope with distressing feelings? How might it make things worse?
- What positive skills would you use instead of self-injury to deal with emotional distress?
- Would you seek help from an adult or a peer if you thought about self-injuring behavior?
- Have you heard of digital self-harm? Why do you think youth sometimes do this?
- If someone encouraged you to self-harm, what refusal skills would you use?

GATEWAY TO SUICIDE?

NSSI may be an early warning sign for suicide, or an attempt to deal with the pain of suicidal thoughts or attempts that have already occurred. Youth with a history on NSSI are 3 times more likely to think about suicide, or engage in suicidal behaviors.

NSSI is a widespread phenomenon with the highest prevalence rates in adolescents (7% - 46.5%), as shown in the graph. Teens who self-harm may be at increased risk not only for future suicide attempts but also substance use, mental health disorders, and disordered eating.



Staff & Family:

- How would you handle it if a child or student told you they were engaging in self-injury?
- Why do some youth choose self-injury over other, more positive coping skills?
- What would you do if you discovered a contagion of youth who were 'trying out' self-injuring behaviors because others were?
- Have you discussed self-injury with youth? Why or why not?
- What age should the prevention discussion about self-injury occur? How is social media contributing to this risky behavior occurring younger?
- What would you teach your child or student to say to a peer who confided in them that they were self-harming?
- What is digital self-harm?