

Parent Fact Sheet

Self-Injury

What is Self-injury?

Self-injury occurs when an individual chooses to inflict wounds upon themselves because of psychological distress. Although it is difficult to understand, this behavior becomes a coping mechanism for some people. Feelings of anxiety and distress, being “outside” one’s body, and a need for self-punishment are among the reasons self-injurers cite for their behavior.

Why do they do it?

Research has not been able to clearly define the life factors that lead to self-injury. Some self-injurers come from loving homes. There is evidence that sexual and physical abuse, feeling invalidated, and sexual identity issues may play a role in the self-injury of some. The theme that is repeated throughout the research is that self-injurers are using the self-injury to relieve extremely uncomfortable feelings.

What do I do now?

- Take a deep breath- this is tough, but it is better that you know about it.
- Realize that you cannot solve the problem, but you can access help.
- Access help!! Find a mental health professional and make an appointment as soon as possible.
- Do NOT tell your child that they must stop self-injuring- it won’t work and will just create frustration.
- DO remove readily available items for cutting, but realize your child will probably find something else.
- DO immediately attend to physical damage and take your child to professional medical care when needed.
- DO provide a listening ear when your child needs someone to talk to- create an accepting atmosphere for him or her.
- DO help coordinate safety plans for your child between your mental health professional and the school mental health staff.
- DO keep the school updated about any changes in your child’s intervention plan and his or her overall status.