

SUICIDE & SELF-HARM

Suicide is currently the second leading cause of death for adolescents. It is often veiled in secrecy and shame.

Children and teens who display nonsuicidal self-injury (NSSI), mental health disorders, and substance abuse disorders need to be assessed by a clinician on an ongoing basis for suicidal ideation.

Suicide

- What they may say
 - Killing themselves - "I think about all the time about ending my life."
 - Feeling hopeless - "There's no point in trying."
 - Having no reason to live - "I don't feel like a reason to go on."
 - Being a burden to others - "All I do is hurt other people."
 - Feeling trapped - "I don't know what to do anymore. There's no way out."
 - Unbearable pain (physical or emotional) - "I just want all this pain to go away."
- What they may do
 - Start using more alcohol and drugs
 - Look for ways to end their lives, including online searches for possible methods
 - Withdraw from activities
 - Isolate from family, friends, and loved ones
 - Sleep too much or too little
 - "Say their goodbyes" to others
 - Give away valued possessions
 - Become aggressive
 - Become fatigued

Nonsuicidal Self-Injury (NSSI) is self-harm not intended to cause death.

- Symptoms
 - Scars
 - Fresh cuts, burns, scratches, or bruises
 - Rubbing an area excessively to create a burn
 - Having sharp objects on hand
 - Wearing long sleeves or long pants, even in hot weather
 - Difficulties with interpersonal relationships
 - Persistent questions about personal identity
 - Behavioral and emotional instability, impulsiveness, or unpredictability
 - Saying that they feel helpless, hopeless, or worthless
- Why do people self-harm?

- Coping with stress or negative feelings. For some people, self-injury becomes a way of dealing with negative emotions, anxiety, depression, and major life transitions, allowing for temporary relief.
 - Finding distraction. Deliberate self-harm is used by some people as one method of taking their minds off overwhelming emotions.
 - To feel something physical. People who feel numb, often from trauma, may also exhibit NSSI tendencies to experience the physical sensation it causes.
 - Sense of control. Individuals who feel their lives are out of their own control might hurt themselves because self-mutilation is something they feel they can control.
 - Self-punishment. People experiencing extreme shame or guilt may turn to self-harm to give themselves the pain they feel they deserve.
 - Expressing emotions. Some people find their emotions so painful that they struggle to put them into words. Other people feel that they should not express their emotions because they have been socialized not to do so. These individuals may use self-injury to show others how they are feeling rather than telling them.
 - Induce a “positive feeling state.” More recent studies show that pain-offset relief can stimulate a positive effect versus a negative one.
- Continued and increased levels of self-harm increase the risk for suicidal behavior.
 - NSSI is a growing phenomenon among adolescents and young adults. Cutting has become a commonly used coping strategy in today’s middle schools. In fact, there are web sites that instruct teens on how to cut safely, or to cut in ways that they will not be caught.
 - If a child or teen self-harms while under the influence of drugs or alcohol, or while in a dissociative state, there is the risk that they may unintentionally cause their own death or injure themselves severely.

If any of these signs or behaviors are identified, consult a licensed mental health professional or medical provider immediately.

Take ALL suicidal behaviors/comments seriously – even if caregivers think the child is manipulating.

National Suicide Prevention Lifeline 1-800-273-8255

Text Crisis Hotline: “4hope” to 741 741 to be connected to a Crisis Counselor 24/7 for free, confidential service

Content Adapted from <https://www.crisistextline.org/>

