



REMEMBER

- The pain of self-injury does 'feel good'—because the body reacts by flooding your brain with 'happy drugs' like serotonin, endorphins, and adrenaline, giving you a natural high. These good feelings become addictive.
- Stepping away from self-harm is giving up something that feels like it works.
- Self-harming never works for long. The natural high wears off and is replaced with shame and guilt, returning the youth to an emotionally unstable place, ready to be triggered and start the cycle all over again.
- Freedom comes from seeing yourself in the eyes of Jesus & knowing you are worth it: "Christ has set us free to live a free life. So take your stand! Never again let anyone put a harness of slavery on you." Galatians 5:1.



RECOGNIZE

- 12% of male youth and 22% of females in British Columbia have injured themselves on purpose in their lifetimes. For some it is a way of expressing internal pain or self-punishing, for some a way of calming or releasing overwhelming negative emotion, for some a way to fight against feeling numb or dead inside. Regardless of why, self-injury is a brave attempt to cope with pain.
- Repeated self-injury begins to play out in a cycle of intense emotional pain - a trigger (could be a sight/smell/situation/feeling) - the self harm action - relief - guilt/shame - and then intense emotional pain...and the cycle goes on.
- Look for:
 - ▶ covering up by wearing long sleeves and long pants, even in hot weather
 - ▶ needing to be alone for long periods of time in the bathroom or bedroom
 - ▶ isolation, irritability, guilt and self-hatred
 - ▶ triggers—a thought, experience or behaviour that starts the cycle
 - ▶ unexplained wounds or scars, blood stains, sharp objects or cutting instruments, and frequent "accidents."



RESPOND

The way you react is key in responding to a student who self-harms:

- **Notice the signs** and come right out and ask: "Are you hurting yourself because of the pain inside you?"
- **Keep calm**...even when things might feel alarming to you.
- **Be present** and validate their emotions. Let them know it's okay to feel how they feel.
- **Empathize** - Step into their shoes, figure out why those emotions make sense and tell them so.
- **Be clear** that you have no expectation of immediate change. It is terrifying to think you might take this way of managing their pain away because they don't have another option.
- **Help your teen to identify** the self-harm triggers: What feeling causes this reaction?
- **Once triggers are identified, try to break the cycle** by teaching positive replacement skills (things that will distract and calm like exercise, drawing, Sudoku, or deep breathing) to help them manage overwhelming stress and emotion.
- **Build their resiliency** through helping them develop communication skills, problem solving skills, values, identity, and spiritual connection. Connect them to positive places.



RESOURCES

sioutreach.org/ - Offers practical ideas for how to cope with the urge to self-injure and an information guide for friends/parents/professionals.

www.helpguide.org - Search "cutting". An article on how to feel better without hurting yourself.

www.familylives.org.uk - Search "self harm". Great resource to refer parents to.