

SELF-INJURY AND SUICIDE RISK INFORMATION SHEET

Self-injury (also known as self-mutilation or deliberate self-harm) is defined as intentionally and often repetitively inflicting socially unacceptable bodily harm to oneself without the intent to die. Selfinjury includes a wide variety of behaviors, such as cutting, burning, head banging, picking or interfering with healing of wounds, and hair pulling.

The relationship between self-injury and suicide is complicated. Researchers believe self-injury is a behavior separate and distinct from suicide and the result of a very complex interaction among cognitive, affective, behavioral, environmental, biological, and psychological factors. However, in some people the self-destructive nature of self-injury may lead to suicide.

Students who injure themselves intentionally should be taken seriously and treated with compassion. Teachers or other staff who become aware of a student who is intentionally injuring himself or herself should refer the student to the school counselor, psychologist, social worker, or nurse. Staff should offer to accompany the student to the proper office and help broach the issue with the relevant mental health professional.

School mental health staff should:

- Assess the student for both self-injury and risk of suicide
- Notify and involve the parents/guardians
- Design appropriate treatment for the student's current behaviors or refer the student to a mental health provider in the community for treatment

The following resource can be used to understand and prepare to respond to self-injury by students:

- Cornell Research Program on Self-Injurious Behavior in Adolescents and Young Adults. Web site contains numerous informational materials: <http://www.selfinjury.bctr.cornell.edu/>

Developed in consultation with Richard Lieberman MA, NCSP
School Psychologist/Coordinator
Los Angeles Unified School District, Suicide Prevention Unit

From Preventing Suicide: A Toolkit for High Schools, SAMHSA