

What is self harm?

Also called **self injury**, and **self abuse**, refers to deliberate acts that cause harm to one's body, mind, and spirit. Examples include cutting the skin with razor blades or pieces of glass; burning or hitting one's self; scratching or picking scabs or preventing wounds from healing; hair pulling; and inserting objects into one's body. Cutting is the most common form of self harm among today's youth.

In a broader sense, behaviours such as smoking, alcohol and drug addiction, bingeing on food and staying in an abusive relationship can also be considered forms of self harming.



People who self injure may not be trying to kill themselves. Usually, they are not trying to end all feelings; they are trying to feel better.

CU Healthy

HCS wants to CU Healthy! The Health Promotion Team at HCS tries to achieve this through our:

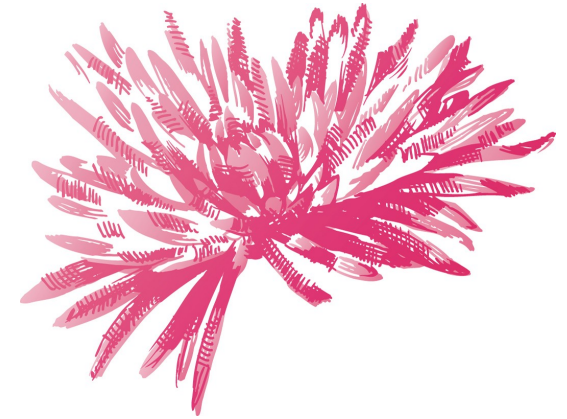
- Resource Centre
- Student Peer Interns
- Health Promotion Advisory Committee
- Website (carleton.ca/health)
- Facebook page
- Newsletters, class presentations, workshops and more . . .

The Health Promotion Team promotes healthy lifestyles and wellness and can provide you with information about stress, colds, nutrition, sexuality, alcohol, etc. Contact the Resource Centre for more information at 613-520-2600 ext. 6544 or carletonwellness@gmail.com.



2600 CTTC Building
613-520-6674
carleton.ca/health

Self Harm



613-520-6674
carleton.ca/health
2600 CTTC Building

Self Injury

Young people learn to cope with emotions in different ways. Tears, anger, depression and withdrawal are some of the ways of responding to—and finding relief from—overwhelming feelings. You may be troubled by frequent intense and painful emotions. While some people are able to deal with these feelings, others react differently to their problems because they have not been taught ways to handle their emotions effectively. They are unable to find the words and the buildup of feelings makes it difficult for them to think clearly. Some young people release this bottleneck by cutting or burning or otherwise hurting themselves. Self injury provides immediate relief, but this is a short-term solution with serious consequences.



Self injury is not a new phenomenon, but it is becoming more common. In one survey, approximately 13% of adolescents who responded indicated that they engaged in self injurious behaviours. Because this is a very secretive activity, it is difficult to determine exactly how many young people are affected.

The rate of self injury is growing. Gaining a deeper understanding of self harm is an essential first step to helping yourself or another. There is treatment, but as with all mental and physical conditions, early diagnosis is key to a successful outcome.

What You Can Do

If you are hurting yourself, it is important to begin talking to someone you trust—for instance a friend, family member, a teacher, physician, or counsellor. Your doctor may be able to recommend a therapist or psychologist who can help you. There may be a support group in your community. Deciding to stop hurting yourself is a very personal decision. Here are some things you might do to avoid hurting yourself.

- If you self-injure to... **Deal with anger** that you cannot express openly, try working through those feelings by doing something different – running, dancing fast, screaming, punching a pillow, throwing something, ripping something apart
- If you hurt yourself in order to... **Feel something** when you feel numb inside, hold ice cubes in one hand and try to crush them, hold a package of frozen food, take a very cold shower, chew something with a very strong taste (like chili peppers, raw ginger root, or a grapefruit peel), wear an elastic rubber band around your wrist and snap it (in moderation to avoid bruising) when you feel like hurting yourself
- If you inflict physical pain to... **Calm yourself**, try taking a bubble bath, doing deep breathing, writing in a journal, drawing, or doing some yoga
- If you self-mutilate to... **See blood**, try drawing a red ink line where you would usually cut yourself, in combination with the other suggestions above

If you are concerned about a friend or family member, it is okay to ask. Just talking about self injury won't cause someone to begin hurting themselves. Before you ask, learn more about self injury. It can be shocking to find that someone you care about is deliberately harming themselves, and it can be difficult to hear what they have to say. Offer support without judging or criticizing. Try not to blame, or react as though their behaviour is impossible to understand.

The path to good mental health may be a long one. Having realistic expectations can help both you and your loved one manage what may be a slow pace of change.

Treatment

Treatment by a mental health professional is recommended. A specialist can help young people find alternatives and guide them toward substituting less harmful acts to express their feelings. Behavioural therapy can help to break the habit and maintain change.

Experts advise that early treatment is important. Some young people stop injuring themselves when their behaviour is found out. For others, being surrounded by a caring network of family, friends, teachers, counsellors and doctors reduces their need to cut or otherwise harm themselves. Assessment for depression or anxiety may reveal underlying issues that can be treated.



For further information contact:

Health and Counselling services

613-520-6674

www.carleton.ca/health

Distress Centre of Ottawa

613-238-3311

Confidential, Anonymous, Open 24 hours a day

Mental Health Service Information Line

1-866-531-2600

Free, Confidential, Anonymous, Open 24 hours a day