

For Parent's Whose Child is Self-Injuring

Don't	Because...
Conduct a body search to see if they have been injuring	It may be humiliating, increase insecurities, create more overwhelming emotions, and send a message that you don't believe in their ability to make better choices.
Yell and criticize your child	You as the parent can put yourself in the position of not being trusted by your child, they may feel even less comfortable coming to you for help and support
Shame the child for the coping behavior	Shaming your child may teach them to be even less comfortable with herself/himself and promote the injuring behavior instead of diminishing the behavior.
Ignore or dismiss the behavior	Anyone intentionally injuring their body needs help and support.
Try to safe guard their environment	Safe guarding the environment is impossible. To attempt do so disempowers your child to take control over his or herself.
Punish your child for the behavior	This is not a behavior choice that will change, at least for the long term, through punishment. Your child needs resources and support from you in order to stop.
Panic	The more you panic the more your child panics. They need to have calm and patient support from you to feel safe.
Tell all of your friends and family about your child's behavior	If you were in their shoes how you feel to have something so personal so publicized? It can be very distressing and awkward to know that others are talking about your personal challenges.
Expect them to stop self-injuring immediately	Self-injury is a coping tool used to manage overwhelming and difficult emotions: taking that away could cause a greater crisis.
Take away all of their privacy	The goal is NOT to control but to support your child with learning balance and healthier ways to cope.
Make jokes about their behavior	Making jokes, in many cases, sends a message that their challenges and experiences are not taken seriously and aren't very important.
Use them as a negative example to their siblings	Making a negative example out of one child to others can create an unhealthy family dynamic of having an 'identified patient' for one child's identity within the family system.
Give up or turn your back on them	Every stage of development in childhood is a critical one with unique paternal demands. Your child never stops needing your acceptance and support!
Think that the behavior is 'just for attention' and therefore not a serious issue	Your child intentionally injuring his or herself demonstrates a degree of desperation to know that they matter! If this doesn't work escalating to something that will could be very dangerous and serious.
Think that it is a phase that will go away	Self-injuring is a coping mechanism to manage overwhelming and difficult emotions and if it does happen to go away most likely something equally unhealthy will replace it. Address the issue with positive and informed support.

This not intended as replacement for professional care or medical treatment. Please use this document as a supplement to care, not in lieu of professional help.



earthwalk counseling

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Do	Because...
Take the behavior seriously	Kids, including teens, are still developing communication skills. Regardless of what their behavior is trying to say the desire to be heard is powerful enough to injure their body. That is serious!
Stay Calm	In order for kids to feel safe in discussing what is going on with them they first need to feel safe with you. If you are anything but calm, chances are their guards will go up. In order for change to happen we first have to feel safe.
Ask them to use their words and then listen. Observe mannerisms, behaviors, and expressions	Actively listen. This means NOT predicting what they are going to say, planning your next question in your head, or thinking about how you are going to respond. Be as open and as present as possible.
Know that their feelings are real	While a child's stress can sometimes seem petty compared to the complexities of adult stress, remember that for their level of development their stress is just as challenging as yours. What they feel is very real for them.
Remind them that you love them	No matter how old we are, we all desire to experience our parent's love. They need it now more than ever!
Provide them with coping manipulatives and tools	Providing them with tangible manipulatives and tools shows that you are supportive, you care, and that there is another way to cope with difficult emotions.
Increase family time/involvement	Having a strong positive connection with family helps to promote a positive self-concept and provides a great outlet for emotional support.
Check in with them when alone for extended periods of time	Isolating can sometimes be a part of self-injury. For example, if they go to the bathroom and are gone for 20 minutes or more you may want to knock on the door to see if they are ok. (Use your best judgment on time.)
Offer professional help and resources	Professionals are trained and equipped to manage many issues and challenges. Providing help sends the message that it is okay to reach out and ask for help because we all need help at some point. It is not only another great coping skill but also shows that you are supportive and take their feelings, actions, and experiences seriously.
Let them know that you aren't mad (even if you are)	This is a time to put aside your own challenges and focus on your child. It isn't always easy but resisting the urge to engage in angry outbursts will help your child relax, trust, and go to you for support.
Check in with their stress levels routinely	Simply asking them how they are managing, without interrogating, lets them know that your door is always open. Sometimes it can be hard to start a conversation so you be the leader!
Create a safety plan together	Having a safety plan keeps the lines of communication open and provides a clearly stated strategy for managing crisis moments. A safety plan fosters empowerment for your child to manage difficult emotions more effectively.
Increase one to one time	Even older kids need individualized and undivided attention from you. Short spontaneous events or planned events can both be valuable when you make the time positive and about them. The feel supported, loved, and important.

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