

Teacher's Guide

Supporting the wellbeing of primary school children

Self-harm



In any situation where a student has been seen to or is suspected of self-harming, do not leave the student alone, send for assistance and report according to school policy.

Self-harm / injury is when a person deliberately causes pain or hurts himself or herself. Engaging in self-injury may not mean that someone wants to die.

Self-harm occurs for many reasons. It is rarely about seeking attention.

A young person may self-harm;

- As a way to deal with or stop overwhelming emotions.
- To reduce tension or a build-up of emotions.
- To relieve feelings of loneliness.
- As self-punishment.
- To feel alive or real rather than numb.
- To feel more in control.
- To let others know they need support.

If you become aware of a student self-harming, it is important to ensure they are safe whilst you notify the school wellbeing team or the principal (depending on the school's protocol). When school staff recognise and support a young person who may be self-harming, and follow the school's procedures and protocols, there is every chance the young person can develop healthier coping strategies.

It is vital to note that self-harm is a risk factor for suicide, and can result in accidental death. Young people tend to hide their self-harming behaviours. In some cases, they may have one or two close friends they have told, but other friends and family may be completely unaware or might only suspect that something is going on.

While there are obvious signs that someone is self-harming, such as exposed cuts or burns, and overdoses that require intervention, there are some less obvious signs to look out for including, but not limited to:

- Unexplained injuries.
- Unexplained recurrent medical complaints.
- Wearing clothes inappropriate to conditions.
- Dramatic changes in mood.
- Changes in eating and sleeping patterns.
- Problems with relationships or being secretive about feelings.

It is important to acknowledge that recognising and supporting self-harming students can be challenging. You may find it triggering in terms of your own feelings and emotions, or it may bring up issues relating to your family and / or friends. You may also feel anxious about your personal capacity to support self-harming students and may feel like you are not well-enough equipped. If you need to talk with someone, you could reach out to trusted colleagues, your school leaders, or the school's Employee Assistance service to arrange a confidential discussion.

<https://www.islhd.health.nsw.gov.au/services-clinics/school-link-teachers-guide>