

APPENDIX 1

Self-Harm

Self-harm or NSSI (Non-Suicidal Self-Injury) is when an individual deliberately causes harm to themselves as a way to cope with intense emotional pain. Parents, if you aren't aware of anyone who self-harms, chances are that your teen does. While the topic of self-harming can be very alarming to parents and small group leaders, the more you know, the more you can be in the best position to recognize the signs and seek professional help.

Here's what you need to know:

- Acts of self-harm include: cutting, scratching, burning, punching things, and even hitting one's head against a wall.
- Self-harming typically stems from childhood trauma, anxiety, and depression.
- Like any other high-risk behavior (e.g., alcohol, drugs, sexual promiscuity), self-harming can be dangerous and compulsive.
- There is a misconception that young people who self-harm are attention seeking or attempting to take their own life. That is not always the case. However, all forms of self-harm should be taken seriously.

- Self-harm is usually done in secrecy as there is a great deal of stigma involved. Due to the secrecy associated with self-harming behaviors, kids and teenagers often feel guilt, shame, and a sense of isolation.

Kids and teens who self-harm are often carrying heavy burdens, and the physical pain is preferable to the emotional pain. Though it only provides momentary relief from painful emotions, the more your teen does it, the more he or she will want to do it. The reason lies in the release of endorphins, which are the “feel-good” hormones released during intense physical exertion—and also during an injury. These hormones initiate a tension-relieving sensation—also known as runner’s high—hence, the habit-forming nature.