



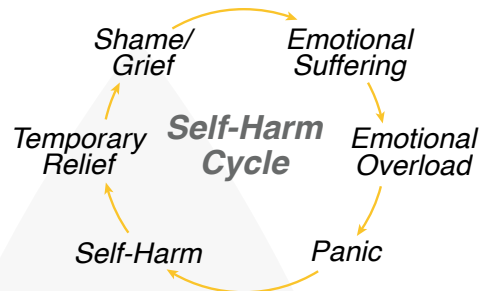
REMEMBER

- The pain of self-harm does 'feel good'—because the body reacts by flooding your brain with 'happy drugs' like serotonin, endorphins, and adrenaline, giving you a natural high. These good feelings become addictive.
- Self-harm and anxiety are highly connected. Although self-harm may feel like a quick way of to deal with growing anxiety, the secrecy builds more stress sending the person right back to the cycle. Finding help for anxiety is an important step in dealing with self-harm.
- Stepping away from self-harm is giving up something that feels like it works.
- Freedom allows teens to see themselves in the eyes of Jesus. He bled so we don't have to: "By his stripes, we are healed." (Is 53.5)



RECOGNIZE

- When someone self-injures they are not attempting to die. For some it is a way of expressing internal pain or self-punishing, for some a way of calming or releasing overwhelming negative emotion, for some a way to fight against feeling numb or dead inside. Regardless of why, self-injury is a brave attempt to cope with pain.
- Repeated self-injury begins to play out in a cycle:



- Look for:
 - ▶ covering up by wearing long sleeves and long pants, even in hot weather
 - ▶ needing to be alone for long periods of time in the bathroom or bedroom
 - ▶ unexplained wounds or scars, blood stains, sharp objects or cutting instruments, and frequent "accidents."
 - ▶ isolation, sadness, guilt and self-hatred, impulsivity, underdeveloped coping skills



RESPOND

The way you react is key in responding to a student who self-harms:

- **Ask the question.** "Are you hurting yourself because of the pain inside you is really big?"
- **Keep calm.** Even if things might feel alarming to you, take your eyes off yourself and focus on how this must feel for them.
- **Be present.** Let them know you can see how dreadful and stuck they are feeling and you are right here, wanting to help.
- **Be clear that you have no expectation of immediate change.** It is terrifying to think you might take this way of managing their pain away because they don't have another option.
- **Explore emotions.** Teens self-harm because their feelings are overwhelming. Help them begin to identify their feelings and express them in healthy ways. Validate their emotions by figuring out why feeling that way makes sense - and tell them so.
- **Help them identify their self-harm triggers.** What feeling or thoughts come right before the urge to self-harm? What is the pattern?
- **Brainstorm ways to interrupt the cycle.** Find replacements/distractions (i.e. things that will calm them like exercise, drawing, or deep breathing) to help them manage when big emotions threaten. Interrupting the pattern stands in the way of falling into the cycle.
- **Build their resilience.** Help them develop communication skills, problem solving/coping skills, positive values, identity, and spiritual connection. Create a space of belonging for them and model how you deal with really big emotions.



SELF-HARM



RESOURCES

- www.sioutreach.org - Offers practical ideas for how to cope with the urge to self-injure and an information guide for friends/parents/professionals.
- www.helpguide.org - Search "cutting". An article on how to feel better without hurting yourself.
- www.ualberta.ca - An excellent PDF to work through with a youth who is open to quitting.