

HOW

HOW TO TALK TO YOUR YOUNG PERSON

It may feel really awkward to start a conversation, but communication is really important.

- Try to open a conversation as soon as possible, and it's really important to make it clear that their feelings and experiences are important.
- Respond calmly, with an open mind and with acceptance.
- Try not to sound judgmental; young people often feel guilt and shame and feeling judged can make these emotions worse.
- Young people often feel ashamed and worry about being labelled and who else will find out.
- You might want to talk about catch-up times, or a plan for how they can let you know they're upset and how you can support them when this happens.

We have spoken with lots of young people who say it's really important to feel cared for and listened to, but that this isn't the same thing as wanting to be 'fixed'. Support is something that you do *with* your child, not to them.

"JUST LET THEM KNOW THAT YOU ACCEPT THEM"

FEMALE, 15
HISTORY OF NSSI

"HARDEN UP IT'LL BE RIGHT' AND YOU'D BE LIKE 'OH, YOU'RE NOT LISTENING TO ME"

MALE, 17

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WHERE TO GO FOR HELP?

If you or your family or whānau need support, you can get help through your GP.

There are also resources on our website:



www.victoria.ac.nz/psyc/research/youth-and-wellbeing-study

"IT'S REALLY IMPORTANT TO HEAR 'I DO CARE ABOUT YOU AND I WANT TO KNOW WHAT'S GOING ON IN YOUR LIFE'"

FEMALE, 17
HISTORY OF NSSI



WHAT TO DO

IF YOUR CHILD IS SELF-INJURING

Illustrations by Ant Sang, Layout by Simon Hartman

WHAT IS NON-SUICIDAL SELF-INJURY?

Non-suicidal self-injury (NSSI) is when people hurt themselves on purpose, without intending to kill themselves. It is:

- Commonly termed self-harm.
- Not part of a cultural practice.
- Different from modifying the body for beauty or embellishment (e.g. tattoos or body piercings)

HOW COMMON IS SELF-INJURY?

It is unknown how common it is in Aotearoa New Zealand. Overseas research suggests 13% - 23% of adolescents and young adults, and 6% - 8% of adults, have engaged in NSSI at some point in their lives.

- Most people who self-injure do so less than 10 times; only a small minority engage in this behaviour regularly for an extended period.
- There are higher rates of NSSI among people being treated for mental health difficulties.
- Research in the Wellington region suggests that up to half of secondary school students will have engaged in self-injury at least once by the time they leave school.

“(WHY?)...SO OTHER PEOPLE WILL SEE THE PAIN INSIDE THEM AND HOW SERIOUS IT IS”

17, FEMALE,
HISTORY OF NSSI

“FEELING WORKED-UP...NOONE'S AROUND SO YOU JUST...HURT YOURSELF, TO GET SOMETHING OUT”

17, MALE,
HISTORY OF NSSI

WHO IS MORE LIKELY TO SELF-INJURE AND WHEN DO PEOPLE START SELF-INJURING?

People from all walks of life and of different ages and ethnicities self-injure.

- Self-injury is more common among adolescents, and tends to begin between the ages of 12 - 14.
- Both males and females engage in self-injury; but there are differences in the method (e.g. females are more likely to cut, whilst males are more likely to hit themselves).
- A range of risk factors have been linked to self-injury; but we don't yet have the full story on what causes this behaviour among New Zealand adolescents and rangatahi Māori.

However, we do know that the following signs are all linked to higher incidence of NSSI:

- low mood and depression
- eating disordered behaviour
- low self-esteem
- poorer emotion regulation
- drug and alcohol problems
- poorer attachment to parents and whānau

WHY DO PEOPLE SELF-INJURE?

People self-injure for many different reasons. These reasons tend to fall into two broad groups: *intrapersonal* and *interpersonal* reasons.

Intrapersonal reasons are to do with changing how a person feels and thinks on the inside (e.g. changing emotions, thoughts and body sensations). Peoples' reported *intrapersonal* reasons include:

- Escaping from distressing, negative emotions (e.g. sadness)
- Distraction from negative thoughts (e.g. painful memories)
- Releasing tension
- To stop feeling numb or empty
- Self-punishment (because they believe they're a bad person)

Interpersonal reasons for NSSI are less common than *intrapersonal* reasons. *Interpersonal* reasons are mainly to do with communicating to others that they need support, but occasionally people have reported self-injuring to avoid certain tasks or responsibilities.

People can self-injure for both *intrapersonal* and *interpersonal* reasons; and multiple reasons at any one time. There is huge variation in the reasons people self-injure.