

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.

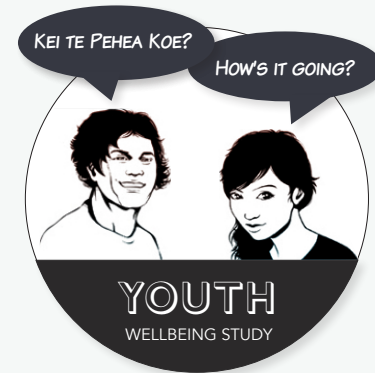
There are also resources on our website:



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?

WHAT IS NON-SUICIDAL SELF-INJURY?

Non-suicidal self-injury (NSSI) is when people hurt themselves on purpose, without intending to kill themselves. This is different from behaviours that are part of cultural practice or body modification (such as tattooing). NSSI is also called self-harm, and is often a way of dealing with relationship difficulties (family, friends, and romantic partners) or coping with overwhelming emotions. People may hurt themselves for lots of different reasons. NSSI can't be explained by the group of friends your child has and shouldn't be assumed to be 'just attention seeking' or an attempt to end one's life.

IS IT COMMON?

Between a third and a half of young people in New Zealand will try NSSI at least once before they leave high school, and about 20% will do so several times or more. NSSI usually starts between the ages of twelve and fourteen, and the majority of people who do so stop by their mid-twenties.

"...ISOLATED AND THEY DON'T FEEL ANYONE ELSE UNDERSTANDS THEM..."

FEMALE, 15
HISTORY OF NSSI

"IF YOU CAN REALLY TALK TO YOUR PARENTS OR A TRUSTED ADULT ABOUT YOUR DAY, IT REALLY HELPS"

TRANSGENDER, 18
HISTORY OF NSSI

"FEAR OF THAT JUDGEMENT OF BEING LOOKED DOWN UPON... BEING [SEEN AS] ATTENTION SEEKING... IS WHY PEOPLE DON'T SHARE IT"

FEMALE, 15
HISTORY OF NSSI

WHEN

WHEN YOU DISCOVER YOUR CHILD IS SELF-INJURING...

YOUR FEELINGS

There is no right way to feel, and you're likely to feel a mix of emotions, which may depend on how you've found out.

- Feelings may include sadness and worry, anger and frustration, fear and helplessness, shame and guilt
- Many people say they were shocked to find out about their child's self-harm
- You may have a very strong reaction to the thought of the behaviour itself
- Some people also feel relieved that they know what's going on for their child.

It's okay to feel these things and it's *important to be thoughtful about how you act on them*, because that might have consequences for other people.

YOUR CHILD'S FEELINGS

Your child is almost certainly feeling upset.

- They may be worried about how you will react, how you feel about them, and how your relationship might change.
- Self-injury is often tied to feelings of shame, guilt, sadness, anxiety, isolation, anger and self-punishment.

Young people may find it difficult to find the words to express these feelings.

MANAGING YOUR FEELINGS

Looking after yourself is very important for being able to help your child. People often worry a lot, and may have difficulty sleeping. If you're finding it hard to manage your feelings, is there someone you trust who you can ask for support? It can be tricky, but try to separate your feelings for your child from your feelings about their behaviour.

Young people learn how to manage their emotions by watching the people around them, so one way you can support them is by how you model the way that you deal with your feelings.