

Indigenous Services
Canada



FIRST NATIONS OF QUEBEC
AND LABRADOR HEALTH
AND SOCIAL SERVICES
COMMISSION

WHAT IS SELF-HARM?

Self-harm or self-injury occurs when a person wants to harm themselves without attempting suicide. Rather, they inflict pain or bodily injury on themselves. Generally, self-harm is a way of coping with difficult situations or painful thoughts and feelings.

*Note that self-harm does not refer to traditional activities or customs that involve any form of mutilation. Therefore, the information provided here is not relevant to those who engage in such activities.

WHY DO PEOPLE ENGAGE IN SELF-HARM?

People may engage in self-harm to:

1. Distract oneself and divert one's focus from overwhelming feelings or thoughts to regain control of one's mind.
2. Release accumulated stress and tension.
3. Induce a physical sensation when one is no longer able to feel one's emotions when they are numbed or inhibited.
4. Punish oneself.
5. Experience a temporary but intense feeling of euphoria that occurs immediately after self-injury.
6. Express or communicate emotions when they are too powerful or intense.

HOW TO IDENTIFY SELF-HARM?

RISK FACTORS

Self-injurious behaviour is most prevalent among youth aged 14 to 21, but can occur in all age groups, including adults and seniors.

Various personal and environmental factors may contribute to a higher prevalence of self-harm in some individuals. Those may help to more effectively identify someone who is engaging in self-harm.

- Family history of self-harm
- History of trauma or intergenerational trauma
- History of experienced or inflicted violence
- Anxiety, anger, and depression
- Feelings of estrangement, loneliness, and isolation

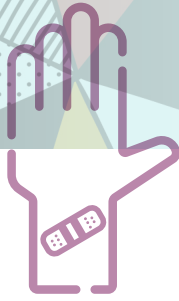
CRITICAL MOMENTS

Self-harm can be triggered by certain life events, such as:

- Difficult relationships with friends or family members
- Problems at school or work
- Problems at home or difficult family situation
- Issues related to racism or discrimination
- Issues related to being LGBTQ2+
- Significant loss or grief
- Difficulty accessing appropriate follow-up

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SIGNS OF SELF-HARM

Physical signs to watch for:

- Cuts or scratches on the skin
- Burn marks on the skin
- Scars
- Bruises
- Bite marks

BEHAVIOURAL SIGNS TO WATCH FOR:

- Possession of razors or other items that could be used for self-harm
- Wearing clothes to hide injuries (long sleeves all the time)
- Change in behaviour
- Isolation
- Apathy

*Although it is important to watch for signs of self-harm, it should not be assumed that the person is engaging in self-harm.

WHAT TO DO

IN THE SHORT-TERM

- Share your concerns: be upfront with the person and share the things that worry you or that may suggest that the person is self-harming.
- Listen to the person's concerns and distress: show empathy and recognize that what they are going through must be difficult.
- Ask the person how you can help in a non-judgmental manner: listen to the cause of their distress and offer your support.
- Help the person identify alternatives to self-harm and find distractions.

IN THE LONG TERM

- Identify sources of stress or distress.
- Use the person's strengths and resources to find alternatives to self-harm: check with the person to determine what already provides relief.
- Promote a sense of belonging and connection to the community.
- Involve the person in the healing process.
- Reinforce culture, traditions and values to promote a sense of hope.
- Nurture passions and strengths.

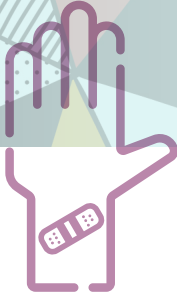
WHAT NOT TO DO

- Avoid suggesting easy solutions to the person's immediate problem: focus more on the person's suffering.
- Avoid telling the person to stop self-harming: self-harm is the person's coping strategy. Instead, identify alternatives to reduce the person's suffering.
- Avoid making the person feel guilty about their actions.

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Always keep in close touch with the person since self-injurious behaviour can pose a serious and immediate danger.

If necessary, you may contact your health centre or the following resources for more information.

- **Hope for Wellness Helpline (24/7)**
1-855-242-3310
<https://www.hopeforwellness.ca/>
- **Suicide Prevention Centre (24/7)**
1-866-277-3553
<https://suicide.ca/>
- **Kids Help Phone (24/7)**
1-800-668-6868
<https://kidshelpphone.ca/>

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