



Youth & Self-Harm

Teens who self injure are often seeking relief from psychological pain, sadness, loneliness, anger or feelings of numbness. Because they have not learned how to handle painful emotions in a healthy way, these emotions can buildup. Some teens release this buildup of feelings by cutting or otherwise hurting themselves. Self injury provides immediate relief from painful emotions, but is a short-term and unhealthy solution to managing emotions.

Self Harm: How to Stop

1. The 15 Minute Rule

If you feel the urge to self-injure, look at the clock and tell yourself you are going to choose to put off any self-harming behaviour for 15 minutes. During this 15 minute waiting period try to keep yourself busy; call a friend, go for a walk, read a book, watch TV, or write about your feelings. After the 15 minute period has passed, check in with yourself. How do you feel? Has the urge diminished? Is the urge gone completely? At this point, you can choose to self-injure or you can choose to wait another 15 minutes. Play the 15 minute game until the urge to self-injure passes.

2. Find Some Alternatives

- **Express Yourself**
Get it all out on paper. Keep a journal or write yourself a letter about your feelings. Be honest without putting yourself down. Focus on stating your emotions in a non-judgemental way.
- **Be Creative**
Create something of beauty or interest like a drawing, a painting, a poem, a story, or a song. Don't judge what you create by how good you think it is. Just focus on the process of creation. Enjoy what you're doing as you do it.
- **Reach Out**
When you are experiencing the urge to self injure, call someone. Don't convince yourself that they won't be happy to hear from you. It could be a hotline, your friend, a family member, anyone. Reach out. You don't have to be alone in this.
- **Listen to Music**
When you are feeling down or feel the urge to self-injure, it's important to monitor the music you listen to. Listen to positive lyrics and up-beat melodies that improve your mood.

3. Create a Distraction Box

- A distraction box is something that allows you to distract yourself from how you are feeling when you have the urge to hurt yourself. What helps to distract you?

Look around and add the things that bring you comfort or capture your attention. Examples include:

- a comfortable blanket
- a favorite quotation
- a stress ball
- a crossword puzzle
- a rainbow loom kit to keep your hands busy
- a picture that mean something to you or makes you smile
- a playlist of upbeat songs
- a nice smell that you enjoy (aromatherapy)

Be creative. A distraction box can include anything that distracts you from negative and harmful thoughts and behaviours.

4. Build Resilience (from The American Psychological Association)

Why is it that sometimes people can go through really rough times and still bounce back? The difference is that those who bounce back are using the skills of resilience. The good news is that resilience isn't something you're born with or not - the skills of resilience can be learned. What are some tips that can help you learn to be resilient?

- **Get Together.** Talk with your friends and, yes, even with your parents. Don't be afraid to express your opinion, even if your parent or friend takes the opposite view. Ask questions and listen to the answers. Get connected to your community.
- **Cut Yourself Some Slack.** When something bad happens in your life, go a little easier on yourself. Allow yourself time to cope and adjust to what is happening.
- **Create a Hassle-Free Zone.** Make your room a "hassle-free zone" - not that you keep everyone out, but home should be a haven free from stress and anxieties.
- **Stick to the Program.** During a time of stress, map out a routine and stick to it. You may be doing all kinds of new things, but don't forget the routines that give you comfort.
- **Take Care of Yourself Physically, Mentally and Spiritually.** Get sleep, exercise and eat well.
- **Take Control.** Even in the midst of stress, you can move toward goals one step at a time. During hard times, just getting out of bed and going to school may be all you can handle, but even accomplishing that can help. Bad times make us feel out of control - grab some of that control back by taking action.
- **Express Yourself.** Stress can bring up a bunch of emotions. Sometimes, it's just too hard to talk to someone about what you're feeling. If talking isn't working, do something else to capture your emotions like start a journal or create art.
- **Help Somebody.** Nothing gets your mind off your own problems like helping someone else's. Try volunteering in your community or at your school, cleaning-up around the house, or helping a friend with his or her homework.
- **Put Things into Perspective.** Eventually, things change and bad times end. Think back to a time when you faced up to your fears or overcame difficulties. Learn relaxation techniques, whether it's thinking of a particular song or taking a deep breath to calm down.