

## **Self-Harm: What You Don't Know**

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### **Why:**

Most people who self-harm do so to handle scary and painful feelings. Our society teaches us to hide our feelings in order to be successful in our careers and social circles. What society does not tell us is what to do with those feelings when we go home. People go home then at the end of the day feeling like something is “wrong” with them for not being able to handle the feelings that rush in on them in private. The idea that something might be wrong with us scares us into pretending that those feelings do not exist; so, we run from them. We do everything that we can to avoid thinking about feeling sad, angry, and scared. The problem with this is that it does not work. The more we try to run from our feelings, the stronger they become. We stop ourselves from asking for help with how to handle these feelings, because we feel like we will be judged for not simply being able to shrug them off. We view others as having that ability; therefore, we have to pretend to have that ability, too, in order to fit in.

### **What:**

When you think of self-harm you probably think of hearing others talk about cutting. Cutting, if you do not already know, is using a sharp instrument to pierce the skin tissue to release a flow of blood. The idea is that releasing the blood will release the feelings. The funny thing is that in ancient times, doctors used to do the same thing for diseases. They found it did not work for them, either. Self-harm does not work, because it is a temporary fix. It feels better for a little while, but it feels worse later. If you self-harm, you may feel that you have to do it more and more to feel better. You may also notice yourself putting yourself in more and more dangerous situations to avoid feelings or thinking about things. This creates a habit, like cracking your knuckles, that becomes very difficult to break.

### **How:**

Cutting is not the only form of self-harm and may not be the most common, either. Did you know that using substances can be a form of self-harm? Other examples include picking of the skin until it bleeds, pulling hair, banging your head against something, breaking joints, using spacers, and regularly piercing and/or tattooing yourself. There are other types of self-harm. If you believe that you might be someone who self-harms, please reach out to your school counselor or parents. Tell them that you need help.

### **Help:**

The reality is that everyone has feelings. They are a normal part of being human. Feelings send us messages such as, “I miss my boyfriend,” “I am sick of my brother stealing my stuff,” or “My uncle is not safe.” They also send us messages when we are happy such as, “I am looking forward to college,” “Being on the football team is awesome,” or “My best friend is someone that I can really trust.” Unfortunately, we have to take the bad if we want the good. If you do not know what to do with your feelings, the good news is that there is nothing wrong with you. You go to class to learn math; you go to a counselor to learn skills to deal with your feelings. If you are afraid of going to a counselor, because you think only crazy people go to counselors, you are not alone. What most people do not realize, though, is how many people actually do go to counselors. The best part is that no one has to know you are going to counselors; sessions are kept private. Counselors can help teach you how to handle your feelings before they spin out of control or lead you to do things or make decisions that you might regret. If you have feelings, you are normal; if you ask for help with them, you are building a strong foundation for your future.