

Understanding Self Injury

As we all know, life can be hard at times. There are a variety of strategies that people use to manage intense or hard life experiences. While there are many healthy strategies that can help people manage, sometimes people turn to a harmful behavior as a way to cope. Some people make the unhealthy choice to manage intense emotions by deliberately injuring themselves, creating a physical pain that they feel is easier to cope with than the emotional pain they may be feeling. Research suggests that people who self-injure say the act helps them to cope with difficult feelings; temporarily bringing a sense of relief or calm. There are however many other ways to cope when struggling with negative emotions like stress, sadness, or anger.

Positive Coping Strategies:	What parents can do:
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ➤ Teach mindfulness techniques like focused breathing, meditation, or using slow steady rhythms (e.g., tapping, walking, drumming) to slow things down and bring attention to the present moment. ➤ Look for other expressive outlets for energy, emotion, and tolerating distress (e.g. music, journaling, painting, pottery, knitting, etc.) ➤ Use the body in a positive manner (e.g. exercise, yoga, swimming, Tai Chi, etc...) ➤ Reach out for help; it is amazing how much sharing troubling thoughts diffuses them and provides the perspective it may take to interpret things differently <p>Healthy and positive coping strategies involve thinking about and <i>accepting</i> intense emotions and thoughts rather than <i>suppressing</i> them- all of the above tips encourage individuals to focus on the present moment.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ➤ Model healthy ways of managing stress. ➤ Keep lines of communication and exchange open. ➤ Emphasize and uphold the importance of family time. ➤ Expect that your child will contribute to the family's chores and responsibilities. ➤ Set limits and consistently enforce consequences when these are violated. Consider positive consequences, such as working in a soup kitchen or other community service. ➤ Respect the development of your child's individuality. ➤ Provide firm guidelines around technology usage. ➤ Avoid over-scheduling your child and putting too much pressure on him or her to perform ➤ Practice using positive coping skills together

Sources: Prussien, K., Rosenblum, S., & Whitlock, J. (nd). *What role do emotions play in non-suicidal self-injury?* The Fact Sheet Series, Cornell Research Program on Self-Injury and Recovery. Cornell University. Ithaca, NY.

Sweet, M. & Whitlock, J.L. (2009). *Information for parents: What you need to know about self-injury.* The Fact Sheet Series, Cornell Research Program on Self-Injury and Recovery. Cornell University. Ithaca, NY

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