

**Self-injury** = intentional destruction of body tissue without suicidal intent and for purposes not socially sanctioned

### **Self-injury ≠ Suicidal**

- To cope, for self-preservation
- To feel better and keep going with life
- Typically non-lethal, but accidents *can* happen
- May be both suicidal and self-injurious, fluctuate

### **Why self-injure?**

- To cope
- Release, get rid of bad feelings
- Feel anything, not numb, real, alive
- Feel more in control
- Punish oneself
- Communicate distress
- Get a high, rush (addictive quality)

### **What to keep an eye out for**

- Unexplained or weak stories for bruises, cuts, burns, injuries, bandages, etc.
- Wearing clothing (e.g., long sleeves) inappropriate for the weather or setting (e.g., beach, PE)
- Refusal to go swimming or do other things that would require skin exposure
- Bloody tissues, towels, clothes
- Stash of razors, sharp objects, or other tools in bedroom, book bag, purse

### **How to react?**

#### **Less helpful**

- Ignoring, minimizing, ridiculing
  - "This is stupid, just stop."*
  - "Get over it."*
  - "If you really want to do it right, cut the other way."*
- Anger, punishment
  - "You're grounded!"*
  - "That's it! I've had enough from you!"*
- Judgment
  - "Stop being so dramatic."*
  - "You're just doing this for attention."*
- Disgust
  - "How could you do that to yourself?!"*
  - "What were you thinking?!"*
- Too much alarm, shock, fear
  - Breaking down in front of him/her.*

#### **More helpful**

- Take seriously, show concern
- Calm, low-key, nonjudgmental
- Respectful curiosity
  - "Really glad you told me. You must really be dealing with a lot. What's going on?"*
  - "Help me understand what's going on for you."*
  - "How does [cutting there/ hitting yourself] help?"*
- Reflect what he says
  - "You felt really pissed off and couldn't handle it anymore."*
  - "You're feeling really overwhelmed."*
- Validate what she's feeling even if you think she's overreacting, being irrational, etc.
  - "It feels like you lost everything when he broke up with you."*
  - "That sounds really difficult."*
- Listen without interrupting. Listen more than you speak.
  - ...[silence].*

## What to do?

### Less helpful

- Ignoring it. Hoping it will just stop.
- Punishing him for engaging in self-injury
- Demanding she stop. Forbidding him from doing it.
- Trying to eliminate any access to dangerous objects
- Invasively checking her body for injuries

### More helpful

- Address it directly and calmly
- Seek professional opinion
  - Assess need for medical treatment
  - Family doctor
  - Mental health clinician

*"I hear you're saying it's nothing. We'll get a third opinion and if they say it's no big deal, then fine."*

*"Let's get some support. Find someone you feel comfortable talking to."*
- Emphasize developing other skills to handle difficult emotions
- If she can be suicidal – work with your treatment provider regarding safety around dangerous objects
  - Always keep firearms secure
- If you notice an injury or find other signs of self-injury
  - ask about it directly
  - assess need for medical treatment
  - encourage him to let treatment provider know

*"Did you burn your arm?"*

*"I noticed a blood spot on the floor. I'm wondering if you cut yourself."*
- Be aware of what she's looking at and posting online, on social media

### Finding a therapist

- Recommendations from family doctor, friends, colleagues
- psychologytoday.com
- Insurance / Out-of-network benefits

### What therapy might look like

- Assessment - getting to know you, what you're dealing with
- Keeping an eye on the level of dangerousness
- Becoming aware of, understanding emotions
- Developing adaptive, healthy ways of dealing with difficult emotions
- Being able to flex and adapt to use what works in a particular situation
- Becoming able to not act on the impulse to do something harmful
- Becoming able to experience difficult emotions as part of the full experience of life
- Not really about totally getting rid of difficult emotions  
→ more about lessening how intense they are and how long they last for

### Crisis Phone Numbers

- (800) 499-7455 Bucks County Mental Health Crisis
- (215) 257-6551 Upper Bucks Crisis  
*Penn Foundation  
Grandview Hospital  
Sellersville*
- (215) 345-2273 Central Bucks Crisis  
*Lenape Valley Foundation  
Doylestown Hospital  
Doylestown*
- (215) 785-9765 Lower Bucks Crisis  
*Lenape Valley Foundation  
Lower Bucks Hospital  
Bristol*
- (877) 435-7709 Bucks County Children's Crisis Support
- (800) 273-8255 National Suicide Prevention Lifeline

