

PARENTS HAND-OUT: FIRST AID FOR SELF-INJURY

NOTE: These first-aid tips are taken from the Red Cross guide to first aid.

In all cases of serious injury, seek medical attention. This information is provided as a service only.

Shock

Severe cuts and burns can cause a body to go into physiological shock. Fluid loss causes the body to reduce blood flow to the extremities in order to protect vital organ systems. Basically, the body starts shutting down – untreated shock can kill.

SYMPTOMS OF SHOCK

- Restlessness/irritability
- Altered consciousness (dizziness, feeling faint, nausea)
- Pale, clammy, moist skin
- Rapid breathing
- rapid pulse

TREATING SHOCK

- Call 999. Shock is a serious condition requiring immediate medical treatment. It can kill.
- Have the young person lie down
- Control external bleeding
- Keep your young person comfortable to reduce the stress on body systems
- Help maintain body temperature; if your young person seems cold, cover him/her with a blanket
- Reassure your young person
- Unless head, neck, or back injuries or broken bones are suspected, elevate your young person's legs about 12 inches
- Don't raise the young person's head
- Do not give your young person food or drink, even though he/she is likely to be thirsty

Burns

Critical burns that need immediate medical attention include those where breathing difficulty is present, where more than one body part is affected, or where the head, neck, hands, feet, or genitals are involved. All chemical, explosion, electrical, and third-degree burns, especially if they cover more area than the palm of the hand, should be evaluated by a medical professional.

IMMEDIATE TREATMENT OF BURNS

- Run cold water over burned area for 15 minutes, if possible
- Do NOT put any creams or greases on the burned area
- Do not pop any blisters. Cover the burn with a light gauze dressing
- If blisters pop, apply a light antibiotic ointment and dress as above

First-degree burns, those that merely redden the skin, can usually be treated successfully at home. Keep the area moist and covered.

Second-degree burns cause reddening and blistering of the skin. If they are moderately large, they require medical attention.

Third-degree and worse burns involve charring or whitening of the skin. The burn has penetrated through the entire thickness of skin layers. These burns should always be treated professionally.

With all burns – take young person to A & E immediately.

Cuts and lacerations

Most cuts can be dealt with at home. There are two exceptions to this:

- 1) If you can't stop the bleeding, or
- 2) If you're young person is going into shock.

IF YOU CAN'T STOP THE BLEEDING

If a cut won't stop bleeding, first try pressing cloths or paper towels directly on top of the wound. On top of that, place a large object (like a balled-up sock), and wrap the entire thing tightly in an Ace bandage. Keep the wound above the level of your young person's heart and check it in ten minutes; if it's still bleeding, re-wrap it and go to A & E. If your person is feeling the symptoms of shock, call 999.

Watch for redness or heat spreading outward from the wound; these are signs of an infection and should be treated by a doctor. Other signs of infection include swollen lymph glands, increased pain, and fever. If your young person starts running a fever, go to the doctor immediately.



Helping a friend or family member who cuts or self-injures

It's very difficult to come to terms with the fact that someone you care about is cutting or self-harming. You may feel shocked, confused, or even disgusted by self-harming behaviours – and guilty about admitting these feelings. But acknowledging your discomfort to yourself is actually an important first step toward helping your loved one. And once you recognize how you feel, a big part of getting beyond any distaste or revulsion about self-harm is to learn about it. Understanding why your friend or family member is self-injuring can help you see the world from his or her eyes; giving you an important new perspective – and making you more mentally prepared to help.

Helpful tips in dealing with someone who self-injures

- **Understand.** It is vital to understand that self-harming behaviour is an attempt to maintain a certain amount of control which in and of itself is a way of self-soothing.
- **Reassure.** Let the person know that you care and are available to listen – and then be available.
- **Encourage.** Encourage expressions of emotions, including anger.
- **Spend time.** Spend time doing enjoyable activities together.
- **Find resources.** Help your friend or family member find a therapist or support group. If you don't know how to find help, encourage your loved one to talk to someone who might be able to help, such as a teacher, a school counsellor, or your minister.
- **Don't judge.** Avoid judgmental comments or telling the person to stop the self-harming behaviour.
- **Examine and change.** If the self-harmer is a family member, especially if it is your young person, prepare yourself to address the difficulties in your family. This is not about blame, but rather about learning new ways of dealing with family interactions and communications that can help the entire family.

Talking about self-injury can be an important first step

Ignoring a friend or family member's cutting and self-harm may help reinforce the feeling of shame surrounding the behaviour. A lack of communication can also increase their feelings of isolation and alienation. You can help create change just by talking, but many family members find it difficult to know what to say.

DOs and DON'Ts of talking with a loved one who self-harms

DO:

Talk about the subject of emotional pain. This way the self-injurer can talk about their internal suffering, rather than express it by hurting themselves.

Ask questions such as:

- "How long have you been hurting yourself?"
- "Why do you hurt yourself?"
- "How do you hurt yourself?"
- "How often do you injure yourself?"
- "Do you want to change your self-injury behaviour?"
- "How can I help you?"

DON'T:

- **Keep asking questions** if the self-injurer does not wish to talk about their cutting or self-harm. It may cause further alienation and make them feel even more alone and isolated.
- **Tell an individual to not injure him- or herself.** This is their way of coping, a final attempt to relieve emotional pain, and they will continue to hurt themselves as long as they feel it's necessary. Telling them not to will just make them hide it more.
- **Try to impose limits.** This may increase your family member's self-harming behaviour in order for them to feel as if they have control over the situation.

SOURCE: *Self-Injury.net*



LISTENING TIPS HAND-OUT

1. Stop Talking! It is difficult to listen and speak at the same time.
2. Put the other person at ease. Give them space and time and “permission” to speak their piece. How we look at them, how we stand or sit, makes a huge difference. Relax, and let them relax as well.
3. Show the other person that you want to hear them. Look at them. Nod when you can agree, ask them to explain further if you don’t understand. Listen to understand them and their words, rather than just for your turn.
4. Remove distractions. Good listening means being willing to turn off the TV, close a door, or stop reading your texts. Give the young person your full attention, and let them know they are getting your full attention.
5. Empathize with the young person. Especially if they are telling you something personal or painful, or something you intensely disagree with, take a moment to stand in their shoes, to look at the situation from their point of view.
6. Be patient. Some people take longer to find the right word, to make a point or clarify an issue. Give the young person time to get it all out before you jump in with your reply.
7. Watch your own emotions. If what they are saying creates an emotional response in you, be extra careful to listen carefully, with attention to the intent and full meaning of their words. When we are angry, frightened or upset, we often miss critical parts of what is being said to us.
8. Be very slow to disagree, criticize or argue. Even if you disagree, let them have their point of view. If you respond in a way that makes the other person defensive, even if you “win” the argument, you may lose something far more valuable!
9. Ask a question. Ask the young person to clarify, to say more, give an example, or explain further. It will help them speak more precisely and it will help you hear and understand them more accurately.

