



Self-Injury Awareness for Parents/Caregivers

Self-injury is a complex behavior, separate and distinct from suicide. Young people who self-harm can feel overwhelming emotional pain, lonely, or worthless. Others report feeling misunderstood, rejected, overwhelmed by school/family responsibilities, want to punish themselves, or want to be accepted. Additionally, others may injure themselves out of desperation or anger, to seek attention, due to feelings of hopelessness and worthlessness, or because they have suicidal thoughts.

General Information

- Self-injury is defined as intentional tissue damage that can include cutting, severe scratching, pinching, stabbing, puncturing, burning, head banging, and ripping or pulling skin or hair.
- Self-injury provides a way to manage overwhelming feelings and can be a way to bond with peers (rite of togetherness).
- Tattoos and body piercings are not usually considered self-injurious behaviors unless they are done with the intention to hurt the body.
- Individual mental health services (therapy) can be effective when focused on reducing the negative thoughts and environmental factors that may cause self-injury.

Signs and Symptoms of Self-Injury

- Frequent or unexplained bruises, scars, cuts, or burns
- Frequent inappropriate use of clothing designed to conceal wounds (often found on the arms, thighs, or abdomen)
- Unwillingness to participate in activities that require less body coverage (e.g., swimming, physical education class)
- Secretive behaviors, spending unusual amounts of time in the bedroom, bathroom, or isolated areas
- Bruises on the neck, headaches, red eyes, ropes/clothing/belts tied in knots (signs of the “choking game”)
- Signs of sadness, fluctuating emotions, social isolation, impulsivity, and disconnectedness
- Possession of sharp objects (e.g., razor blades, shards of glass, thumbtacks, scissors, knives)
- Evidence of self-injury in drawings, journals, pictures, texts, and social networking sites
- Statements of helplessness, hopelessness, or worthlessness

Non-Suicidal Self-Injury



There is a difference between self-injury and suicidal acts, thoughts, and intentions. With suicide, there is an intent to die; whereas, with non-suicidal self-injury, the reasons may be to:

- Feel emotionally better
- Express desperation or anger
- Manage painful feelings of current or past trauma
- Punish oneself
- Feel pain or relief
- Have control of one's body

A professional clinical assessment may be necessary to determine risk.

What should I do if my child is engaging in self-injurious behavior?

- If you become aware that your child is engaging in self-injurious behaviors, it is important to get help and remain calm.
- If the injury appears to pose potential medical risks (e.g., excessive bleeding, need for stitches), call 911 immediately.
- If the injury does not appear to pose immediate medical risks, there are other actions you may take:
 - Seek support from a mental health professional (e.g., therapist, psychologist, psychiatrist). This collaboration can help determine the next steps for supporting your child.
 - Provide calm and nurturing support
 - Participate in your child's recovery (e.g., family therapy)
 - Support your child in an open and understanding way

Resources

For consultation, contact the LAUSD Student and Family Wellness Hotline at (213) 241-3840.

EMERGENCY INFORMATION / After Hours Services

If you need IMMEDIATE help, call 911

For a psychiatric emergency, contact the Department of Mental Health ACCESS Center at (800) 854-7771

Los Angeles School Police Department (213) 625-6631

Resources for Students & Parents/Caregivers

Crisis Text Line (24/7)

- Text "LA" to 741741

988 Suicide and Crisis Lifeline (24/7)

For individuals who are in a suicidal crisis or emotional distress.

- Call: 988 or 800.273.8255
- Text: 988
- Chat: <https://988lifeline.org/>

Teen Line (6pm–10pm PST, Daily)

Trained teen listeners provide support, resources and hope to any teen who is struggling.

- Call: 800.852.8336
- Text: "TEEN" to 839863

Trevor Lifeline (24/7)

Crisis intervention and suicide prevention services for lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender and questioning (LGBTQ+) young people ages 13-24.

- Call: 866.488.7386
- Text: 678678
- Chat: <https://thetrevorproject.org/webchat>

Online Resources

www.didihirsch.org
www.sandyhookpromise.org
www.thetrevorproject.org
www.teenline.org
www.afsp.org/understanding-suicide



Los Angeles Schools Anonymous Reporting (LASAR)

App to anonymously report instances of suspicious activity, mental health incidents, and other safety issues from a smartphone.

What should I do if I am worried about my child?

As a parent/caregiver, you play an important role in the life of a child.

If you believe that your child is engaging in self-injurious behaviors and/or thinking about suicide, talk to them. Asking is the first step in saving a life and can let them know that you are here for them and will listen. Make sure to take action immediately and connect them with the appropriate support at school or with a mental health agency.

Here are some Psychological First Aid (PFA)* strategies you can utilize to provide support and respond:

LISTEN

- Have the conversation and listen without judgment.
- As you express love and concern, it is ok to admit this is also difficult for you to talk about.
- Ask open-ended questions, such as:
 - *What happened?*
 - *How long have you been feeling this way?*
 - *Sometimes when people are injuring themselves, they are also thinking about suicide. Have you ever thought about suicide?*

PROTECT

- Take action immediately.
- Do not leave your child alone. You or a trusted adult should supervise/monitor your child.
- Safety plan at home. Consider removing hazards (e.g., sharp objects, razors, poisons, weapons). Keep firearms inaccessible and medications locked away.

CONNECT

- Go to your child's school for support from school administration, mental health personnel, or a counselor.
- Seek options for school and community resources, including your child's pediatrician and referrals to professional mental health services.

MODEL

- Remain calm.
- Be aware of your thoughts, feelings, and reactions as you listen without judgment.
- Establish a safe environment to talk about self-injury and suicide.

TEACH

- Teach your child how to ask for help and identify *Trusted Adults* at school, home, and community.
- Teach healthy ways to cope with stress, including deep breathing, writing/drawing, exercise, or talking.

*The PFA: Listen, Protect, Connect Model was created in partnership by UCLA Center for Public Health and Disasters, LAUSD Trauma Services Adaptation Center and the National Center for the School Crisis and Bereavement. The authors M. Schreiber, R. Gurwitsch, and M. Wong have authorized this adaptation.

School Contact Information

School: _____

Crisis Team Member: _____

Phone/Extension: _____

Crisis Team Member: _____

Phone/Extension: _____