

HOW COMMON IS THIS?

Very! Self-injury can happen when a child is feeling out of control or like they can't handle the painful emotions they are experiencing. In 2020 nearly 1/2 of all youth in MA reported feeling sad or hopeless almost daily for 2 weeks or more. Nearly 1 in 5 teenagers report self harming behaviors and the pandemic has increased these rates significantly. They NEED to feel "normal", heard and seen.

HOW DO I RESPOND?

- Be compassionate-recognize and respect their feelings.
- Be a good listener- let them talk openly, avoid shame and blame
- Make sure they know they can always ask for help, even if its not from you.
- Validate their emotions/concerns. "I'm proud of you for telling someone", "Talking about this really brave"
- Tell them there are safe alternatives for self harm that work!

DID I MISS THE SIGNS?

Puberty causes youth brains to grow rapidly, which leads to lots of behavioral changes. Since most of these changes are typical it can be hard to recognize warning signs. There is a typical range of moodiness, irritability, and pushing you away; this is a natural part of adolescent development. But if you notice other signs or concerns, it's time to check in with your child.

KEEPING THE CONVERSATION GOING!

It may seem awkward to bring up but its important-talk about it! Youth often say they want to feel more understood and listened to by their parents. Open lines of communication, even if it's hard. Follow their lead, suggest activities together that leaves space for talking- walks, drives, baking, shopping, playing a sport. If they're not ready to talk , suggest alternative forms of communication like messaging or texting.

FOR
PARENTS/
GUARDIANS

Common Questions about Self Harm

HOW DO I KNOW IF MY CHILD IS SAFE?

We know the more trust you give, the more trust you'll get back. Name how YOU feel- "I'm feeling a little worried about you but I trust you" Offer them space to be honest. Respond with kindness, support and creative options. Be calm. Check in, a lot. Avoid shame or blame. Try "How can I help you feel safe?"

WORDS AND ACTIONS TO AVOID

Avoid interrupting or accusations. It can be hard to know how to respond, but try not to minimizing or ignore their anxieties. Youth tend to pull away when they feel misunderstood. Try to think of it as "support seeking" instead of "attention seeking". Suicidal thoughts should always be taken seriously- you can always ask your child's doctor for help

TAKE CARE OF YOURSELF

You can't give from an empty cup! Taking care of yourself as well is very important in taking care of a struggling child. Find ways to comfort yourself- a warm bath, get yourself flowers, yoga or even taking a nap. Find someone to talk to about what YOU are going through too. Being gentle with yourself is essential when trying to care for anyone.

SAFE AND HEALTHY ALTERNATIVES

If they feel like hurting themselves, they can:

- Squeeze an ice cube or frozen orange
- Snap a rubber bands on their wrist
- Draw on their skin with sharpie/marker
- Finger paint with black and red
- Smash ice/clay/eggs on the ground
- Hammer nails in to wood or a tree

NEXT STEPS

Getting more information is key- why they are struggling and to what degree. There are other ways kids can get relief from their pain that does not cause dangerous or permanent harm.

Let this guide help you think about getting them help. Seeking help could look like a lot of things- listening to them, talking their doctor or school counselor, or calling a hotline if you feel they are in more immediate crisis.

Definitions

Self Harm- the act of purposely hurting ones self

Ideation - the act of forming or entertaining these ideas

Intrusive Thoughts - unwanted thoughts popping into our heads

Suicidality- thinking about or being preoccupied with thoughts of suicide

Passive vs Active -
A: wanting to hurt yourself/die **with** a plan you can act on
P: wanting to feel pain or not live anymore **without** an action plan

Need to Talk?

1-866-488-7386

The Trevor Project
LGBTQIA Crisis Line

1-800-562-0112

Clinical Support Options
(CSO) Crisis Line

1-800-407-4515

NAMI Peer Support Warmline
Mon-Thurs 7am-9pm
Fri-Sun 7am-10pm

FOR
PARENTS/
GUARDIANS

Resources and Support around Self Harm

THERAPY

The best option is to connect with a therapist but you can also start by talking with their doctor, school counselor or local youth serving organization to help find other resources in your area. Try to engage your child in these conversations- the more control they have, the more engaged they will likely be.

SUPPORT GROUPS

- **Western Mass NAMI Connection Support Group** - Mondays and Wednesdays over zoom from 6-7:30 Find out more at namiwm.org/support
- **TREVORspace** - online social media platform for LGBTQ youth with "clubs" for mental health support and hobbies
- **TeenTribe** - online peer-to-peer support group for teens with mental health challenges divided into different categories

Technology has come a long way in the therapy world! There are many websites and phone apps that provide talk and text therapy for all ages, as well as helpful apps for anxiety, panic attacks, depression, gratitude, mediation, motivation, journaling and mood tracking. Some cost money but many are free! Check out below for some good options to try. If we meet our kids where they re most comfortable, we will likely be able to help them better than if we ask them to do what's comfortable for us- don't be afraid to try it all.

HELPFUL APPS

- **Headspace**- free-fitness app w/ meditation, workouts, other cool supports
- **7 Cups**- free- 24/7 chat support for teens from trained peer listeners
- **Mindshift**- free- teaches behavioral therapy skills to support teens mental health
- **What's Up**- great mood tracking app
- **TalkSpace**- fee for service- #1 text/voice/video therapy sessions 24/7!
- **Daylio Journal**- free- mood tracker and journaling app for teens