

Self-Harm

Self-harm, self-injury, self-mutilation and cutting are all acts of intentionally damaging or injuring one's body. In 2009-2010, the most common form of self injury was poisoning (85%) followed by cutting (10%) and strangulation (2%) (*Health Indicators, 2011*). In 2010 the Canadian Institute for Health Information reported, 17,500 Canadians were admitted to hospital after deliberately harming themselves. Actual incidents of self harm often go unreported/untreated suggesting the actual number of incidents to be much higher.

Self-harm is often an expression of emotional distress and is described by some as a way of expressing deep emotional feelings. Self-harm is symptomatic of underlying psychological factors and possible illnesses such as depression, bipolar, eating disorder, obsessive thinking or compulsive behaviours. While it is not a productive coping strategy, people that self-harm report such behaviour as a way to cope with upsetting events. Cutting and self-harming behaviours are used as a way to temporarily relieve the intense feelings, pressure and anxiety they are experiencing. Those who self-harm often have difficulty managing and expressing their emotions and use self-harm as a method of expression and a means of demonstrating control in situations where they feel powerless.

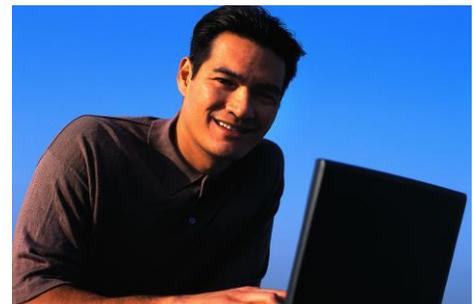
People who self-harm are not generally dangerous to others and may feel shame, guilt and even confusion about their own behaviour. These feelings often create barriers to seeking assistance.

Learning that a friend, colleague or family member is engaging in self-harm can be quite upsetting. The following suggestions about how you can help;

- *Deal with your feelings:* acknowledging your own feelings and fears about the behaviour is an important first step
- *Learn about the problem:* seek to understand why the individual is engaging in self-harm
- *Offer support, not ultimatums:* express your concerns and offer support: avoid judgement and criticism
- *Encourage communication:* encourage the individual to express his or her feelings and to seek assistance
- *Provide contact information:* encourage the individual to speak with their doctor or a mental health professional

You can not force someone who self-harms to stop. It does not help to lose your patience or isolate the individual when they need support the most. Let them know that you care and that they are not alone. Additional information and guidance on speaking to someone you believe might be self-harming and self-injury can be found on-line at www.virtualwellness.ualberta.ca, select *Resources and Links*.

Facing Facts: Tackling the Stigma if Mental Illness. Talk About it.



Staff:

Human Resource Services
Phone: 780.492.7124
www.hrs.ualberta.ca

Employee and Family Assistance Program
Phone: 780.428.7587
www.hrs.ualberta.ca/efap

Postdoctoral Fellows:

Postdoctoral Fellows Assistance Program
Phone: 780.428.7587
www.hrs.ualberta.ca/pdap

Students:

Graduate Student Assistance Program
Phone: 780.428.7587
www.hrs.ualberta.ca/efap/gsap

Counseling & Clinical Services
Phone: 780.492.5205
www.uwell.ualberta.ca