



Self-Injury - Information for Family/Friends



When you first find out that a loved one self-injures you may well feel overwhelmed with conflicting emotions. Perhaps you are shocked that your loved one resorts to self-harming, perhaps you are confused as to what it all means. You may experience guilt and anger, frustration and sadness. Depending on how you discovered your loved one relies on self-injury as a coping mechanism, you may have little time to adapt to the news.



Here is some general advice on how to deal with self-injury:

- Learn more about self-injury, why people do it, and how to help by visiting www.scar-tissue.net
- Don't take the self-injury personally. It is not aimed at you, and it is not being done to hurt you.
- For some people self-injury does not last for long, but for others it can be a long-term problem. Be prepared for relapses, and don't convey disappointment if someone can't give it up immediately.
- Self-injury is normally a secretive behaviour. Asking someone to show you their injuries, or checking up on them against their will takes away their sense of control, and can be embarrassing.
- Offer support. Be there for them if they want to talk (about anything), but don't put pressure on them. Offer to go with them to see their doctor, but respect their privacy if they do not want you there (whatever their age), or if they do not want to seek help yet
- Let them know that you will be there for them no matter what they do, and whilst you must not condone their self-injury, they need to know that it does not make them a bad person.
- Try not to become over protective. Actions such as removing sharp objects will normally make matters worse, and lead to self-injury becoming even more secretive. Telling a person to stop self-injuring or giving ultimatums is unreasonable, as it is not that easy.
- It is ok to be angry or sad, but try not to let your friend or family member see that you are angry as this could increase feelings of guilt.
- Don't criticise the person or make them feel that their feelings and behaviour are not valid. It might be worthwhile seeking counselling yourself to deal with your feelings.
- Self-injury is not the only way for people to deal with emotional distress. Try to encourage (but don't push) your friend or family member to seek alternative and more constructive coping mechanisms.

How you deal with a friend or family member's self-injury will depend on a number of issues – how old they are, how serious the physical damage is, what the underlying problems are, whether they are ready to accept help, and what sort of effect it is having on their life.

Above all, although you care about your friend or family member you must remember to take care of yourself first (you might want counselling to deal with how you are feeling). Unless you do this you will not be a help to anyone!