

Myths about Self-Harm

It is important to look at self-harm from an objective mindset. Below are some of the myths and misconceptions that surround the topic of self-harm.

MYTH: Only adults self-harm.

People of all ages self-harm. Self-harm is not particularly meant as a suicide attempt. It is an unhealthy attempt to cope with emotional pain such as anger, frustration, loss, sadness, etc., and physical pain.

MYTH: Teens who self-harm are usually open about self-harm behavior.

Self-harm in teens is usually kept private.

MYTH: Teens who self-harm do this as an occasional expression of behavior and only do it once or twice.

Some teens may self-harm once or twice and then stop. However, many teens do it frequently and it becomes a long-term, continual behavior, and possibly a habit.

MYTH: Teens who self-harm use only the cutting behavior.

Teens who self-harm cut or scratch with a sharp object, hit or punch themselves, carve on or pierce the skin, pull out hair, burn, pick at a wound, etc., or continually put themselves in harm's way, i.e., engage in fights, drive recklessly, abuse substances, etc.

MYTH: Only teens with a mental illness consider self-harm.

Not all teens who self-harm have a mental illness, but they may have emotional, physical, and/or social issues that create unbearable emotions that lead to extreme physical responses.

MYTH: Teens who self-harm are willing to talk about it with others.

Usually, teens who self-harm do not share with other teens. It is vital for the person having self-harm thoughts or behaviors to talk with someone they trust: a therapist, friend, family member, spiritual or religious leader, etc.

MYTH: Self-harm calms the person for a long time.

In fact, the person usually feels guilt, shame, and other painful emotions afterwards.

MYTH: No real damage happens with self-harm.

There is a strong possibility that serious or life-threatening consequences can occur from self-injuring behaviors.

MYTH: Teens self-harm for attention.

Teens who self-harm should not be considered attention-seeking. Teens self-harm for many reasons: to help themselves feel something when they are emotionally numb; to distract themselves from their emotional pain; to punish themselves; or to disfigure themselves.

Although these are only a few of the myths and misconceptions about self-harm, they will provide you with some insight into the thinking that is prevalent about people who self-harm.

Encourage individuals to call a trusted person, see a mental health facilitator or medical professional, find a positive support system, and use local or national resources and hotlines.