



Cheat Sheet for Self-Harm / Self-Injurious Behaviors

What is Self-Harm?

Self-harm is the act of purposely hurting oneself as an emotional coping mechanism. Self-harm is not meant as a suicide attempt; this type of self-injury is a harmful way to cope with emotional pain, intense anger, and/or frustration. Self-harm may bring a momentary sense of calm and a release of tension, but it's usually followed by guilt, shame, and the return of the painful emotion(s).

Self-harm behaviors usually occur in private and are done in a controlled or ritualistic manner that often leaves a pattern on the skin. Most frequently, the arms, legs and torso are the targets of self-injury, but any area of the body may be used.

Forms of Self-Harm:

Cutting

Burning oneself

Self-hitting, punching, or head banging

Piercing the skin with sharp objects

Scratching

Forced vomiting / purging

Carving words or symbols on the skin

Inserting objects under the skin

Red Flags:

Unexplained wounds or scars from cuts, bruises, or burns (on the wrists, arms, thighs, or chest)

Sharp instruments such as razors, knives, needles, glass, or bottle caps in the student's belongings

Clothing that provides a lot of coverage: long sleeves, long pants (even in hot weather)

Frequent "accidents" as a way of explaining away injuries

Blood stains on clothing, towels, or bedding

Risk taking behaviors

Frequently missing school and dropping grades

Irregular sleep

Isolation

If you become aware that your YFU student is self-harming:

- Collect as much information as you can re: the student's self-harm behaviors: how often do they engage in this behavior, what tool(s) do they use, what are their triggers, and how long have they been self-harming?
- Notify your SSM immediately and submit a Monthly Contact Report with all the information that you have.

What Will YFU Do?

- Although YFU recognizes that most teenagers who engage in this behavior are not attempting suicide, this is still a very unsafe behavior.
- YFU will ask the host family or LC to take the student for a mental health assessment; usually to the ER.
- YFU will ask a mental health provider to create a "Safety Plan" for the student and host family.
- YFU will inform the partner country (who will inform the natural family) and ask for any history of similar behaviors.
- In most cases, YFU will recommend early return to the home country and natural family.