

understanding self-harm



WHAT IS IT?

- Self-harm occurs when a person deliberately tries to hurt themselves but without intent to die as a result of suicide - however this does put them at increased risk of harm
- Self-harm is also known as self-injurious behaviour, self-mutilation, self-abuse, cutting, etc.
- 1-14% of youth engage in self-harming behaviour. There is a large range in rates because this behaviour is often secretive in nature and often goes unreported or has been wrongly documented as a suicide attempt
- Self-harm is more common in females and the onset is around age 14 and peaks between ages 16-25
- Self-harm serves a purpose for the individual (dealing with stress, calming nerves, communicating pain to others, etc.)
- Self-harm is often about externalizing pain that is felt inside and that cannot be named or understood
- Self-harm is often present in youth who struggle with some type of mental illness (e.g. depression, bi-polar, borderline personality disorder, anxiety, eating disorders, etc.)

TYPES OF SELF-HARM:

- Superficial or moderate self-harm includes examples of burning, cutting, pulling hair, hitting, interfering with wound healing or any other method of inflicting damage to oneself – this represents the most common form of self-harm
- Stereotypic self-harm includes activities such as biting and head banging – mostly seen in individuals with autism and psychosis
- Major self-harm is permanent (e.g. amputation) – fairly rare

HOW DO YOU KNOW?

Self harm often goes undetected as many youth take extra precautions to hide the fact that they are engaging in this behaviour (e.g. out of shame)

Signs can include the following:

- Scars or small linear cuts on arms, legs, stomach, etc.
- Cigarette burns
- Attempts to hide their scars (wearing long sleeves or pants in the summer, wristbands, makeup, etc.)
- Mood changes
- Isolation

WHAT NOW?

There are different resources available in the community to support youth who are engaging in self-harm:

Distress Centre of Ottawa and Region:

confidential emotional & mental health support, crisis intervention, information referral and education services, **613.238.3311** | www.dcottawa.on.ca

Kids Help Phone:

24 hour anonymous telephone counseling, referral and internet service for children & youth, **1.800.668.6868** | www.kidshelpphone.ca

Mental Health Crisis Line:

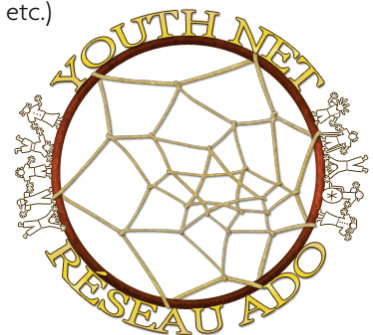
crisis intervention services for youth 16 and older, **613.722.6914** outside Ottawa, **1.866.996.0991** | www.crisisline.ca

Youth Services Bureau of Ottawa:

support available with a counselor who specializes in working with youth and their families, **613.562.3004** or after hours **613.260.2360** | **1.877.377.7775** | www.yusb.on.ca

**If you are concerned about a youth's immediate safety call 9-1-1 or, if you can safely do so, take them to the closest hospital's emergency department*

For further information please visit www.ementalhealth.ca.



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