

Supporting Someone who Self-Injures

Knowing that someone you care about is self-injuring can be stressful. It can be difficult to know what to say, whether to seek further help, and how to support them. Here, we offer some strategies to support you.

Why did they tell me?

There are lots of reasons a person may choose to tell someone about their self-injury. If someone has told you about their self-injury, it means they trust you. This opens up space to offer them support, which will be a highly individual process.



Looking after yourself	The ongoing conversation	Strategies to use
Put your own oxygen mask on first. You'll be most helpful if you are looking after your own health and wellbeing.	Supporting someone who self-injures will involve many conversations over time.	There is a lot you can do to support someone who self-injures – and it does not always need to be about self-injury.
Be aware of your own reaction and how it might change over time.	It's ok to check in now and then to see how the person is going, but don't pressure them to talk.	If the person does not want to stop, or if they do self-injure, it's not your fault.
Learn about self-injury, including common myths (http://sioutreach.org/)	Focus on what the person needs right now (keep in mind they may not know).	It's also not their fault. Learning new coping strategies is hard. This will take time and there will be setbacks along the way. Don't give up.
Allow yourself space to process information. Sometimes conversations can be difficult and emotional.	Avoid jumping straight in with questions that feed your own curiosity.	Be empathic and adopt a respectful curiosity.

Don't promise to keep it a secret, as this can be unrealistic and a burden. But establish the boundaries of confidentiality.

Validate how the person is feeling, without being judgmental.

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Let the person know if it is getting too much and you need to take a break.

Don't be afraid of silence. Allow the person space to process their thoughts and emotions. Talking about their experience is likely to be difficult and/or emotionally draining.

Removing means to self-injure and suggesting replacement behaviours (e.g. rubber bands) is often not helpful and removes personal control.

Offer to go with the person to seek external support if needed. This can take some of the pressure off you.

Just sitting quietly with someone can help them feel less overwhelmed, and feel like they have your support.

Establish the boundaries of confidentiality. Unless it's an emergency, telling anyone else is best done with consent of the person who self-injures.

Make use of your own support network to maintain your own health and wellbeing.

Not every conversation needs to be about self-injury. Don't let self-injury redefine your relationship.

Talk together about what you can do if they feel upset or have an urge to self-injure. Generate a list of strategies you can use in a variety of different situations.
