



SCHOOL NURSE DISCUSSION GUIDE

Understanding and Responding to Self Harm

This discussion guide supports school nurses in reflecting on and discussing how to —either in a group setting or for individual reflection. Facilitators may choose the questions most relevant to their group.

Icebreaker Questions

- Have you ever worked with a student who self-harmed? What was that experience like?
- How is self-harm different from suicidal behavior—and why is that distinction important?

Recognizing and Understanding Self-Harm

- How might experiences like trauma, bullying, family conflict, or identity struggles contribute to self-injury?
- How can self-harm be a coping mechanism for overwhelming emotions like shame, loneliness, or fear?
- Why might students say that self-harming helps them “feel better”?
- How can school staff avoid jumping to conclusions about intent (e.g., assuming self-harm means the student is suicidal)?

Approaching Students Engaging in Self-Harm

- What are some open-ended ways to ask a student about possible self-injury?
- How can you approach a student with curiosity and concern, not shame or fear?
- What statements have you found helpful to reduce stigma and offer hope?
- What might you say to validate a student’s pain while also encouraging healthier coping strategies?

System, Safety, and Follow-up

- What physical signs or behaviors might make you concerned about self-harm?
- How do students try to hide their injuries, and what should we watch for?
- What role do peers and online spaces play in influencing or normalizing self-harm behaviors?
- How might students indirectly ask for help—without directly saying they’re hurting themselves?

Personal Reflection and Support

- What helps you stay grounded after having a difficult conversation about self-injury?
- What professional development or resources would help you feel more confident in these situations?

Conclusion

- What’s one new strategy or insight you’d like to bring into your practice after viewing the module or participating in today’s discussion?